The Spirit of the Nation:

Women and Conversion in Early Modern English Drama

Hannah Korell

Department of English

McGill University, Montreal

May 2022

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This dissertation develops a feminist literary history of religious conversion in early modern drama from 1590-1634. Bringing dramatic works into conversation with an archive of biological, theological, and social discourses circulating about women during the period, I argue that early modern drama depicted women and the supernatural as central to the process of religious conversion. While the English Reformation has traditionally been considered hostile to the concept of supernatural womanhood, I reveal how the feminine occult was subsumed into the phenomenon of religious conversion. The early modern theatre was a crucial cite for exploring and disseminating the links between the occult, supernatural nature of women and the mysterious process of conversion. Through a variety of theatrical genres, the playhouse both echoed antifeminine discourses and established positive interpretations for women's powers that situated them as holy, God-given, and imperative for the burgeoning English nation-state.

This dissertation thus recovers the vital importance of women to discussions of early modern conversion. My four chapters take up different female archetypes, showing how witches, wives, resurrected women, and prophetesses and martyrs were depicted as central to the process of individual, community, and national religious conversion. I reveal how playwrights often envisioned white Christian women voluntarily upholding and refashioning patriarchal structures. Rather than suffocating female power, the recovered political and social communities at the plays' close are a testament to women's work. Given women's perceived openness to the divine, their decisions to procure spiritual conversions in their husbands, kings, and lovers could be leveraged as signs of divine approval for England's conversional projects at home and abroad. The plays studied in this dissertation participate in a larger cultural movement to sanction England's imperial impulses in ways that place white women at the heart of this process.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse développe une histoire littéraire féministe de la conversion religieuse dans le théâtre renaissance de 1590 à 1634. En faisant dialoguer des œuvres dramatiques avec des archives de discours biologiques, théologiques et sociaux circulant sur les femmes au cours de cette période, je soutiens que les premiers drames renaissance décrivaient les femmes et le surnaturel comme étant au cœur du processus de conversion religieuse. Alors que la Réforme anglaise a traditionnellement été considérée comme hostile au concept de féminité surnaturelle, je révèle comment l'occultisme féminin a été subsumé dans le phénomène des conversions religieuses. Le théâtre public en particulier a renforcé et amplifié les liens entre la nature occulte et surnaturelle des femmes et le mystérieux processus de conversion. À travers une variété de genres théâtraux, la théâtre reproduit des discours antiféminins et établit une interprétation positive des pouvoirs des femmes qui les situaient comme sacrées, données par Dieu et impératives pour l'anglais pays en développement.

Cette thèse récupère ainsi l'importance vitale des femmes dans les discussions sur la conversion de l'époque renaissance. Mes quatre chapitres abordent différents archétypes féminins, montrant comment les sorcières, les épouses, les femmes ressuscitées, les prophétesses et les martyres étaient décrites comme étant au cœur du processus de conversions religieuses individuelles, communautaires et nationales. Ce faisant, je révèle comment les dramaturges imaginaient souvent des femmes chrétiennes blanches soutenant et refaçonnant volontairement les structures patriarcales. Plutôt que d'étouffer le pouvoir féminin, les communautés politiques et sociales récupérées à la fin de la pièce témoignent du travail des femmes. Étant donné l'ouverture supposée des femmes au divin, leurs décisions d'engendrer des conversions spirituelles chez leurs maris, rois et amants pourraient être utilisées comme des signes d'approbation divine pour la conversion au pays et à l'étranger. Les pièces étudiées dans cette

thèse participent de manière complexe à un mouvement culturel plus large pour sanctionner les impulsions impériales de l'Angleterre d'une manière qui place les femmes blanches au cœur de ce processus.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This idea for this dissertation was shaped during my time as a graduate research associate for the Early Modern Conversions project. I am deeply beholden to all its members for their generosity, wisdom, and kindness. It was instrumental to me as a young PhD student to have an intellectual space devoted to thinking, feeling, and playing with tough questions, encouraged by some of the most brilliant minds in the field. The spirit of collaboration I learned during the project will guide me for the rest of my academic career.

Additionally, this dissertation would not have been possible without the funding I received from the Conversions Project, the Fonds de recherche du Québec Société et Culture, the McGill Department of English and Faculty of Arts, and the McGill Women's Alumnae Association. I thank these organizations for their financial support over the last five years.

I made it through the Dantean "dark woods" of the PhD with the guidance and support of an incredible group of people. First and foremost, I owe a great debt of gratitude to my incredible supervisor, Paul Yachnin, who taught me what it means to be a scholar. Your wisdom, careful attention, and engagement have made writing this project fun and enjoyable, and I have learned so much. The gifts you have given me can never be repaid; I only hope to pass them forward to the next generation.

I would also like to thank Maggie Kilgour for helping me to become a better teacher, thinker, and writer over the last five years. May we all be fortunate enough to have a Maggie Kilgour in our lives. I am very grateful to Torrance Kirby and Helen Smith for graciously agreeing to serve as examiners for this dissertation. Maggie and Torrance previously examined my comprehensive research project on *The Winter's Tale*, a portion of which developed into Chapter Three of this dissertation.

I am very lucky to have an invaluable support network of dear friends and colleagues, including three women who are magical in their own right. I must thank Willow White, my loving taskmaster and forever role model, and Elaine Cannell, a hero who read every draft, took every call, and always knew what word I was looking for. You have both enriched this dissertation in untold ways. My sincerest thanks as well to Anna Torvaldsen, who kept me going at the bitter end with unrelenting cheer, a sympathetic ear, and croissants. Many thanks to Jérémie LeClerc for his help with the translation of my abstract. And to my darling Andrew: words can never fully do justice to the ways in which you keep me anchored.

Finally, my family has been an endless well of support and love throughout my graduate career. My parents, Paul and Lisa, and my sister Alex have been there for me through it all with patience, pride, and, occasionally, an affectionate but necessary kick in the pants. They never once stopped believing in me. My love for you all is imprinted into every page. I could not have done it without you. And, of course, I must thank Mia too, for providing endless distraction, comfort, and laughter.

INTRODUCTION

> *"There are three elements in the world that do not know how to maintain a middle course in terms of goodness or evil, and instead attain a certain pinnacle in goodness or evil…these three things being a tongue, a churchman and a woman."*
> –*Malleus Maleficarum* (1486)[1]

In the ongoing battle between God and Satan for the soul of the English nation, patriarchal culture fashioned women into powerful weapons for each side. If, as the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) asserts, tongues, churchmen, and women all operate solely in extremes, one might imagine the explosive potential of the woman invested in using her tongue (among other things) to influence spiritual matters. This construct of the religio-supernatural woman is the centerpiece of my dissertation. Across my four chapters, I trace how this belief about women within early modern English culture influenced one of the most popular theatrical tropes of the period: the depiction of Christian religious conversion on the public stage. I argue that the early modern theatre presented women as one of the primary drivers of religious conversion. Drawing together an archive of diverse contemporary writing that includes demonological treatises, witchcraft pamphlets, sermons, defenses of women, ecclesiastical histories, martyrologies, prophetic writings, antitheatrical tracts, conduct manuals, court documents and more, I demonstrate how early modern understandings of womanhood and femininity were continuously interwoven into conversional theology on the stage. The questions of "how" and "why" a character might be brought to a religious conversion were time and again answered by looking to the women within their fictional communities, a response bolstered by a longstanding assertion that women were privy to an occult network of divine and diabolic forces.

---

[1]Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum,* trans. Christopher S. Mackay as *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the* Malleus Maleficarum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

This socially constructed vision of the "early modern woman," a composite creature drawn from the pages of medical treatises, theological dissertations, polemical writing and the like, possessed what Pseudo-Albert Magnus called an "*occulta et secreta*" nature.[2] A term initially used to describe secret or hidden properties, by the late sixteenth century "occult" had also come to signify objects or knowledge related to the supernatural—magic, alchemy, and other mystical arts.[3] Mary Floyd-Wilson has demonstrated that the post-Reformation world commonly interpreted occult phenomena through demonological or providentialist thinking, crediting inexplicable events as either the work of demons and witchcraft or of godliness and active faith.[4] Phyllis Mack notes that all women were suspected of possessing secret magical knowledge because of their connections to healing and childbirth, but women were also themselves seen as occult objects whose bodies possessed unknowable secrets, a "no-man's-land of natural and spiritual forces."[5] Women's uteruses and menstrual blood, for example, were

---

[2]Pseudo-Albert Magnus, *De secretis mulierum et virorum* (Leipzeig, 1505), sig. A2v. Magnus's treatise is translated in Helen Rodnite Lemay, *Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albert Magnus'* De Secretis Mulierum *With Commentaries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 59. A longer engagement with Magnus's treatise and its implications for medical understandings of the female body can be found in Katharine Park, *Secrets of Woman: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection* (New York: Zone Books, 2006), 82-100.

[3]Studies which consider the occult in the context of the supernatural include Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964) and *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1979); John S. Mebane, *Renaissance Magic & The Return of the Golden Age: The Occult Tradition & Marlowe, Johnson, & Shakespeare* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992); Genevieve Guenther*, Magical Imaginations: Instrumental Aesthetics in the English Renaissance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

[4]Mary Floyd-Wilson, *Occult Knowledge*, *Science, and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 2.

[5]Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 24.

accorded magical powers.[6] The conversional possibilities of women's knowledge and the female body—a body Mack calls an "explosive device" of "inflammable spiritual essence" [7]— were anxiety-producing, since women could just as easily be acting as envoys of Satan as of God. Medical understandings of the female body, biblical and contemporary examples of female prophetesses and martyrs, and published pamphlets and treatises about witchcraft all suggested women could be capable of awesome and mysterious feats. Throughout this dissertation, I use the phrases "feminine occult" and "supernatural womanhood" to refer to this cluster of occult tendencies attributed to women's knowledge, spirituality, and bodies.

Through my exploration of women and conversion, this dissertation recovers a vein of enchantment, a kind of occult unknowability, within early modern beliefs about the conversion process that is intrinsically connected to the same aura of occult unknowability that surrounded women. At its foundations, then, this dissertation joins an ongoing scholarly trend that complicates the once *de rigueur* disenchantment theory of early modern history by bringing forward the period's sustained investment in the idea of supernatural womanhood.[8] Prior to the Reformation, ideas of supernatural womanhood were particularly resonant with the central beliefs of Catholicism, a theology oriented around an immaculate conception and replete with

---

[6]Floyd-Wilson lists menstrual blood as a supposed cure for dog bites, anti-enchantment charms, tumors, impotence, and rosacea. See *Occult Knowledge*, 15.

[7]Mack, *Visionary Women*, 23.

[8]Max Weber's *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) argued that the Reformation initiated a mass, ongoing secularization of Europe, a naturalization of superstition and supernatural belief. Weber's influential paradigm has been generally linked to a lack of "wonder" and the miraculous within Protestant theology. There has been significant nuancing and pushback against this in the recent decade. See, for example, Alexandra Walsham, "Reformation Legacies," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Reformation*, ed. Peter Marshall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 227-268.

female saints and mystics.[9] In the 1640s and 1650s, England saw the rise of Quakerism, a radical women-friendly sect of Protestantism that established female preachers and sanctioned a significant number of female prophetesses.[10] The near century between the Elizabethan Settlement and the beginnings of Quakerism, however, has been widely considered a period in which popular imagination contained few avenues for safely making sense of women's supernatural natures. Mary Fissell claims that the Protestant Reformation brought with it more sinister understandings of women's bodies, as the elements of womanhood formerly hailed as sacred connections to the Virgin Mary were transposed into "the sins of Eve."[11] What was once "wondrous" about women, Fissell writes, was "now a threat."[12] While this period of tumultuous religious conversions following the Henrician Reformation and continuing to the English Civil War brought with it the revival of many biblical and classical antifeminine discourses, I resist the totalizing narrative that implies that representations of women's religio-supernatural powers were solely limited to the boogey(wo)men of the post-Reformation patriarchy. Rather, I propose that the positive spirituality previously associated with the feminine occult persisted in Protestant theology in the century following the Reformation. I demonstrate how supernatural womanhood was incorporated into the phenomenon of individual and national religious conversions that mark

[9]See Frances Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1992); Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[10]Mack writes that "[o]f the nearly three hundred visionary women who wrote and prophesied during that early period, over two hundred belonged to the Society of Friends." See *Visionary Women,* 1.

[11]Mary E. Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 47.

[12]Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, 62.

the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, especially on the early modern stage, a medium that flourished during this same historical period.

The public theatre, an institution continually engaged with topical social questions,[13] drew from and amplified these discourses about women by integrating them into plays that explored the topic of religious conversion in many different forms and iterations. The theatre, I contend, was instrumental in popularizing the links between supernatural women and conversion, not only bringing forward complex questions about conversion but also providing alternative interpretations of supernatural womanhood that nuance longstanding scholarly assumptions about the representation of female power on the stage. I thus offer a new methodology for approaching depictions of conversion on the early modern stage that emphasizes the role of women and their *occulta et secreta* natures. In the sections that follow, I contextualize how my theorization of women and conversion engages with the preexisting scholarly conversation around early modern religious conversion, its representation on the early modern stage, and early modern feminist and gender studies.

---

[13]Thinking of the theatre and its relationship to power (whether as a tool of subversion or propaganda) largely comes from new historical critical modes. Foundational texts in this tradition include Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) and *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Jonathon Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Brighton: The Harvest Press, 1984); Stephen Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988); Jean Howard's *The Stage and Social Struggle* (London: Routledge, 1994); Louis Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). For a critique of new historicist models which lend the theatre too much political power, see Paul Yachnin's *Stage-Wrights: Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, and the Making of Theatrical Value* (1997). For Yachnin, it is the perceived *powerlessness* of the theatre which allows it to address topical issues: "[t]he theater that emerged in response to the conflicting pressures of censorship and commercialism was able to address topical issues, and thus to appeal to a large and heterogeneous audience, precisely because drama was perceived to be separate from real life and because play was perceived to be separate from power." See *Stage-Wrights*, 3.

Turning Through the Years: A History of English Conversion

The idea of a "conversion" etymologically stems from the Latin *convertere*, meaning "to turn altogether" (*con-* together, altogether, *vertere-* to turn). The *OED* definition for conversion offers the directional "to turn about" and the transformational "to turn or change in character, nature, form."[14] "To convert" thus signifies a whole-character transformation within a person. For the scope of this project, however, I work with a more narrow definition of conversion, taking my cue from the most common early modern usage: conversion as religious transformation. In his 1612 *Christian Dictionarie*, Thomas Wilson describes conversion as "the turning, or totall change of an elect Sinner from sinne to God."[15] For Wilson, this can be either "passive"—"we suffer God to work upon us, but ourselves…worke nothing"—or "active," in which a person "worke[s] together with [God's] grace."[16] These two processes of conversion roughly map onto the two most famous Christian conversion narratives repeated during the period, the conversions of Paul and Augustine. Paul, quite literally blinded by the light of God on the road to Damascus on his way to persecute the followers of Jesus, models a more passive form of conversion than Augustine, who himself actively "took up and read" upon hearing the voice of a child.[17] Wilson's definition presents conversion as a process of repentance and redemption

[14]"convert, v.". OED Online. March 2022. Oxford University Press.

[15]Thomas Wilson, *A Christian Dictionarie, Opening the Signification of the Chiefe Wordes Dispersed Generally Through Holie Scriptures* […] (London, 1612), sig. F2r. A longer engagement with Wilson can be found in Abigail Shinn, *Conversion Narratives in Early Modern England: Tales of Turning* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1-3.

[16]Wilson, *Christian Dictionarie*, sig. F2r.

[17]In Acts 9, Saul/Paul is on the road to Damascus when "suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him"; he is blind for three days until Ananias comes to him—then, "[i]Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized" (Acts 9:13-19). Paul speaks of his own conversion in his epistles (1 Cor. 15:3-8; Galatians 1:11-16). Augustine's conversion is stimulated by the act of reading. In Book 8 of his *Confessions*, Augustine recalls that, while weeping in the garden, he heard the voice of a child tell him "pick it up and read"—upon opening and reading

within a firmly Christian paradigm. Hence, when I talk about "conversion" in this dissertation, I refer to characters renegotiating their relationship to Christian concepts of the divine supernatural. Studying examples of passive conversion in Chapter Two and active conversion in Chapter Three, I demonstrate how the early modern stage often situated women as godly agents able to foster and invite conversion.

Yet the idea of religious conversion extended beyond the individual's personal relationship with God, becoming a central feature of England's burgeoning identity as an imperial and colonial Christian power.[18] The European Reformation heralded a period of individual and national conversions only surpassed by the initial Christianization of Europe. Operating alongside what Lieke Stelling terms a "spiritual conversion"—the process of repentance articulated by Wilson—was the interrelated idea of "interfaith conversion," a movement between confessional identities: Catholic to Protestant, Protestant to Muslim, Jewish to Christian, although these larger denominations are umbrella terms that encompassed a spectrum of beliefs and practices.[19] Individuals converted for any number of personal, spiritual, political, or financial reasons, but state-sponsored interfaith conversion was driven by European empire building, resulting in the subjugation and forced conversion of the indigenous peoples of

---

Romans 13:13-14, Augustine writes, "I had no wish to read further, nor was there need. No sooner had I reached the end of the verse than the light of certainty flooded my heart and all dark shades of doubt fled away." See Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions by Saint Augustine*, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: New City Press, 1997), 206.

[18]This argument is the foundation of Michael Questier, *Conversion, Politics, and Religion in England, 1580-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[19]Lieke Stelling, *Religious Conversion in Early Modern English Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 11.

the Americas, antisemitic and anti-Black policy, and missionary conversion programs in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.[20]

Even as the project of Christian conversion guided English colonial practice and propaganda, the questions and ever-present prospect of conversion haunted England at home. Because national religion was strongly influenced by the monarch, the personal spiritual lives of kings and queens exerted tremendous influence over their subjects. The English Reformation and Henry VIII's *Act of Supremacy* (1534) ushered in a twenty-five-year period during which England and her people converted religions an unprecedented four times under four different monarchs. Through Henry VIII's divorce from Katherine of Aragon and remarriage to Anne Boleyn, England transformed from a Roman Catholic nation under papal supremacy to the Church of England. While the Church was reformed more in name than in any true practice, we should not underestimate the psychological impact even these more nominal changes had upon people whose identities were inextricably bound to their spirituality. England underwent another national conversion when Henry's son, Edward VI, enforced a radical form of Protestantism that led to feverish iconoclasm, including the whitewashing of cathedrals, breaking of idols, and major reforms to sacramental theology. Upon the accession of his half-sister Mary, England once again became a Catholic nation, and many English Protestants were forced into exile, tortured, or burned at the stake. When Elizabeth I acceded to the throne in 1558, the Elizabethan Religious Settlement declared England a Protestant nation; however, generations of her subjects had lived

[20]See Jeffrey Shoulson, *Fictions of Conversion: Jews, Christians, and Cultures of Change in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013) for a description of how English interest in conversion impacted the lives of Jewish communities in England and Europe. Anxiety about African Moors living in England prompted Elizabeth I to expel "Negros" and "Blackmoores" from England in 1596 and 1600. A lengthier engagement with these policy decisions can be found in Ambereen Dadabhoy, "Barbarian Moors: Documenting Racial Formation in Early Modern England," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 30–46.

through an extremely tumultuous and violent period of religious upheaval. The changes over the previous twenty-five years had drastically transformed their deepest senses of self-identity, long-held beliefs, and the materials with which they practiced their faiths. The grand conversion narrative of English history is comprised of an infinite number of smaller conversion stories. Conversion was simultaneously deeply personal and political.

Despite England's supposedly settled religious identity, anxiety about religious conversion continued to shape the early seventeenth century and Stuart dynasty. James I's wife, Queen Anne, was suspected of converting to Catholicism, and James himself, though Protestant, was notoriously sympathetic to crypto-Catholics and often strove for religious tolerance. In 1604, he signed the unpopular Treaty of London which ended war with Spain; while this treaty forced Spain to recognize England formally as a Protestant nation, it also ensured that James would stop financing Protestant Dutch rebellions against the Holy Roman Empire. James then attempted to marry his son Charles to the Spanish Infanta. Charles eventually married the Catholic Henrietta Maria of France who caused quite a stir—as an openly Catholic queen, she even went so far as to assist with Catholic marriages, an act that, as Diane Purkiss reminds us, was a criminal offence under English law.[21] Throughout the period, English and foreign Catholics sought to overturn the Protestant hegemony. Rebellions such as the 1569 Rising of the North and the 1571 Ridolfi plot tried to overthrow Elizabeth and place her Catholic cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, on the throne of England, leading to Mary's own execution for alleged treason in 1587. The Spanish Armada of 1588, part of a larger Anglo-Spanish conflict, received papal authority to replace Elizabeth with a Catholic monarch of Philip II's choice. In the 1605 Gunpowder Plot, a Catholic cabal attempted to blow up Parliament and assassinate the king and his family in order to install a

[21]Diane Purkiss, *The English Civil War: A People's History* (London: Harper, 2006), 35.

Catholic Sovereign. Additionally, anxieties about foreign conversion increased as a response to increased immigration, global trade, and travel. This is particularly true regarding England's relationship with the powerful Ottoman Empire. The common phrase "turning Turk," shorthand for a conversion to Islam, came to signify betrayal and falseness, and circumcision jokes became popular in a variety of literary genres.[22] Merchants and travelers brought back stories of pirates and other men who voyaged to the Ottoman Empire and converted—the famous pirate John Ward, for example, became a Barbary corsair who sailed under the name Yusuf Reis. Ward's story was popular enough to be the subject of Robert Daborne's play *A Christian Turn'd Turke* (1612), although the play adapts Ward's motivations from his conversion—while the historical Ward converted for protection and financial gain, the fictional Ward is tempted by Voada, a Muslim woman, and he converts in order to marry her.

Indeed, when I consider England's story of conversion, I am most struck by the prominence and power it gives to women. As wives and mothers, women were seen to possess moral influence over their husbands and children, and through seduction, manipulation, their wombs, or their breast milk, women were believed to be able to convert their families.[23] Heterosexual desire and the promise of sex could purportedly procure conversions in men—the prospect of sexual favors might inspire men to reform, or men might be bewitched and entrapped by female beauty and desire, making them susceptible to women's religious influence. On a

---

[22]This phrase appears throughout Shakespeare's works. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Margaret mocks Beatrice for having "turned Turk" regarding her feelings toward Benedick (3.4.49). See also *Othello*, when Othello asks "Are we turn'd Turks?" (2.3.149), or *King Lear*, when Edgar connects women and Turks as being "false of heart" (3.4.84). The phrase also appears in *Hamlet*, when Hamlet, after watching Claudius flee the play, cries out, "if the rest of my fortunes turn Turk with me" (3.2.255-6).

[23]Not only could infants suck morality or potential perversion from their mother's breast, but breastmilk could also influence doctrinal allegiance. It was believed a child could pull certain religious leanings from a mother or wet-nurse's milk. Charles I, for example, did not allow Catholic wetnurses, since he desired there to be no doubt that his children would grow up Protestant. See Mack, *Visionary Women*, 36.

national scale, queen-consorts were revered and feared as uniquely able to influence the spiritual beliefs and lives of their royal husbands and their children, giving these women a measure of control over England's current and future political and doctrinal allegiances. These queens were not only regarded with suspicion because of their potential to convert their royal husbands, but because their wombs held the future heirs and spiritual leaders of England.

The topic of religious conversion therefore yoked together contemporary discourses about the female body with its capacity for spiritual influence. Pregnancy in particular intensified the mysteries of the already deeply occult female body. Quite simply, as Fissell states, "only women's bodies had the power to make new life."[24] Yet in addition to its potential magic, the uterus also made manifest female morality and spirituality. While the Virgin Mary's miraculous womb held Christ, the womb could also be easily perverted by the sins or emotions of the mother and could instead breed monstrous creatures.[25] Just as a wife could spiritually corrupt her husband, a pregnant woman could corrupt the life growing inside of her. Julie Crawford writes that women were responsible for conceiving children "both in the biological and theological sense," where a mother's sins or spiritual doubts were revealed on the child's body through physical deformities.[26] As children grew, their mothers were then responsible for their spiritual education. Because of a woman's authority within the domestic sphere, women were believed to

---

[24]Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, 1.

[25]For more on the moral interpretation of pre-natal and post-natal deformities in early modern Europe, see Julie Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism: Monstrous Births in Post-Reformation England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); A.W. Bates, *Emblematic Monsters: Unnatural Conceptions and Deformed Births in Early Modern Europe* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005); Sara D. Luttfring, *Bodies, Speech, and Reproductive Knowledge in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2015), esp. 165-208; Amy Kenny, *Humoral Wombs on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 111-138.

[26]Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism*, 18.

exercise substantial influence over the spirituality of their households. For early moderns, it was not a coincidence that Mary and Elizabeth Tudor each restored England to the faith of their mothers. Despite Elizabeth's own reluctance to publicly mention her mother, Protestant writers quickly drew connections between Anne's and Elizabeth's reformist policies and breaks with Rome.[27] Alexander Ales wrote to Elizabeth to claim that "[t]rue religion in England had its commencement and its end with your mother," and hoped to see Elizabeth follow her mother's example.[28] But the control mothers exerted over their children's spiritual morality could also be used as a weapon to slander and tarnish women's reputations: women had the authority to teach, but they also possessed the power to corrupt and pervert their children. As I explore in Chapter One, accusations of witchcraft regularly claimed that women recruited, converted, and taught their daughters occult and diabolic practices.[29] It was much more likely that young women and men whose mothers had been accused would also face accusations in their own lifetimes, simply because they were believed to have been corrupted by their mothers during gestation and childhood.[30] This belief in hereditary female corruption extended to royals too—just as her

[27]Elizabeth's feelings toward her mother are addressed in Helen Hackett, "Anne Boleyn's Legacy to Elizabeth I: Neoclassicism and the Iconography of Protestant Queenship," in *Queens Matter in Early Modern Studies*, ed. Anne Riehl Bertolet (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 157-180.

[28]Alexander Ales to the Queen, "Elizabeth: September 1559, 1–5*", Calendar of State Papers Foreign, Elizabeth, Volume 1: 1558–1559*, ed. Joseph Stevenson (1863): 524–542, qtd. in Hackett, "Anne Boleyn's Legacy," 171.

[29]Deborah Willis, "The Witch-Family in Elizabethan and Jacobean Print Culture," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2013): 4-31.

[30]Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996), 146.

mother Anne was accused of using witchcraft to incite reform in England, Elizabeth faced similar accusations from William Allen in *Defense of English Catholics* (1584).[31]

Despite the incredible influence women were believed to have over the spirit of the nation and its people, Helen Smith and Simon Ditchfield's edited collection *Conversions: Gender and Religious Change in Early Modern Europe* (2017) is one of the only studies to interrogate the relationship between religious conversion and gender. Examining the "intricate and overlapping performances of religious and gendered selfhood," the essays in the collection demonstrate how women played a central role in the erratic conversions that characterize this historical period. [32] This dissertation is deeply indebted to *Conversions* and the theoretical framework that it develops. However, the collection mostly centers on the lives of historical women, part of the vitally important project of feminist recovery that has emphasized the contributions of real women to the religious life of England and Europe.[33] As a result, less attention has been paid to the representation of women and conversion within popular media

---

[31]Cristina León Alfar, *Fantasies of Female Evil: The Dynamics of Gender and Power in Shakespearean Tragedy* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), 25.

[32]Simon Ditchfield and Helen Smith, eds., *Conversions: Gender and Religious Change in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 13.

[33]Scholarly interest in how the Reformation changed life for women across Europe blossomed from the questions posed in Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?," in *Women, History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 19–50. These questions have been taken up in a myriad of works, see Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England 1500-1720* (London: Routledge, 1993); Christine Peters, *Patterns of Piety: Women, Gender, and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Erica Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Sylvia Monica Brown, *Women, Gender, and Radical Religion in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Kimberly Anne Coles, *Religion, Reform, and Women's Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Kirsi Irmeli Stjerna, *Women and the Reformation* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2009); Eric Dursteler, *Renegade Women: Gender, Identity, and Boundaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011); Julie Chappell and Kaley A Kramer, eds., *Women During the English Reformations: Renegotiating Gender and Religious Identity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

forms such as pamphlet literature or the commercial theatre. Nevertheless, the study of women characters continues to matter because, as Sarah Johnson has argued, "literary and dramatic representations of women were deeply connected to the possibilities that real women could see for themselves and to the cultural attitudes they faced on a daily basis."[34] Throughout this dissertation, I reveal how the composite of the early modern woman, her supernatural womanhood, and her imagined spiderwebbing influence over conversion, shaped and was shaped by fictive representations of women. This dissertation turns to the early modern theatre to interrogate how the representation of women and conversion on the public stage could simultaneously amplify, challenge, and nuance early modern understandings of womanhood and its relationship to Christian conversional theology.

Staging Religious Conversion

Given its prominence within early modern English life, it is not surprising that religious conversion was one of the most popular topics on the public stage. Lieke Stelling conservatively estimates in *Religious Conversion in Early Modern English Drama* (2019) that over one hundred plays engaged with the subject in some meaningful way between 1558-1642.[35] Scholars estimate approximately 543 extant play-texts from this period, suggesting that a staggering twenty-percent of surviving plays incorporate themes of religious conversion, at a minimum.[36] In his essay on

[34]Sarah Johnson, *Staging Women and the Body-Soul Dynamic in Early Modern England* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 5.

[35]Stelling, *Religious Conversion,* 161.

[36]David McInnis and Matthew Steggle claim that there were upwards of 3,000 plays produced during the period, but only 543 survive. See David McInnis and Matthew Steggle, "Introduction: Nothing Will Come of Nothing? Or, What can we Learn from Plays that Don't Exist?," in *Lost Plays in Shakespeare's England*, eds. David McInnis and Matthew Steggle (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1-16, esp. 1.

"Shylock, Conversion, and Toleration," Paul Yachnin calls the public stage a "theatre of conversion," arguing that Shakespeare and his contemporaries made meaningful entertainment by "repurpose[ing] and repackag[ing]" the religious crises that marked the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in poetic ways that largely avoided government censure.[37] The "theatre of conversion" is an apt description for both the content of plays and the public perception of their power: while the narratives of these plays were invested in the subject, antitheatricalists and players alike also declared that plays were tools for conversion. Stephen Wittek has similarly argued that "the dramatists of the period repeatedly grappled with questions of conversion, applied the structures of conversion to new areas of human experience, and helped to push thought about conversion forward."[38] As Stelling, Yachnin, and Wittek all note, the representation of conversion on the early modern stage influenced the ways that English people understood conversion, bringing forward topical questions about the authenticity and longevity of conversion, the process of repentance, and the potential consequences of immigration or foreign travel. Crucial to this dissertation, the public stage also explored the role that women might play in their own conversions, as well as those of their families and the larger English nation.

In spite of this recognition of the symbiotic relationship of playhouse and discourse about conversion, discussions of gender—and especially women's roles within the conversion process—has been largely focused on women's conversions into their husband's property

---

[37]Paul Yachnin, "Shylock, Conversion, Toleration" in *Imagining Religious Toleration: A Literary History of an Idea, 1600-1830*, eds. Alison Conway and David Alvarez (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 18-34, esp. 27.

[38]Stephen Wittek, "Conversional Thinking and the London Stage," in *Performing Conversion: Cities, Theatres and Early Modern Transformations*, eds. José R. Jouve Martin and Stephen Wittek (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 87-110, esp. 88.

through the ritual of marriage. Stelling describes this as the "marriage-cum-conversion" trope,[39] where characters such as *The Merchant of Venice*'s Jessica, *The Renegado*'s Donusa, or *The Island Princess*'s Quisara are converted to Christianity through their love of a Christian man, individual conversions that double as colonial propaganda. Jane Hwang Degenhardt's *Islamic Conversion and Christian Resistance on the Early Modern Stage* (2010) illustrates how this trope worked both ways, revealing how women of color were often depicted as seductive temptresses who would turn Christian men to Islam.[40] As these studies reveal, to talk about early modern religious conversion is to talk about race, and particularly, the intersections of race, sex, and gender, given the tremendous influence sexual desire was believed to exert over the soul. One outcome of the period's fascination with and anxiety about conversion, premodern critical race studies scholars have demonstrated, was the conflation of religious and racial identity.[41] In *Becoming Christian: Race, Reformation, and Early Modern English Romance* (2014), for example, Dennis Austin Britton argues that this period of conversion helped to foster the

[39]Stelling, *Religious Conversion*, 137.

[40]Jane Hwang Degenhardt, *Islamic Conversion and Christian Resistance on the Early Modern Stage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 14-17. See also Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theatre and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) and Jonathon Burton, *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005).

[41]Peter Fryer terms this process the "demonology of race" and sees it as the foundations of British racism. See, Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 135. Other works that have taken up the racialization of religion include Elliot H. Tokson, *The Popular Image of the Black Man in English Drama, 1550-1688* (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1982); Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Lara Bovilsky, *Barbarous Play: Race on the English Renaissance Stage* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Matthieu Chapman, *Anti-Black Racism in Early Modern English Drama: The Other "Other"* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

"emergence of the theology of race," a process through which Christianity became synonymous with whiteness and other religious identities became racialized in England.[42] Stage technologies such as blackface cosmetics and racialized costuming helped to cement these associations.[43] My investment in thinking about conversion and race centers on the conflation of whiteness with Christianity in England.[44] In focusing my attention on white women and the developing construct of white femininity, I engage in a critical exploration of what the white English woman's body represents: England's spiritual future, but also its imperial project. As Kim Hall writes in *Things of Darkness* (1995), white English women represent "the symbolic boundaries of the nation," so that the sanctity of the white female body, its capacity for corruption, and its potential for divinity operate as metaphors for the security and spiritual health of the English nation itself.[45] Bringing together a diverse set of plays that have been largely excluded from the canon of early modern conversion plays, I reveal a new vein of thinking about white women and conversion that centers on the concept of the feminine occult and its use for Christian patriarchy and English nation-building.

---

[42]Dennis Austin Britton, *Becoming Christian: Race, Reformation, and Early Modern English Romance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 9.

[43]See Ian Smith, "White Skin, Black Masks: Racial Cross-Dressing on the Early Modern Stage," *Renaissance Drama* 32 (2002): 33-67; Farah Karim-Cooper, "The Materials of Race: Staging the Black and White Binary in the Early Modern Theatre," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 17–29.

[44]This subfield of critical race studies, called critical whiteness studies, has its roots in iconic critical texts such as Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) and Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). In early modern studies, see Peter Erickson, "Seeing White," *Transition*, no. 67 (1995): 166-185; Kim F. Hall, "Beauty and the Beast of Whiteness: Teaching Race and Gender," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (1996): 461-475. Discussions of whiteness and white femininity are also central to Hall's *Things of Darkness*.

[45]Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 9.

Women on the Stage

It may seem paradoxical to discuss the representation of women on the early modern stage, because, of course, there were no women on the stage at all. As has been well documented, women characters were played by boy actors until 1660, when Charles II allowed women to work as actresses. I do not want to erase the exciting gender experimentation brought forward by these cross-dressed boy actors—the plays themselves often teasingly call attention to it. However, as Lori Leigh argues in *Shakespeare and the Embodied Heroine* (2014), the early modern theatre was capacious enough to hold two "opposing but compatible conclusions": an audience could be aware that the actors were boys but recognize that, within the fictional world of the play, they were women.[46] Early modern audiences were able to suspend their disbelief to interpret these characters as women, even using feminine pronouns when referring to women characters in contemporary reviews.[47] Leigh concludes that "without doubt, the boys were able to play female roles with sufficient skill and 'believability' that spectators responded to the fictional character, rather than being constantly reminded of the disparities between the genders of actor and character."[48] These women characters, Dympna Callaghan argues, are productive objects of scholarly attention as they "help produce or reproduce ideas about women that then shape, perpetuate, or even disturb prevailing conditions of femininity."[49]

---

[46]Lori Leigh, *Shakespeare and the Embodied Heroine: Staging Female Characters in the Late Play and Early Adaptations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 6.

[47]Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 279.

[48]Leigh, *Shakespeare's Embodied Heroine*, 9.

[49]Dympna Callaghan, "Introduction," in *The Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Dympna Callaghan, 2nd ed. (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2016), 1-20, esp. 20.

And, indeed, since the advent of feminist criticism in the 1970s, scholars have interrogated what the early modern canon—and specifically the works of Shakespeare—contributed to the construct of the "early modern woman." Juliet Dusinberre's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Woman* (1975), for example, claimed that early modern drama was "feminist in sympathy," highlighting women characters' "emancipation, their self-sufficiency, and their evasion of stereotypes."[50] In the wake of such celebratory reclamations of Shakespeare, however, countless studies have shown that the public stage promoted what Cristina León Alfar calls "fantasies of female evil"—antifeminine discourses that advocated for the continued subjugation of women.[51] Writing in 2005, Phyllis Rackin claimed that "feminist Shakespeare criticism has been almost shaped by the scholarly consensus about the pervasiveness of masculine anxiety and women's disempowerment in Shakespeare's world."[52] Ultimately, it is impossible to definitively claim a medium as diverse and expansive as the public playhouse as either a patriarchal or feminist institution. Different tropes, trends, and genres—as well as individual plays and playwrights—had their own discrete cultural politics and used and treated women characters in a multiplicity of ways. As a result, each of my chapters contains a brief literature review that acknowledges the nuanced critical legacies of different genres and even individual plays.

As a whole, however, this dissertation interrogates the gender politics of the religious conversion trope in early modern theatre, and I show how conversion was a phenomenon in

---

[50]Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 5.

[51]Alfar, *Fantasies of Female Evil*, 30-46. Some of the initial studies that offered patriarchal readings of the theatre include Carol Thomas Neely, *Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare's Plays* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); Peter Erickson, *Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Marilyn L. Williamson, *The Patriarchy of Shakespeare's Comedies* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986).

[52]Phyllis Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 15.

which women were widely believed to have more power than men. While Chapter One focuses on one of the most prevalent "fantasies of female evil," Chapters Two, Three, and Four study plays that celebrate female empowerment and rewrite supernatural womanhood as a divinely sanctioned gift. Many of the plays that I study in this dissertation recuperate the feminine occult by modeling how it can be essential to the proper functioning of Christian patriarchy. Empowered women, these plays contend, can make excellent allies in the wider dissemination of Christianity. While this vision of white femininity is a decidedly male interpretation and fantasy, this dissertation also asks us to reflect on how these depictions may not be fully fictional or removed from historical reality. Intersectional feminist theory in particular has brought attention to the ways white women have traditionally aligned with white men in service of colonial and imperial projects, elevating white women at the cost of people of color. The early modern public playhouse is one venue where we can see the beginnings of this trend.

Chapter Outline

The four chapters of this dissertation are organized according to character archetypes and genre—the witch in witchcraft plays, the wife in city comedy, the resurrected woman in Shakespearean comedy, and the martyr and prophetess in history plays—but their order also maps a growing sphere of influence, from conversions centered on the individual, to the married couple, to the community, and finally, the English nation itself.

Chapter One, "A Discovery of 'Satanical Sisterhoods': Religious Conversion in Witch Plays," takes up the most popular and infamous interpretation of supernatural womanhood: the belief that women were secretly diabolic witches. The first section of this chapter shows how the witch-craze was an extreme manifestation of anxiety about religious conversion, and I work with demonological treatises and pamphlet literature to establish how witchcraft was situated as a

women-centric conversional crisis in England. In the second and third sections of this chapter, I turn to the public theatre's "Jacobean witch-vogue," an early seventeenth-century trend that prompted the performance, revival, and publication of at least six extant plays about witchcraft.[53] Focusing my analysis on the true-crime dramas *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) and *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634), I demonstrate how each play stages the prevalent fear that women operated within an underground satanic network designed to subvert Christianity in England. These plays bring forward questions about women's vulnerability to conversion and the consequences that this susceptibility might have on women and the communities to which they belong.

In Chapter Two, "Turn Back O Man: Converting the Prodigal Husband in City Comedy," I delve into the other side of the good/evil binary, focusing upon the trope of the sacred woman as a handmaiden of God. To do so, I study the figure of the faithful wife in city comedy, demonstrating how white femininity is leveraged by playwrights to reform and save wayward men, redirecting them toward the Christian path. Heterosexual love and the institution of marriage become indicative of a character's morality and relationship to God, and female virtue is rendered a divinely supernatural means to convert a prodigal husband. The first section of this chapter establishes the prevalence of this narrative in early modern culture through an examination of conduct manuals, sermons about marriage, and defenses of women. I then look to *The London Prodigal* (ca. 1591-1604) and *The Tamer Tamed* (ca. 1609-1611). In revealing the similarities between an underestimated character like Luce and the protofeminist heroine Maria, I recover the agency of the faithful wife, a character type less popular than the bawd, courtesan,

[53]Purkiss, *Witch in History*, 199.

or adulterous wife, and make a claim for pushing the generic boundaries of what scholars typically consider the staples of city comedy.

While both Chapters One and Two look at examples of what Thomas Wilson calls passive conversion—women contaminating or saving men without their consent—Chapter Three, "Staging Conversion in Shakespeare's Resurrection Comedies," looks at two examples of active conversion within the Shakespearean canon. Studying the intersection between supernatural women, conversion, and theatre as both an art form and cultural institution in *Much Ado About Nothing* (ca.1598-99) and *The Winter's Tale* (ca. 1610-11), this chapter claims that, in both plays, women and the theatre work together to invite, not force, men to reform and convert. The first section of this chapter considers how antitheatrical discourse appropriates the language of witchcraft to situate the early modern playhouse as a spiritually corrupting institution. I then demonstrate how *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Winter's Tale* yoke together the conversional capital of the feminine occult with the ongoing debate between players, playwrights, and antitheatricalists about the playhouse's ability to convert or pervert spectators to challenge blistering assumptions about both the theatre and women's abilities to "bewitch" men.

Finally, Chapter Four, "Converting the Nation: Feminizing *Historia Sacra* on the Early Modern Stage," considers how the conversional possibilities of women's supernatural powers were believed to extend beyond the domestic sphere to incite national conversions. The first section of this chapter traces the history of female martyrs and prophetesses in England in the century following the Reformation, as well as the contentious debates about the legitimacy and morality of their perceived powers and influence. Then, I illustrate how the early modern theatre engaged these discourses, focusing on *The Virgin Martyr* (1622) and *The Prophetess* (1622), plays set during the original Christianization of Europe, ending with a discussion of *Henry VIII*

(1613). All three plays heavily adapt the historical narratives they are based on, adding all kinds of fantastical elements in order to argue that women share a uniquely intimate relationship with God, and that women's supernatural powers are a force for national good. In doing so, these plays reclaim women, and thus the feminine occult, as the founders and engineers of England's own Christian identity. Through the four chapters of this dissertation, I reveal how the early modern stage presented women as immensely powerful agents of conversion, be it for good or for evil.

CHAPTER ONE

A Discovery of "Satanical Sisterhoods": Religious Conversion in Witch Plays

> *"The formall tearmes of this covenant, as they bee set downe by some, are most dreadfull: To renounce God his Creator and that promise made in Baptisme. To deny Jesus Christ, and refuse the benefites of his obedience, yea to blaspheme his glorious and holy name. To worship the Devill, & repose all confidence and trust in him. To execute his commaundements. To use things created of God for no end, but to the hurt and destruction of others. And lastly, to give…soule and body to that deceitfull and infernall spirit."*
>
> —Alexander Roberts, *A Treatise on Witchcraft* (1616)[1]

The imagined process of becoming a witch in early modern England was more than just an act of apostasy: it was conceived of as a demonic religious conversion.[2] The colloquial terminology "turning witch" evoked similar interfaith conversions such as "turning Jew" and "turning Turk."[3] Like other stigmatized religious conversions, to "turn witch" was widely understood as a subversive exchange of Christianity for another religious order—in this case, Devil worship, an act that I term a satanic conversion. As Alexander Roberts's treatise details,

---

[1]Alexander Roberts, *A Treatise of Witchcraft Wherein Sundry Propositions are Laid Downe, Plainely Discovering the Wickednesse of that Damnable Art* (London, 1616), 28.

[2]The infamous witch hunter manual *Malleus Maleficarum* explicitly refers to turning witch as a conversion. The text was hugely influential on all witchcraft literature that followed: it was published in thirty-six editions between 1487 and1669. Writing on young girls' decision to seek demonic aid, the manual notes that "they turn to [*convertere*] every sort of assistance offered by the Devil." The use of the verb *convertere* in the original Latin suggests that Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger defined this act as one of conversion, an idea that took root across all genres of witchcraft literature. See Kramer and Sprenger, *Malleus*, 278.

[3]We see this phrase, for example, in *The Witch of Edmonton*, when Mother Sawyer proclaims she "had need turn witch" to revenge herself (4.1.85). The phrase also appears colloquially in John Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* when Freevil admonishes Franceschina to "not turn witch before thy time" (2.2.100) and in James Shirley's *The Example* (1637), as Lord Fitzavarice warning one of the ladies that if she marries her suitor, "it will be pollicie / To turne witch betime" (sig. C4v). On "turning Jew" or "turning Turk," see Shoulson, *Fictions of Conversion*; Vitkus, *Turning Turk*; Jonathon Burton, *Traffic and Turning*, 16.

the initiate—almost always pictured or presented as a woman[4]—not only renounced God but turned toward the Devil with both her "body and soul," undergoing a new baptism that often involved a formal demonic covenant, physical markings, and a satanic alias, as she consented to join a diabolic order that sought to subvert true religion throughout England and Europe. One key mission of this satanic cabal, demonologists posited, was to recruit and convert more women to the cause. "The more women," the theologian William Perkins proclaimed, "the more witches."[5]

This perceived conversional epidemic was overwhelmingly presented as a gendered crisis, with women accounting for more than ninety percent of accused persons in England.[6] The early modern witch-craze thus feels like a natural starting point for unpacking the relationship between women and conversion on the early modern stage, as witches were popular character archetypes. Diane Purkiss calls this theatrical trend the "Jacobean witch-vogue,"[7] and the early seventeenth century saw a marked increase in drama featuring female witches, including Thomas Heywood's *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* (1604), Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1606),[8] John Marston's

---

[4]The belief that witches were women was amplified in published print literature. Charlotte-Rose Millar's study of the sixty-six extant English witchcraft pamphlets shows that in the sixteenth century, ninety-four percent of pamphlets centered on female witches, eighty-five percent in the seventeenth, and one hundred percent in the early eighteenth century. See Charlotte-Rose Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil and Emotions in Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 7.

[5]William Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft so Farre Forth as it is Revealed in the Scriptures, and Manifest by True Experience* (Cambridge, 1608), 169.

[6]See Alan MacFarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional Study* (London: Routledge, 1970), xix. This statistic is repeated in Edward Bever, "Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power in the Early Modern Community," *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 4 (2002): 955-988, esp. 956.

[7]Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 199.

[8]While Shakespeare's witches' beards lend them some sexual ambiguity, the play-text does refer to them with female pronouns and designates them in-text as the "weird *sisters*." More lengthy discussions of the witches' beards and gender play in *Macbeth* can be found in James Schiffer, "Macbeth and the Bearded Women," in *Another Country: Feminist Perspectives on Renaissance Drama*, eds. Dorothea Kehler and

The Wonder of Women; or The Tragedy of Sophonisba (1606), Thomas Middleton's *The Witch* (ca. 1613-1616), William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford's *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), and Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome's *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634). The public theatre was a key venue that disseminated the idea that witchcraft was a satanic conversion, bringing to life for its diverse audiences a plethora of demonically aligned women.

To investigate how the theatre participated in the meaning-making process that bound together witchcraft, women, and religious conversion, the first section of this chapter draws upon a wide range of witchcraft literature—elite and pulp press, Continental and English—to establish the prevalence and wide circulation of beliefs about women's satanic conversions within early modern English culture. I then turn to two case-studies, the true-crime dramas *The Witch of Edmonton* and *The Late Lancashire Witches*, to demonstrate how each play builds upon its contemporary reporting, adding plotlines and theatricalizing elements that emphasize these cultural anxieties about women, conversion, and witchcraft. Early modern playwrights certainly capitalized on the popularity of the witch-craze, but I argue that they also crucially embedded into these plays a larger body of social questions about religious conversion and gender, inviting audiences to consider why and how women might be particularly vulnerable to satanic conversions.

In my reading of *The Witch of Edmonton*, I counter the standard sympathetic interpretation of the play, arguing that by including Mother Sawyer's on-stage conversion and

---

Susan Baker (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 1991), 205-217; Brett D. Hirsch, "'What are these Faces?': Interpreting Bearded Women in *Macbeth*," in *Renaissance Poetry and Drama in Context: Essays for Christopher Wortham*, eds. Andrew Lynch, and Anne Scott (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 91-113; Hilda H. Ma, "The Medicalization of 'Midnight Hags': Perverting Post-Menopausal and Political Motherhood in *Macbeth*," in *Staging the Superstitions of Early Modern Europe*, eds. Verena Theile and Andrew D. McCarthy (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 147-168.

blood pact with the devilish dog Tom, the play ultimately exploits rather than challenges popular notions of witchcraft. By staging the descriptions of satanic conversion found in witch hunter manuals, the playwrights revise their source material to emphasize Sawyer's agency in this process and allow those gathered in the playhouse to experience this shocking, mysterious, and taboo act for themselves. In the final section of this chapter, I demonstrate how bringing forward the idea of satanic conversion complicates the often-underestimated comedy *The Late Lancashire Witches*. Responding to the traditional scholarly reading that the play skeptically defangs witchcraft, I show how the text stages a world in which skeptics must instead accept the reality that the town's women have "turned witch," operating an underground satanic network. The comedic elements of the plot are often at the expense of non-believers, not the witches, as the play's male characters fall prey to the bewitchments of a coven of wives and young maids seeking to overturn patriarchal order. Even as the play has many humorous scenes, it brings forward the seriousness of satanic conversion in the added subplot featuring Mr. and Mistress Generous. When Mr. Generous discovers his wife is a witch—after seeing her transformed from a horse to a human—he laments the spiritual dangers her secret diabolic allegiances have created for him, mourning her betrayal and demanding that she perform a penitential spiritual conversion back to God. Taken together, *The Witch of Edmonton* and *The Late Lancashire Witches* demonstrate how witchcraft drama amplified anxiety about women's satanic conversions. Reading these plays through the lens of religious conversion reveals that witchcraft drama was not somehow skeptically "ahead of its time"—as is commonly maintained—but instead served as a crucial vehicle for provoking questions about women and conversion that often aligned with witch hunter propaganda.[9]

[9]See, for example, Meg Pearson, "Vision on Trial in *The Late Lancashire Witches,*" in *Staging the Superstitions of Early Modern Europe*, eds. Verena Theile and Andrew D McCarthy (Farnham, Surrey:

The Devil is in the Details: Witchcraft and Religion in England

It is no coincidence that the height of the witch hunts and witch panic in England, roughly 1550-1650, corresponded with the English Reformation's tumultuous series of conversions and their traumatic afterlives. Since the mid-twentieth century, scholars have debated the relationship between the witch hunts and the period's religious conflicts. Hugh Trevor-Roper's incendiary 1967 essay "The European Witch-craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries" first connected the witch hunts to the Reformation, describing them as a microcosmic battle between Protestants and Catholics where writers from both sides used witchcraft accusations to further their own religious causes.[10] In response, sociological and feminist scholarship posited different origins for the witch-craze. Led by Alan McFarlane and Keith Thomas, sociologists refuted the religious underpinnings of the witch-craze, emphasizing that most accusations happened within local communities, arising from disputes between neighbors that "had little to do with elite [demonological] concerns."[11] Feminist scholarship of the 1980s and 1990s drew special attention to the disproportionate number of accused women, interpreting this as evidence of a larger patriarchal conspiracy to punish and murder unruly

---

Ashgate Pub, 2013), 107-127; Eric Pudney, *Scepticism and Belief in English Witchcraft Drama, 1538-1681* (Lund: Lund University Press, 2019).

[10]Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The European Witch-craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century: Religion, The Reformation, and Social Change* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 83-177.

[11]Gary K. Waite, *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 7. For the most foundational sociological studies, see Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- And Seventeenth- Century England* (London: Penguin Books, 1971); Christina Larner, *Enemies of God: The Witch hunt in Scotland* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Alan MacFarlane and Christina Larner, *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).

women.[12] Foundational to all three critical approaches, however, was the notion that to engage with the witch-craze, one must first demystify it. Rather than allowing that most early modern people superstitiously believed wholeheartedly in the idea of women's satanic conversions, witchcraft scholarship has often trended toward assuming that belief was a conscious cover for something else—doctrinal propaganda, community conflict, or misogyny.

Reading witchcraft belief as an articulation of anxiety about women and religious conversion triangulates religious, social, and feminist readings of witchcraft, showing how belief in the Devil brings together post-Reformation anxiety, interpersonal and localized conflict, and cultural misogyny. Taking my cue from scholars such as James Sharpe and Stuart Clarke, this chapter asserts that, despite individual skeptics, the predominant belief in England was that the Devil and his witches were real, powerful, and an active threat to English Christians.[13] Witch panics frequently arose in counties that resisted England's national totalizing march toward

---

[12]These include Barbara Ehrenrich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (New York: Feminist Press, 1973); Deborah Willis's foundational *Malevolent Nurture: Witch hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995). The socio-gender politics of witchcraft are also elucidated in Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History* and Frances Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*: *Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550-1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994),171-236; Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994); Marianne Hester, *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches: A Study of the Dynamics of Male Domination* (London: Routledge, 1992); Christina Larner, "Was Witch hunting Women-Hunting? (1994)" in *The Witchcraft Reader*, ed. Darren Oldridge (London: Routledge, 2002), 253-256; Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004); Heidi Breuer, *Crafting the Witch: Gendering Magic in Medieval and Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Julia Garrett, "Witchcraft and Sexual Knowledge in Early Modern England," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2013): 32-72; Alison Rowlands, "Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe," in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian Levack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 449-467.

[13]James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996) and Stuart Clark, *Thinking With Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). See also Brian Levack, *The Witch hunt in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Pearson, 1987).

Protestantism. Lancashire, for example, was considered a "hotbed of recusant activities" of all forms, and the county saw numerous witchcraft panics and trials during this period, including the infamous 1612 Pendle case.[14] In this particular case, the panic began when the local justice of the peace, Roger Nowell, was instructed to compile a list of recusants and religious nonconformists in the area. During this investigation, Nowell was approached by the Law family, who claimed that John Law had suffered from a "witchcraft-induced illness" after a negative encounter with Alizon Device.[15] Through his interviews with the Device family, Nowell uncovered a secret occult network led by two older women, aliases Chattox and Demdike, who brought up their families to practice diabolic witchcraft. As the eliding between Nowell's mission to discover recusants and his investigation into the Law case illustrates, early modern English witchcraft was deeply enmeshed with larger fears about religious nonconformity.

Yet, any study of the religious underpinnings of the witch-craze must also take gender into account. The particulars of witchcraft lore and theories of how witchcraft spread grew from and reaffirmed the occult properties of women, their biological and spiritual vulnerability, and the inherent danger of their domestic and social roles. Mothers, wives, and the desire women aroused in men were all understood to be spiritually persuasive—when women used their maternal or wifely influences morally, they could incite conversion back to God. But the witch manipulated her influence for satanic purposes, practicing extreme perversions of maternal nurturing and female sexuality to bring others into the diabolic fold. When men fell under

---

[14]Meg F. Pearson, "Vision on Trial in *The Late Lancashire Witches*," 116. The relationship between Lancashire's religious politics and witchcraft is the focus of Luca Baratta, "Lancashire: A Land of Witches in Shakespeare's Time," *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, 13, no. 2 (2013): 185–208.

[15]See James Sharpe, "Introduction," in *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, ed. Robert Poole (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 1-18, esp. 1-3 for details on the 1612 Pendle investigation and trials.

suspicion in England, it was often because of their relationship to another suspected or guilty woman, typically their wife or mother. The men appeared to be casualties of women who used their conversional persuasiveness for diabolic purposes.[16] Witch panic centered on women because witchcraft was the amalgamation of anxiety about women's occult natures and about religious conversion.

My reading of stage witches as nightmarish female religious converts participates in a more recent revisionist trend in witchcraft scholarship that disrupts the neatly constructed categories between English and Continental lore. The foundational sociohistorical witchcraft scholarship of the early twentieth century separated English belief and accusations from their Continental European counterparts and distinguished between learned demonology and popular witchcraft belief. The widely accepted theory has been that English witchcraft was secular and folkloric, generated by disputes between neighbors, while Continental witchcraft was imagined as diabolic and heretical, based in sexualized blood pacts and Sabbaths between witches and the Devil or other demons. This dichotomy developed largely due to the influential work of Keith Thomas who claimed that "English witchcraft…was neither a religion nor an organization" and that the practices of English witchcraft "did not involve any formal breach with Christianity." The Devil, Thomas concluded, was not "one of the staple constituents of English witch trials."[17] This constructed division between English and Continental lore has been difficult to shake and continues to be repeated throughout witchcraft scholarship. Charlotte-Rose Millar's *Witchcraft, The Devil, and Emotions* (2017), however, comprehensively demonstrates the near-ubiquitous

[16]Joseph Klaits, *Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 52.

[17]Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 516.

presence of the Devil, demonism, and diabolic pacts in English witchcraft pamphlets. Millar's work not only recovers the central anxiety about religion that pervades English witchcraft lore but also unearths an intertextual network between European and English witchcraft belief at all levels of society.[18] Like Millar, I demonstrate the Devil's central importance to English witchcraft with my own focus on stage representations. The Devil's presence in these plays is indeed what renders turning witch a conversional, rather than just apostatic, act, as witches were crucially portrayed as turning *toward* the Devil, the leader of a perverse kind of religious order that had its own rituals, rules, and pseudo-evangelist mission.

Additionally, the lines between common and elite knowledge and thinking were far blurrier than scholars have previously allowed. We might note that Gifford's *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes* (1593), for instance, itself enacts this blending of spheres.[19] A learned treatise written as a dialogue, it creates a philosophical and theological debate about witchcraft between local village men and their wives, tantalizingly proposing that these kinds of "elite" conversations were not restricted to the pages and minds of educated demonological writers but reflected broader concerns and beliefs about witchcraft happening at dinner tables, county courts, and in popular entertainment. Another example is Ben Jonson's witchy court masque, *The Masque of Queens* (1606), which contains extensive annotations on the antimasque that explain Jonson's sources for the characterizations and actions of the witches. These sources include the most famous demonological texts of the period, *Malleus Maleficarum*,

---

[18]Millar's work on witchcraft and the Devil builds upon a larger body of scholarship considering representations and mythologies of the Devil within early modern England such as John D. Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Darren Oldridge, *The Devil in Early Modern England* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000); Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Gary F. Jensen, *The Path of the Devil: Early Modern Witch Hunts* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

[19]George Gifford, *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes* (London 1593).

Jean Bodin, Nicholas Rémy, and *Daemonologie* (1597), alongside anecdotes from witch confessions, "vulgar Fable[s]," and even "a Tale [from] when I went to School."[20] The mixed sources detailed in Jonson's dramatic work show that demonological and popular ideas were often wed together for their audiences—those who saw Jonson's masque would have no sense of the exact reference for each nefarious act of his witches. Witchcraft lore, presented in all kinds of fictional writing, depositions and testimonies, and demonological tracts, was a true melding pot of sources. Pamphlets, which commonly repurposed theories found in demonological writing, further disseminated "elite" ideas to the masses. Thus, this chapter contributes to this growing body of work studying the circulation and amalgamation of witchcraft lore across class and geographical borders by studying how witchcraft as a diabolic iteration of religious conversion was taken up and dispersed across these porous spheres through the early modern playhouse. The playhouse was an instrumental tool that, like pulp press pamphlets, further broke down barriers between Continental and English and learned and popular accounts of witches and witchcraft. Engaging with the descriptions of witchcraft and satanic conversion found in treatises and pamphlets (detailed in the next section), the early modern theatre presented witchcraft as an act of apostasy that entailed a seemingly whole-character turn toward Satan, inviting audiences to question the morality, occult power, and spiritual influence of women.

Dancing with the Devil: Woman, Witchcraft, and Conversion

The early modern witch was defined by her relationship with Satan across witchcraft literature. As William Perkins defines it in *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (1608),

[20]Ben Jonson, "The Masque of Queens, Celebrated in the House of Fame," in *The Works of Ben Jonson, Which were formerly Printed in Two Volumes, and are now Reprinted in One* (London, Printed by Thomas Hodgkin, for H. Herringman, E. Brewster, T. Bassett, R. Chiswell, M. Wotton, G. Conyers, 1692), 345-354, 346.

"the Ground of all the practises of Witchcraft, is a league or covenant made betweene the Witch and the Devill."[21] The witchcraft drama of the period reiterates the satanic origins of female supernatural power. In *Macbeth*, the weird sisters serve their "masters" (4.1.70), responding to calls from their diabolic familiars Graymalkin and Paddock (1.1.10-11). In Thomas Middleton's *The Witch*, Hecate works with a number of spirits and devil-animals (1.2.3), and Firestone notes in an aside that "the devil's in her" (1.2.87). Mother Sawyer in *The Witch of Edmonton* practices *maleficia* through Dog, an embodiment of the Devil, and the witches of Lancashire confess that they are similarly empowered by the Devil. Even in *The Wise Woman of Hoxton*, the eponymous character—who does not explicitly consort with the Devil—still faces accusations of satanic allegiances, as Boyster claims that she "look'st somewhat like his dam" (2.1.168).

Such interpretations of the witch-Devil relationship often reduce the power of individual women in favor of constructing a widespread diabolic conspiracy designed for, as James I wrote in *Daemonologie*, the "enlargeing of Sathans tyrannie, and crossing of the propagation of the Kingdome of CHRIST."[22] Witches were a vital sign not only of Satan's continued presence, but also of his active plan to subvert God, establishing witchcraft within the wider spectrum of perceived cabals against God and true religion that characterized the period. This aligned witches with other religious groups construed as apostates by the Church of England. In Gifford's *Dialogue*, Dan tells the others that the "devill hath his throne, his dominion and kingdom in the hearts of ignorant blind infidels," asking, "is there anie greater infidelitie and darknesse in anie, than in witches, conjurers, and such as have familiaritie with devils?"[23] Dan not only brings

---

[21]Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft*, 41.

[22]James VI and I, King of Scotland and England, *Daemonologie in Forme of a Dialogue, Divided into Three Bookes* (Edinburgh, Printed by Robert Walde-graue printer to the Kings Majestie, 1597), 34.

[23]Gifford, *Dialogue*, sig. C4r.

witches together with the other kinds of "infidels" ruled by the Devil—Catholics, Muslims, and Jews—but further suggests that the witch is the most vile iteration of this religious infidelity. While witches were frequently vilified alongside recusant Catholics or compared to papists, they were crucially not always elided with them.[24] Witches were often named separately amongst other damned religious sects; for example, Thomas Potts's *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* (1613) claims that Lancaster is "abound as much in Witches of divers kindes as Seminaries, Jesuites, and Papists."[25] Similarly, John Eachard's sermon *The Axe, Against Sin and Error* (1646) preaches that "*Heathens, Jews, Turks, Devils, Witches,* [and] *Papists*" will be unable to recognize and navigate the apocalypse.[26] Yet, witch panic was intensified because, unlike other racialized religious groups, witches had few discernible outward signs of their difference. The witch brought with her the fear that the community could be disrupted and converted from the inside by an undetectable source. Frances Dolan writes that witch-figures "conjoined the characteristics of domestic 'outsiders within'—dependents feared to be insubordinate—and scapegoated cultural others (such as Jews, Catholics, Moors)."[27] As Carlo

[24]For studies which pay particular attention to the Catholic/Protestant dimensions of certain witchcraft accusations see, Stuart Clark, "Protestant Witchcraft, Catholic Witchcraft," in *The Witchcraft Reader*, ed. Darren Oldridge (London: Routledge, 2002), 136-147; Waite, *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft*, 118-191; Diane Purkiss, "Charming Witches: The 'Old Religion' and the Pendle Trial," *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 3, no. 1 (2014): 13–31.

[25]Thomas Potts, *The Wonderfull Discouerie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* (London, 1613), sig. T2r.

[26]John Eachard, *The Axe, Against Sin and Error; and the Truth Conquering* (London, 1646), n.p.

[27]Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, 175.

Ginzburg terms them, witches were at once both "internal and external enemies," able to manipulate women's social roles to bring the Devil into the home and community.[28]

Witchcraft was believed to affect women more easily than men because women lacked the kind of "inner scaffolding" necessary to adequately defend themselves against all sorts of infiltrations and mutations, and women's humoral and spiritual makeups left them more vulnerable to satanic manipulations.[29] Nearly every piece of extant English witchcraft literature contains some semblance of gendered stereotypes—while certain texts have designated chapters or sections that posit the connection between women and witchery, others interweave these discussions throughout, and others still make the argument implicit by focusing on accused women or women-centric anecdotes and examples. Many of these texts invoke the story of Eve as indisputable evidence that women were destined to bring about the continued fall of man. "What can be the cause that there are twentie women given to that craft, where ther is one man?" James prompts in *Daemonologie*, "[t]he reason is easie, for as that sexe is frailer then man is, so is it easier to be intrapped in these grosse snares of the Devill, as was over well proved to be true, by the Serpents deceiving of *Eva*."[30] *Malleus Maleficarum* continually selects female-gendered grammatical cases to reiterate, even on a linguistic level, the equivalence of witch with woman, claiming it must be called "a Heresy, I say, of Sorceresses, since it is to be designated by the particular gender over which [the Devil] is known to have power."[31] *Malleus* looks back to

---

[28]Carlo Ginzburg, "The Witches' Sabbath: Popular Cult or Inquisitorial Stereotype?" in *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Steven L. Kaplan (Berlin: Mouton, 1984), 39-51, 43.

[29]Mack, *Visionary Women*, 27.

[30]James I, *Daemonologie*, 43-44.

[31]Kramer and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, 69.

history to support this claim, arguing that "[w]e find that virtually all the kingdoms of the world have been overturned because of women…Hence, it is no wonder if the world now suffers on account of the evil of women."[32] Roberts estimates that "women in a farre different proportion proove Witches then men, by a hundred to one," leading him to conclude that "the Lawe of God noteth that Sex, as more subject to that sinne."[33] All of these writers work from a foundational understanding that women possess an aptitude for the occult and that this occultness makes them excellent satanic converts and proselytizers.

Women's tendency toward satanic conversions was believed to begin at the level of their internal chemistry. John Jacob Wecker asserted in 1660, for example, that "you shall find more Women that are Witches than you shall find Men, by reason of their Complexion."[34] In humoral theory, women were colder and wetter than men, and because, as Gwynne Kennedy reminds us, heat was "responsible for strength, intelligence, courage, [and] virtuous action," women were seen to be biologically predisposed to weakness, irrationality, anger, and corruption.[35] Additionally, women's thinner, permeable skin and porousness meant that their bodies could be more easily invaded, tempted, and infected by demonic forces. "If they be moist, and all they generallie," Scot explained, the "veines, pipes, and passages of their bodies are open."[36] This

---

[32]Kramer and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, 168.

[33]Roberts, *A Treatise of Witchcraft*, 40.

[34]John Jacob Wecker, *Eighteen books of the secrets of art and nature being the summe and substance of naturall philosophy* (London, 1660), 34.

[35]Gwynne Kennedy, *Just Anger: Representing Women's Anger in Early Modern England* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 7.

[36]Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft Wherein the Lewde Dealing of Witches and Witchmongers is Notablie Detected* (London, 1584), 278. The structure of Scott's treatise—large sections that state accepted theories followed by much smaller separate sections of his refutations—means that even as he seeks to dispute, Scott also rewrites and gives voice and space to the beliefs he claims are nonsense, often recirculating more than meaningfully deconstructing.

openness, coupled with their watery equivocation and the lack of stable form associated with their wetter natures, meant women were more mutable and open to the influence of occult forces. *Compendium Maleficarum* (1608) argued that women "are of a more humid and viscous nature, more easily influenced to perceive various phantoms and slower and more loath to resist such impulses…it is easier for the devil to delude them with false and deceptive apparitions.[37] This receptiveness to the supernatural, however, was not all evil. Roberts notes:

> their complection is softer, and from hence more easily receive the impressions offered by the Divell; as when they be instructed and governed by good Angels, they prove exceeding religious, and extraordinarily devout: so consenting to the suggestions of evill spirits, become notoriously wicked, so that there is no mischiefe above that of a woman.[38]

Just as women's porousness makes them vulnerable to evil, so too does it leave them more open to godly gifts. As Chapter Four will discuss, women were also more likely to be prophets and visionaries, as their bodies were more sensitive to trances and divine frequencies. However, as every woman was innately open to the supernatural and prone to extremes, and because it could be near-impossible to distinguish between the satanic woman and the devout, all women were perceived as threatening and regarded with suspicion.

Women's extreme porousness also meant that they were believed to haphazardly leak from their bodies and mouths.[39] For Roberts, women's leakiness was especially dangerous

---

[37]Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum*, ed. Montague Summers, trans. E.A. Ashwin (London: John Rodker, 1929), 137.

[38]Roberts, *A Treatise on Witchcraft,* 42-43.

[39]Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 23-63.

because it meant that they uncontrollably shared demonic knowledge within their communities. "They are of a slippery tongue, and full of words," he writes, "and therefore if they know any such wicked practises, are not able to hold them, but communicate the same with their husbands, children, consorts, and inward acquaintance…and so the poyson is dispersed."[40] Women's inability to "hold" their words and knowledge inside their bodies positioned women as powerful demonic weapons that could be deployed to convert their families and communities. In the misogynistic imaginings of these writers, women make the best witches because their skin and humors render them easily corruptible, less able or willing to fight off temptations due to their cold wetness and inherent connection to Eve. Women's looseness would then allow such corruption and knowledge to spread quickly throughout the community. The woman, then, is imagined as Satan's greatest weapon against God and Christian people.

Roberts's commentary reveals another key element driving the anxiety surrounding women, witchcraft, and conversion—the wife and mother's spiritual authority within the household and her power to persuade and convert her husband and children. Bodin notes "the wife attracts her husband, the mother leads her daughter, and sometimes the whole family carries on for many centuries as it has been proven by countless trials."[41] Conjuring the terrifying vision of an exponentially growing spiritual epidemic, Bodin's witch is not an isolated, poor, begging crone, but a socially connected woman who abuses her domestic authority, the kind of witches presented in *The Late Lancashire Witches*. She is terrifying, not only because she recruits for

---

[40]Roberts, *A Treatise on Witchcraft*, 43.

[41]Jean Bodin, *De la démonomanie des sorciers*, trans. Randy A. Scott as *On the Demon-Mania of Witches* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), 113-114. Bodin's work was translated from French into German, Italian, and Latin. The text was familiar in England by 1582, as *A True and Juste Record* opens with an English translation of some of Bodin's work. Reginald Scot, writing in 1584, also did much to circulate Bodin to English readers, extensively citing from "Bodins bables" in order to refute them. See Scot, *The Discoverie*, sig. B5r.

Satan, but because she does so virtually undetected within her community and within the privacy of her home, simultaneously performing and perverting her prescribed role as a spiritual guide for her children in women-oriented spaces. Rémy similarly claims that "once [Satan] has gained a foothold in any family he has never been known to retreat from it" because "there is no easier way for [the Devil] to accomplish [his] purpose than to drive and compel those who are already in his power to corrupt their children also."[42] This fervent belief in what Deborah Willis terms the "witch-family" helped witch hunters and courts to prosecute this often invisible crime.[43] Depositions, confessions, pamphlets, and treatises alike all reveal networks of occult knowledge shared between female neighbors and mothers and daughters, seemingly attesting to Perkins's warning, "the more women, the more witches." Women and men whose parents were accused were exponentially more likely to fall under suspicion in their own lifetimes. We can see one such example of this trend with the 1634 Lancashire witch trial that inspired *The Late Lancashire Witches*: at nine years old, Jennet Device testified against her own mother, sister, and grandmother in the 1612 Pendle trials; however, because of those associations, Device found herself accused in 1634 by another child witness, Edmund Robinson.

From the first extant witchcraft pamphlet published in England, *The Examination and confession of certaine wytches at Chensforde in the countie of Essex* (1566), English witchcraft was presented as a crime passed down matrilineally and laterally between female friends and neighbors. Grandmothers, mothers, and neighbors not only taught demonic knowledge and ritual, but they also helped procure satanic conversions. Elizabeth Francis claimed that she first learned

---

[42]Nicholas Rémy, *Daemonolatreiae libri tres*, ed. Montague Summers and trans. E.A. Ashwin as *Demonolatry* (London: John Rodker, 1930), 92.

[43]Willis, "The Witch-Family," 4-31.

witchcraft as the age of twelve from her grandmother, Eve. "When shee taughte it her," the pamphlet claims, "she counseiled her to renounce GOD and his worde, and to geve of her bloudde to Sathan."[44] Such counsel extends far beyond the sharing of a craft, or even the passing down of potions, recipes, and healing knowledge. Francis's grandmother, fatefully named Eve, instructs her to commit apostasy and realign herself with Satan through a blood compact, helping her to complete a satanic conversion. Francis practiced as a witch for nearly sixteen years when she then converted Agnes Waterhouse and "taught her as she was instructed before by her grandmother Eve, tellig her that she must cal him Sathan and geve him of her bloude and bread and milke as before."[45] Francis took on the mothering role, helping Waterhouse to complete a satanic conversion and blood compact, further spreading this knowledge within their community.

This narrative is repeated throughout pamphlet literature. In *A Rehearsall both Straung and True* (1579), Elizabeth Stile reports that "Mother Dutten…and Mother Devell did perswade her, to dooe as thei had doen, in forsakyng God and his woorkes, and givyng her self to the Devill."[46] *The Apprehension and Confession of Three Notorious Witches* (1589) suggests the advice went into specifics: Joan Cunny confessed that one Mother Humphrey "told her that she must kneele down upon her knees, and make a Circle on the ground, and pray unto Sathan the cheefe of the Devills, the forme of which praier that she then taught her."[47] In *Witches*

[44]Anonymous, *The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches at Chensforde in the Countie of Essex* (London, 1566), sig. A6r.

[45]*Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches*, sig. A8r-A8v.

[46]Anonymous, *A Rehearsall both Straung and True, of Hainous and Horrible Actes Committed by Elizabeth Stile Alias Rockingham* (London, 1579), sig. A8v.

[47]Anonymous, *The Apprehension and Confession of Three Notorious Witches. Arreigned and by Justice Condemned and Executed at Chelmes-Forde, in the Countye of Essex* (London, 1589), sig. A3r.

Apprehended, Examined and Executed (1613), the pamphleteer recounts that, after she was widowed, Mother Sutton brought her daughter to live with her "as a furtherer to her divellish practises, nay indéed to make her a scholler to the Divell himselfe."[48] The 1612 Pendle case was particularly salacious because of the familial occult networks Roger Nowell uncovered operating secretly within seemingly godly communities. Recorded by Thomas Potts in *The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* (1613), the Pendle case relied on daughters and sons turning on their witch-mothers and witch-neighbors turning against one another in a tangle of social and familial relationships connected by demonic teachings. Potts informs the reader that Elizabeth Southerns "brought up her owne Children, instructed her Graund-children, and tooke great care and paines to bring them to be Witches."[49] In her own testimony, Alizon Device confirms that her grandmother and mother had both guided her toward this conversion:

> *Alizon Device* sayth, that about two yeares agon, her Graund-mother (called *Elizabeth Sowtherns*, alias old *Demdike*) did sundry times in going or walking togeather as they went begging, perswade and advise this Examinate to let a Devill or Familiar appeare unto her; and that shee this Examinate, would let him sucke at some part of her.[50]

Her grandmother not only persuaded and advised Alizon to join with the Devil but helped her to use her womanly body to do so—as Alizon notes, part of what she learned was to let these devils suck from her body. One significant reason that women's bodies were considered mysterious and

---

[48]Anonymous, *Witches Apprehended, Examined and Executed, for Notable Villanies* (London, 1613), sig. A4r.

[49]Potts, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches*, sig. Bv-B2r.

[50]Potts, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches*, sig. Cr.

supernatural was because they had the ability to create and nourish new life. Here, Alizon is taught how to use her occult female body for perverted maternal and sexual purposes, nourishing demonic familiars with her blood instead of an infant with her milk. Alizon was not the only family member that Southerns converted—her brother James Device also claimed that "he [was] carefull to observe his Instructions from *Old Demdike* his Grand-mother, and *Elizabeth Device* his mother."[51] James and Alizon Device illustrate the power of maternal influence and its frightening possibilities for perversion and satanic conversion. Southerns even proselytized outside of her family—Anne Whittle confessed that "about foureteene yeares past she entered, through the wicked perswasions and counsell of *Elizabeth Southerns*, alias *Demdike*, and was seduced to condescend & agree to become subject unto that divelish abhominable profession of Witchcraft."[52] By bringing Whittle into the diabolic fold, Southerns established a full coven in Pendle believed to meet for secret sabbaths at Malkin Tower. Potts warned that "from these two [Southerns and Whittle], sprung all the rest in order: and were the Children and Friendes, of these two notorious Witches."[53]

A mother's guidance could combine initiation into the satanic fold with sexual initiation. Just as Southerns taught young Alizon to allow devils to suck from her, Bodin opens *Demon-mania* with the scandalous story of Jeanne Harvillier. Bodin claims that Harvillier was promised to Satan by her mother at her birth and when she turned twelve, her mother presented her to the Devil who then had sex with her in front of her mother.[54] By emphasizing Harvillier's age, Bodin

[51]Potts, sig. Ir.

[52]Potts, sig. B4r.

[53]Potts, sig. D2r.

[54]Bodin, *Demon-mania*, 35.

connects Harvillier's puberty to her sexualized satanic conversion. Harvillier is on the brink of becoming a woman, and her mother turns that potential demonic rather than godly. Rémy shares a similar story from his case files from July 1587 about Dominique Fallvea:

> her mother began to warn her not to be afraid if she saw something unusual, for there would be no danger in it; and as soon as she had said this, there suddenly appeared one in human form who seemed like a shoemaker, for his belt was stained here and there with pitch. This man made her swear an oath to him, and marked her upon the brow with his nail in sign of her new allegiance, and finally defiled her before the eyes of her mother. And the mother in her turn gave herself to him in sight of her daughter.[55]

In Rémy's sensational account, Fallvea's mother prepares her emotionally for the Devil's presence and watches as her daughter performs a satanic conversion, pledging allegiance to the Devil and receiving his mark. To seal the union, Fallvea and the Devil have sex and her mother participates, modeling the expected witch-Devil relationship and signaling that Fallvea has now been initiated into a new stage of life as a witch and as a woman.

The sexual luridness of both Bodin and Rémy's anecdotes—which bring forward taboos such as incest, orgiastic rituals, and pedophilia—are part of a larger spectrum of sexual deviancy associated with satanic conversion. The *Malleus* explains that "all witchcraft comes from carnal lust," and one "natural explanation" for the overwhelming number of female witches is that a woman "is more carnal than a man."[56] "The mouth of the womb," the *Malleus* warns, "[is] never

[55]Rémy, *Demonolatry*, 93.

[56]Kramer and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, 47; 165.

satisfied."[57] Just as women's sexuality evidenced witchery, women's insatiable sexual appetites in conjunction with their overpowering and malicious desire for revenge also provided a powerful incentive to turn witch, offering women the power to bewitch their lovers and avenge themselves on men who wronged them. *The Examination and Confession of certaine Wytches,* for example, tied Elizabeth Francis's satanic conversion to her desire to marry Andrew Byles. The reader learns that "she desired to have one Andrew Byles to her husband, which was a man of some welth, and the cat dyd promyse she shold, but that he sayde she must fyrste consent that this Andrew shuld abuse her, and she so did."[58] Francis's cat, named Sathan, offers to help procure Francis her chosen husband, but the bewitchment has a sexual component, requiring that Francis engage in premarital sex with Byles. By emphasizing this narrative, the anonymous writer reinforces the belief that women can use witchcraft to override men's wills, titillates readers with details of Francis's sexual exploits, and uses these same exploits as further proof of her spiritual perversion. Witchcraft literature frequently emphasizes female witches' crimes against men in order to amplify the threat—according to Roberts, witches could "enforce men to hate those things they should love, and affect that which they ought to avoyd."[59] When women witches were unable to enforce or maintain this magical control over men, they could use magic to harm their perceived enemies.

While women were believed to perform satanic conversions to aid their sexualized attacks against men, the satanic conversion and witch-Devil relationship was also sexualized, a favorite topic of many demonological writers. Even the most famous skeptic, Reginald Scot, still

---

[57]Kramer and Sprenger, 47.

[58]Anonymous, *Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches*, sig. A7r.

[59]Roberts, *A Treatise on Witchcraft*, 18.

includes nearly fifteen pages repeating various sensational sex acts and sex crimes with little editorial interpolation, and John Stearne shares more than ten anecdotes of witches who had sex with the Devil or with demonic agents.[60] Bodin notes that sex is a key aspect of the conversion process, writing that "After renouncing God, they kissed the devils in human form, although extremely hideous to behold, and worshipped them, then they danced with their brooms in their hand, and finally the devils copulated with the women."[61] These acts included women performing sex acts outside of procreation, such as fellatio or anilingus on the devil, made explicit in various woodcuts and illustrations.[62] While Bodin describes the orgiastic rituals attributed to the infamous Sabbath, the Devil was also believed to approach individual women and maintain lengthy sexual relationships with them. In one of Stearne's cases, the Widow Barton confessed that:

> the Devill appeared to her…and had the use of her body, and asked her to deny God and Christ, and serve him, and then she should never want, but should be avenged of all her enemies, which she consented to, then she said he kissed her and asked her for bloud, which he drew out of her mouth, and it dropped on a paper, and that he us'd to have the use of her body two or three times a weeke, and then us'd to kisse her.[63]

[60]Scot, *The Discoverie*, 74-88.

[61]Bodin, *Demon-mania*, 119.

[62]See, for example, the frontispiece for Nathaniel Crouch's *The Kingdom of Darkness* (1688) or Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum*, 35. A lengthier discussion of these images can be found in Millar, *Witchcraft, The Devil, and Emotions*, 127.

[63]Stearne, *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft* […] (London, 1648), 29.

As Barton's story evidences, sex, blood-sharing, and conversion are all intertwined in witchcraft mythology. Even without the ritualized satanic baptism described by Bodin and Rémy, sex and sexualized blood-sharing serve as another way to perform and consecrate conversion. In English witchcraft pamphlets, familiar spirits, as demonic agents, also fulfill Satan's role, often requiring blood to formalize a covenant. The familiar generally chooses to suck from a sexualized location, most commonly on and around the thighs, genitals, anus, and breasts. Margaret Flower, for example, confessed that while one familiar spirit "sucked under her left brest," the other sucked "within the inward parts of her secrets."[64] The simulated sex acts supposedly left teats that could then be discovered during court-mandated strip-searches, granting the public the voyeuristic pleasure of imagining these women's naked bodies and the sex acts performed to obtain such marks. The locations of these marks imply that their "deviancy" and "filthiness" stems from these often being oral sex acts focused on women's pleasure, and women frequently alluded in their confessions to the orgasms they experienced when having intercourse with the Devil. Women's conversions toward Satan, then, embodied not only fears about women's spiritual health and influence, but they also exemplified a greater anxiety about women's fidelity and sexual desire. Because the Devil was frequently imagined as a Black man, the sex acts which mark these conversions also bring forward larger fears about interracial sexual relationships and miscegenation.[65] In turning now to *The Witch of Edmonton*, based on the real-life case of

---

[64]Anonymous, *The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, Daughters of Joan Flower Neere Bever Castle: Executed at Lincolne, March 11. 1618* (London, 1619), sig. Cv.

[65]I discuss this further in two forthcoming articles. See "The Devil You Know: Anti-Black Racism and the Mythologies of English Witchcraft," *Shakespeare Studies* (forthcoming Fall 2023), and "Enter a Black Dog: Witchcraft as Racecraft in *The Witch of Edmonton*," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* (forthcoming). See also, Joyce Miller, "Men in Black: Appearances of the Devil in Early Modern Scottish Witchcraft Discourse," in *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland*, eds. Julian Goodare, et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 144-165; Richard Grinnell, "Witchcraft, Race, and the Rhetoric of Barbarism in *Othello* and *1 Henry IV*," *Upstart Crow* 24 (2004): 72-80.

Elizabeth Sawyer, we see how the public stage was instrumental in further disseminating these conversional anxieties.

Turning Witch in *The Witch of Edmonton*

On 19 April 1621, Elizabeth Sawyer was found guilty of using *maleficia* to kill Agnes Ratcliefe and was executed for witchcraft.[66] In the days prior to her death, Sawyer gave her confession to the Newgate Prison chaplain, Henry Goodcole, who then published a moralizing pamphlet complete with Sawyer's supposed testimony, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer, a Witch* (1621).[67] Goodcole's overarching thesis for the pamphlet was that anger, swearing, and cursing are direct paths to diabolic collaboration, and Sawyer's dialogue within the confession characterizes her as a passive and ignorant woman coerced into the Devil's service.[68] During Goodcole's questioning, Sawyer describes her "very greate feare" when she saw the Devil, who appeared to Sawyer in the shape of a large black dog and threatened to "teare [her] in peeces" if she did not acquiesce.[69] Sawyer makes clear that while her anger and swearing may have brought the Devil to her, she did not join him willingly out of anger or a thirst for

[66]Sawyer was also charged with witching to death two neighborhood children and some cattle, but she was acquitted on both counts. See Henry Goodcole, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch Late of Edmonton* (London, 1621), sig. B3v.

[67]Goodcole claimed in his "Apology to the Christian Readers" that he published the pamphlet to provide a definitive "true" narrative for the Sawyer case juxtaposed to a series of sensational ballads that had been circulating. The ballads to which he referred no longer survive, and, indeed, Goodcole's pamphlet remains the only historical evidence of the Sawyer case.

[68]The early modern desire to regulate swearing is explored in David Dean, "Blasphemy, Swearing, and Bad Behaviour in the *Witch of Edmonton*," *Early Theatre* 21, no. 2 (2018): 151-165. A feminist reading of scolds and the regulation of the female tongue in the pamphlet and the play can be found in Sarah Johnson, "Female Bodies, Speech, and Silence in the *Witch of Edmonton*," *Early Theatre* 12, no. 1 (2009): 69-91.

[69]Goodcole, *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, sig. C1v; C3r. The dog also sometimes appeared to Sawyer as white, often when he came upon her as she was praying.

power, but rather "granted for fear unto the Divell his request of my Soule and body."[70] Following the initial blood-sharing covenant in which the Devil sucked blood from Sawyer's perianal area, Sawyer does not invite the Devil to continue to nourish himself, but instead "suffer[s] him to doe what hee would" as he sticks his head under her skirts.[71] This blood exchange contrasts many of the satanic baptisms and covenants described across various genres of witchcraft literature: rather than presenting Sawyer as sexually promiscuous or sexually perverse, Goodcole's pamphlet renders her the victim of repeated sexual assault.

Throughout her confession and recorded gallows' statement, Sawyer reiterates her desire to repent and be forgiven, although whether these are her own words or the result of Goodcole's coaching or editorializing is impossible to discern.[72] The historical reality of Sawyer's prison conversion is lost to time; however, Goodcole's Sawyer yearns for salvation. In her final moments, Goodcole's pamphlet claims, Sawyer sought the mercy of the gathered crowd, asking that they "pray unto Almightie God to forgive me my grievous sinnes."[73] And, despite her previous turn to the Devil, Sawyer successfully returns to the Christian path: she claims that she can only be saved "[b]y Jesus Christ alone" and that she will pray to God "with all [her] hearte

[70]Goodcole, sig. C3r.

[71]Goodcole, sig. C3v.

[72]Goodcole had a personal stake in presenting Sawyer as a successful convert back to Christ. His career advancement relied on his ability to procure conversions from criminals before their deaths, his chief job as a visitor of Newgate. Randall Martin suggests that Goodcole framed his pamphlet with his employers in mind, attempting to impress them by turning Sawyer. See Randall Martin, "Henry Goodcole, Visitor of Newgate: Crime, Conversion, and Patronage," *The Seventeenth Century* 20, no. 2 (2005): 153-184, 155.

[73]Goodcole, sig. D2v.

and minde."[74] In Goodcole's pamphlet, then, Sawyer makes a somberly optimistic end; while her body must be punished by the law, her spirit will experience "mercy in Gods power."[75]

William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford's *The Witch of Edmonton* premiered later that year. While the play features three interconnected plotlines, the narrative based on Sawyer's case appears largely derived from Goodcole's pamphlet with a few key revisions: Sawyer is rewritten from a passive victim to the active agent of her satanic conversion, her sexual assault is transformed into the more standard sexually charged relationship with Dog, and Sawyer remains angry and begrudgingly unrepentant in her last moments. Anna Bayman's study of repentance in witchcraft pamphlets reveals that Goodcole's decision to present Sawyer as reconverted was not typical of the genre. In fact, witchcraft pamphlets often took up the opposite task, striving to show the accused as unrepentant in order to play against the standard trope of the "gallows-repentance," making the witch seem comparatively worse than other, lesser criminals.[76] *The Witch of Edmonton* follows more in this tradition, juxtaposing Sawyer's unwillingness to repent against Frank Thorney, who is forgiven for bigamy and murder by his pregnant wife Winifred, his father, and his second wife and murder victim Susan's family. These adaptations made by the playwrights bring Elizabeth Sawyer's story more in line with popular witch lore and more fully tease out the spiritual consequences of her witchery.

Scholarship on *The Witch of Edmonton*, however, continually cites the play as the most sympathetic portrayal of witchcraft in early modern drama. David Nicol calls the play a "sober

---

[74]Goodcole, sig. D2v.

[75]Goodcole, sig. D2v.

[76]Anna Bayman, "'Large Hands, Wide Eares, and Piercing Sights': The 'Discoveries' of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Witch Pamphlets." *Literature & History* 16, no. 1 (2007): 26-45, esp. 36.

and skeptical" examination of how "an old woman [is] scapegoated as a witch by her neighbors."[77] Julia Garrett suggests that by allowing Mother Sawyer a critical voice, the play "dramatizes the risks to the community posed by intolerance and communal aggression," demonstrating for playgoers how "social alienation or even abuse" can lead to criminal behavior.[78] Susan Amussen reads the play as purposefully turning the witchcraft-as-inversion trope on its head, where the dramatists use Mother Sawyer to "argu[e] that it is the legal and moral order of society that is upside down."[79] Feminist critics have furthered the idea that the play critiques society rather than Sawyer, positioning her as a tragic victim of the patriarchy. Viviana Comensoli writes that "Mother Sawyer is not an agent of supernatural powers but a victim of an entrenched social code," so that in "locat[ing] the roots of witchcraft in the external conditions of class, misogyny, and poverty," the play "debunks popular notions of witchcraft."[80] For Lisa Hopkins, Sawyer is entirely blameless, arguing the play presents Sawyer as a "passive subject" who "is hardly more than a puppet."[81] Scholars appear desirous to rescue the play from the perceived crudeness of early modern superstition, painting the dramatists as enlightened men educating their audience about the truth behind the witch-craze. Comensoli, Anthony Dawson,

---

[77]David Nicol, "Interrogating the Devil: Social and Demonic Pressure in the *Witch of Edmonton*," *Comparative Drama* 38, no. 4 (2005): 425-445, 426.

[78]Julia Garrett, "Dramatizing Deviance: Sociological Theory and the Witch of Edmonton," *Criticism* 49, no. 3 (2007): 327-375, 328, 366.

[79]Susan Amussen, "*The Witch of Edmonton:* Witchcraft, Inversion, and Social Criticism," *Early Theatre* 21, no. 2 (2018): 167-180, 167.

[80]Viviana Comensoli, "Witchcraft and Domestic Tragedy in *The Witch of Edmonton*," in *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, eds. J.R. Brink, et. al (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989), 43-60, esp. 44-46.

[81]Lisa Hopkins, *The Female Hero in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 109.

and Robert Lawrence even go so far as to suggest the play shares more in common with the modern sociohistorical witchcraft scholarship of Keith Thomas and Alan MacFarlane than it does with other early modern witch plays.[82] Perhaps the most nuanced reading of the play comes from David Stymist, who argues that even as the play criticizes the social conditions that pressure women to become witches, it simultaneously "participates in the Jacobean fascination with and sensationalism surrounding witchcraft trials."[83]

Of course, as these scholars rightfully point out, by granting Sawyer a platform to present her side of the story and air her grievances to the audience, the play does embed a certain social awareness within the witchcraft plot. Yet, the play's skepticism, social critique, and debunking of witchcraft mythology have been exaggerated. Mother Sawyer is neither a passive victim of circumstance nor a "puppet"—she actively seeks out diabolic collaboration to aid in her revenge, eagerly engages in a blood-sharing covenant with the Devil onstage, and gleefully orders the torture and murder of various characters. The play presents Sawyer's turn to witchcraft as an eagerly sought-after satanic conversion, capitalizing on and reinforcing popular witchcraft lore rather than exposing it as superstitious falsehood.

When the audience is first introduced to Mother Sawyer at the opening of Act 2, she bemoans the way that she has been treated by her neighbors. "Some call me witch," she soliloquizes, "And being ignorant of myself, they go / About to teach me how to be one" (2.1.8-

[82]Comensoli, "Witchcraft and Domestic Tragedy," 45, n. 7; Anthony Dawson, "Witchcraft/Bigamy: Cultural Conflict in *The Witch of Edmonton*," *Renaissance Drama* 20 (1989): 77-98, 77; Robert Lawrence, ed., *Jacobean and Caroline Comedies* (London: Dent, 1973), 76.

[83]David Stymeist, "Must I be . . . made a common sink?": Witchcraft and the Theatre in *The Witch of Edmonton*," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 25, no. 2 (2001): 33-53, 34.

10).[84] Mother Sawyer goes on to describe how her frequent cursing is blamed for bewitching cattle, corn, her neighbors, and their children. Sawyer references her "bad tongue" (2.1.11), alluding to the emphasis Goodcole placed in his pamphlet on cursing and swearing as natural stepping-stones to diabolic corruption. Upon his entrance, Old Banks beats Sawyer and exits the stage, providing proof of both Sawyer's ill-treatment at the hands of her neighbors and her so-called bad tongue. Cursing Old Banks, Sawyer responds to his abuse by calling out for diabolic remedy:

> What is the name, where and by what art learned,
>
> What spells, what charms, or invocations,
>
> May the thing called Familiar be purchased? (2.1.34-36)

Only twenty-five lines after her introduction to the play, Mother Sawyer actively seeks out her satanic conversion. The play adds this scene to Goodcole's narrative, signaling from the start that this version of Elizabeth Sawyer will not be a hapless victim coerced by the Devil. Instead, Sawyer specifically desires the aid of a diabolic familiar spirit. The narrative trajectory of this scene—Sawyer criticizing Edmonton for thinking she is a witch because of her bad tongue, Old Banks abusing her, her then cursing him and seeking out witchcraft for revenge—complicates the notion that the play is wholly sympathetic to Sawyer. The organization of the scene grants her an agency that Goodcole's pamphlet denies her. With that agency, she almost immediately illustrates for the audience the very accusation that she complained was unfounded. This addition to the source text aligns Mother Sawyer with the angry-woman-turned-witch trope, casting Sawyer into a more recognizable villainous archetype than Goodcole's pamphlet allowed. As witchcraft mythology proposed, Sawyer's anger at Old Banks overwhelms her reason and her

[84]All citations from *The Witch of Edmonton* come from William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, ed. Lucy Munro (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2017).

inherent godliness. Writing on how anger motivates women to turn witch, Roberts argued that "this sex, when it conceiveth wrath or hatred against any, is unplacable, possessed with unsatiable desire of revenge, and transported with appetite to right…the wrongs offered unto them."[85] Mother Sawyer seems the embodiment of Roberts's claim, amplifying the notion that women could not properly manage their anger and would be vulnerable to satanic temptation. In Nicol's reading of Sawyer's anger, he concludes this is part of the play's larger interest in emotional and social regulation, as "the play suggests that each character must resist giving in to their rage, which Sawyer cannot."[86]

However, I would contend that at no point in the play does Sawyer *want* to resist giving in to her rage. Quite the opposite: following another abusive encounter with Cuddy Banks, Mother Sawyer reiterates her desire for diabolic aid and revenge. She even declares that she is willing to apostatize herself to achieve it:

> Would some power, good or bad,
> Instruct me which way I might be revenged
> Upon this churl, I'd go out of myself,
> And give this fury leave to dwell within
> This ruined cottage ready to fall with age,
> Abjure all goodness, be at hate with prayer,
> And study curses, imprecations,
> Blasphemous speeches, oaths, detested oaths,

[85]Roberts, *A Treatise of Witchcraft*, 43.

[86]Nicol, "Interrogating the Devil," 441.

> Or anything that's ill: so I might work
>
> Revenge upon this miser. (2.1.106-15)

Sawyer's claim that she would "[a]bjure all goodness, be at hate with prayer," and make "detested oaths" situates her decision to pursue witchcraft as a satanic conversion. Sawyer is willing to give up her Christian identity in pursuit of revenge. By having Sawyer so explicitly articulate her desire to apostatize herself, the play represents turning witch as an irreligious, conversional act away from God. These added speeches by Sawyer's character more thoroughly ventriloquize the witch than Goodcole's reading of her confession at her execution. Going beyond mere printed testimony, the embodied nature of the theatre allows the audience to witness firsthand Sawyer's guilty actions and satanic desires, brought to life by a player dressed in costume and delivering her lines with emotion. The theatre thus enhances the depiction of witches as demonically vulnerable by proclaiming that Sawyer is a willful sinner, a woman who seeks her own satanic conversion. The revisions and additions made to the source text, the more expressive nature of the theatrical medium, and the presence of large audiences (including many illiterate playgoers) made the theatre into an amplifier and disseminator of ideas about the connection between women's occult natures and satanic conversion. Even though Sawyer asks for either a "good" or "bad" power to help her, it is Dog, a devil, who is drawn by the spiritual weakness evident in her cursing and desire for revenge.

In stark contrast to Goodcole's Sawyer, who claimed that she gave in to the Devil out of fear, the theatrical Sawyer makes an active choice to form a covenant with Dog. The scene starts nearly text-identical to Sawyer's confession: following her curses on Old Banks, Dog appears and says, "Ho! Have I found thee cursing? Now thou art mine own" (2.1.120). Dog even makes the exact same threat to Sawyer, claiming that if she refuses him, he will "tear thy body in a

thousand pieces" (2.1.136). But, unlike Goodcole's Sawyer, Mother Sawyer does not acknowledge his threat. In response, she only looks for confirmation of what this covenant will give to *her*: "But shall I / After such covenants sealed, see full revenge / On all that wrong me?" (2.1.137-9). When she momentarily wobbles in her dedication to Dog, he begins to repeat the threat, but Sawyer interrupts him with a pledge of her loyalty before he can finish:

DOG. Art mine or no? Speak, or I'll tear—

SAYWER. All thine.

DOG. Seal't with thy blood.

Sucks her arm, thunder and lightning. (2.1.144-45)

In the play, Sawyer is an active agent in her satanic conversion. The playwrights have notably revised where Dog sucks her blood—from the anus to the arm—very likely because this aspect of Goodcole's pamphlet was far too salacious to stage. However, the scene could have been set off-stage and relayed to the audience later through dialogue, a common technique used in the period to navigate scenes of sexual assault and sexual intercourse. The decision to make changes to the published testimony in order to ensure this scene could be staged suggests that the dramatists wanted no ambiguity surrounding Mother Sawyer's conversion or guilt. She is unequivocally and voluntarily a witch. The play subsequently reinforces for its audience that these are the steps to become one, bringing to life demonological theories of satanic ritual and diabolic blood pacts.

Additionally, the revised location of Dog's blood-sucking grants Sawyer more power in the scene. She is not helpless as Dog threatens and assaults her, but instead she interrupts his threats and offers him her arm. Removing the overt sexual nature of the blood-sucking redirects

this exchange from one of explicit transgressive sexuality (although a charged sexual element remains) to an exchange of power and ability—her nourishing blood for the power to shape her anger into revenge. The thunder and lightning that sound at the moment the compact is sealed endow the act with divine significance. Thunder and lightning, David Atkinson reminds us, were a "conventional dramatic method of signifying divine disapproval."[87] This blood-sharing nourishes Dog, a dark inversion and perversion of the Eucharist in which the body and blood of Christ nourishes the souls of his followers—here, his satanic followers must nourish Dog with their own bodies and blood. Through both the dialogue and the staging, *The Witch of Edmonton* reiterates that becoming a witch is an apostatic and conversional act as Sawyer participates in a demonic ritual that signals her participation in a religious—or in this case satanic—community. Dog even implies that this community is larger than just Sawyer and himself, telling Cuddy Banks that he has "more dames than one" (3.1.159-60), a tantalizing suggestion of a much greater satanic network.

This relationship between witchcraft and religious conversion is furthered through how Sawyer must summon Dog to perform *maleficia*. Before he leaves her, Dog gives Sawyer instructions for how to use him for her revenge:

> I'll tell thee: when thou wishest ill,
> Corn, man, or beast wouldst spoil or kill,
> Turn thy back against the sun,
> And mumble this short orison:
> "If thou to death or shame pursue 'em,
> *Sanctibicetur nomen tuum.*" (2.1.171-177)

[87]David Atkinson, "Moral Knowledge and the Double Action in the *Witch of Edmonton*," *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 25, no. 2 (1985): 419-439, 431.

The rhyming, quite a change from the unrhymed verse of the rest of the play, marks Tom's speech as something special, ritualistic, and magical. His line "Turn thy back against the sun" has playful double meaning in performance—in the published play-text, it is clear he means that she must physically turn herself toward the west when working *maleficia*, against the rising sun in the east. Yet, "turn thy back against the sun," when only spoken in performance, also tantalizingly suggests that, in working witchery, she must turn her back on Christ the son. This blending of physical turning with spiritual turning renders Sawyer's turn to witchcraft as a conversional act. The play further signals this religious change when Dog tells Sawyer she must "make Orisons to me, / And none but me" (2.1.170-71). Now, rather than praying to God, Sawyer must pray to the Devil. One of the summoning orisons that Dog provides, "*Sanctibicetur nomen tuum*," part of the paternoster meaning "hallowed be thy name," repurposes godly prayer for demonic purposes, another of the expected religious inversions attributed to witchcraft practice.[88] That the prayer is in Latin would have also prompted the audience to link this moment with Catholic tradition, another way in which the play aligns turning witch with other interfaith conversions.

Sawyer's inability to be redeemed, or perhaps her unwillingness to be saved, is placed in juxtaposition to the murderous Frank Thorney's repentance and gallows conversion. Frank's story was invented for the play, and it serves to emphasize how Sawyer's conversion threatens and corrupts the entire town, as Dog exacerbates Frank's worst qualities. Frank also provides an important way for the playwrights to signal the permanency of witchcraft in opposition to other capital crimes. Prior to his execution for the murder of his second wife Susan, Frank has the

[88]The use of the 'b' instead of the 'f' in "*Sanctibicetur*" has several possible explanations. It could be an inside joke within the play signaling that the Devil cannot truly speak godly words, or it might be that the printer was uncomfortable attributing part of the paternoster to the Devil.

chance to repent to his first wife Winifred, his father, and Susan's family. Old Thorney finds immediate "comfort in this penitence" and forgives his son (5.3.91). Susan's entire family and those Frank implicated in her murder also "forgive [him] with all [their] heart" (5.3.116). Winifred, who has been lied to and abused by Frank, goes even further, saying that his "repentance makes thee / As white as innocence" and notes that their sins are "cancelled"—she even hopes that they will find each other in heaven and enjoy an everlasting love (5.3.94-99). Frank goes to his grave, as he says, "in peace" (5.3.128). Sawyer, charged with murder just like Frank, has a different ending. When Dog abandons Sawyer to her fate, she does not surrender, but instead continues to curse Dog as she is carried off the stage to her trial. Even as she is led to execution, Sawyer still wants her revenge, as she tells the officers and gathered crowd: "Would I had one now whom I might command / To tear you all in pieces" (5.3.29-30). When she does finally say she "repent[s] all former evil" it is done reluctantly and bitterly, and her only purpose is to get the crowd to stop asking her to do so (5.3.50). Her final statement focuses on cursing the Devil rather than reclaiming Christ as her savior, as Goodcole's Sawyer does. She is angry to the last.

Despite the play's early insistence that Sawyer has a right to be angry, these concluding scenes suggest that it is impossible for the witch-figure to be forgiven and reincorporated into the community. Sawyer's unrepentant end makes clear that there are crimes that cannot be redeemed in Edmonton. In comparing Frank's joyous and communal execution scene with Sawyer's antagonistic and bitter one, we see that such crimes demand a vicious institutional response. Ultimately, *The Witch of Edmonton* reproduces rather than challenges cultural norms about the danger of women's satanic conversions. Yet through Sawyer's dramatic characterization and dynamic agency, the medium of the stage is also uniquely able to reveal a human dimension

behind this kind of sensational conversion, raising questions about the motivations, impulses, and desires of women. Her villainy and humanity uncomfortably coexist. In inviting the audience to better understand Sawyer, in making her a "real" person that must be confronted, the play is able to complexly evoke sympathy even as it further vilifies her, taking the larger-than-life trope of the satanic witch and rendering her profoundly human.

Taking Over the Town in *The Late Lancashire Witches*

On 10 February 1634, 10-year-old Edmund Robinson went before two justices of the peace at Padiham in Lancashire and accused twenty of his neighbors, the majority of whom were local wives, of witchcraft. Edmund claimed that while out gathering wild plums, he witnessed two greyhounds transform into Mr. Dickenson's wife and an unknown little boy. Edmund recounted how, when he refused Mrs. Dickenson's attempts to bribe him into silence, she transformed the unknown child into a horse, kidnapping Edmund and absconding with him to a witches' sabbath complete with a magical banquet. Edmund's testimony sparked a witch panic that escalated until around sixty people were under suspicion.[89] Adding to the frenzy, on 9 March 1634, Margaret Johnson came forward, despite not being named by Edmund, and confessed that *she* was one of the witches of Lancashire. Johnson gave details of another witches' sabbath that she had attended with around forty others, who plotted murder and intermingled with demons and a grand devil.

[89]See Helen Ostovich, "*The Late Lancashire Witches:* Critical Introduction," *Richard Brome Online*, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2010. Richard Brome Online (dhi.ac.uk), 9.

The case fascinated the public on all levels of society—Charles I sent the Bishop of Chester to reexamine the women and bring "the most notorious offenders" to London to "attend his Majesty's further pleasure."[90] The witches even gained international recognition, as Sir William Brereton reports in his travel journal that the Queen of Bohemia, the daughter of James I, "put me upon a discourse of the discovery of our Lancashire witches."[91] Yet all of this excitement proved to be generated by false claims. Edmund Robinson's testimony, he admitted later that July under increased pressure from London authorities, was fabricated, and influenced by popular myths about witches, local gossip about some of the women, a squabble between his family and the Dickensons, and the infamous Pendle trial of 1612 that continued to haunt Lancashire. The exact motivations behind Johnson's voluntary confession are more difficult to parse, but her story also resonates with the cultural mythology of witchcraft created on the pages of both learned witch hunter treatises and popular confession pamphlets, broadsides, and ballads alike.

The Late Lancashire Witches, then, which reproduces sometimes verbatim the events from both Edmund's deposition and Johnson's confession, can be read as a comic ode to popular witchcraft belief. Heywood and Brome wrote the piece sometime over the summer of 1634, staging it in August while the witches were awaiting trial in London. The play was a huge commercial success, running for three consecutive days and bringing in large crowds of "fine folk, gentlemen and gentlewomen," surprising given that many would have left London for the

---

[90]Mildred Tonge, "The Lancashire Witches: 1612 and 1634," *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* 83 (1932): 153-177, esp. 161.

[91]Sir William Brereton, *Travels in Holland, the United Provinces, England, Scotland, and Ireland, 1634-1635* (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1844), 33-34.

summer.[92] The play features inverted social hierarchies, human-animal transformation, demonic familiars performing mischief, allusions to devil sex and pacts, magically-induced erectile dysfunction, witches' sabbaths, and, perhaps most crucially, the basic underlying premise of an underground network of women conspiring against the town—a "satanical sisterhood" (4.1.34), as the Generous's groom Robert terms it. The comedy follows three young men, Arthur, Bantam, and Shakestone, and the respected Mr. Generous, who are skeptical about the existence of witches. Over the course of the play, the men discover that five witches—Mistress Generous, Moll Spencer, Gillian Dickinson, Mawd Hargreave, and Meg Johnson—are behind the strange occurrences in the town, leading to the arrest of the women in the play's final scenes. Most of the play's runtime is spent showcasing the witches' different antics and the chaos that they cause. *The Late Lancashire Witches* strongly reinforces the idea of witchcraft as a woman's crime—despite several men being named in Edmund Robinson's initial testimony, Brome and Heywood revised the story to present only female witches, going so far as to align the conflict between the play's amateur witch hunters and witches as a battle between the town's men and women, and, in the case of Master and Mistress Generous, between husbands and wives.

Most scholarship on *The Late Lancashire Witches* reads the play's witchcraft as a form of sexual and social inversion, a depiction of carnivalesque misrule associated with popular festive traditions.[93] Such interpretations, in keeping with Nathaniel Tomkyn's original review that the

---

[92]Gabriel Egan, ed. *The Witches of Lancashire* (London: Globe Quartos, 2002), 163-64. The text is traditionally known as *The Late Lancashire Witches*, and I refer to it as such throughout this dissertation. All citations are from this edition are refer to act, scene, and line number.

[93]See Heather Hirschfield, "Collaborating Across Generations: Thomas Heywood, Richard Brome, and the production of *The Late Lancashire Witches*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30, no. 2 (2000): 339-74; Alison Findlay, "Sexual and spiritual politics in the events of 1633–34 and *The Late Lancashire Witches*," in *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, ed. Robert Poole (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 146-163; Charlotte A. Coffin, "Theatre and/as Witchcraft: A Reading of *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634)," *Early Theatre* 16, no. 2 (2013): 91-119; Brett D.

play lacks "any poetical genius" and instead focuses on "ribaldry…to provoke laughter," often suggest that the play burlesques witchcraft, primarily because the witches' pranks remain fairly innocuous.[94] Meg Pearson, for example, claims that the play's witches are "domestic and non-threatening," asserting that the women are characterized as harmless "girls next door" and witchcraft is represented as "decidedly quotidian."[95] In contrast to the scholarly tendency to claim that the play approaches witchcraft skeptically or parodically, I propose that *The Late Lancashire Witches* actually bolsters popular witchcraft mythology, including the relationship between witchcraft and religious conversion. Approaching the play through the lens of religious conversion reminds us that because of their diabolic associations and power to convert others, witches were always implicitly threatening. The Lancashire witches are all the more so because of their status as "the girls next door." Pearson notes that "the women who are identified as witches are also villagers" with "identities within the town and among their female friends" that make them a part of the Lancashire community.[96] While for Pearson this renders the witches more mundane and less frightening, I would argue that it also invites audiences to consider that, given the pervasive and undetectable nature of witchcraft, any of their female neighbors could secretly be a witch.

Hirsch, "Hornpipes and Disordered Dancing in *The Late Lancashire Witches*: A Reel Crux?," *Early Theatre* 16, no. 1 (2013): 139-49; Eleanor Rycroft, "Voicing Women, 'Community' Drama, and *The Late Lancashire Witches*," *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 3, no. 1 (2014): 168–89.

[94]Egan, "Appendix 1," 163-64.

[95]Meg Pearson, "*The Late Lancashire Witches*: The Girls Next Door," *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 3, no. 1 (2014): 147–67, esp. 147, 152.

[96]Pearson, "The Girls Next Door," 162.

While the play's humor is largely generated through the witches' antics, this comic approach does not negate the anxiety produced by witch panic. As is true across early modern drama, comedies incorporate a wide range of topical social issues. In *The Late Lancashire Witches*, the Generous subplot, a fictional addition by the playwrights, brings forward an element of seriousness that reminds audiences that witchcraft is a conversional crisis with dire consequences for all those within the witch's domestic network. In this sense, the witches of Lancashire are manifestations of the hetero-patriarchy's worst fears: satanic and sexually deviant women, outwardly indistinguishable from good Christian women. The witches are wives and young lovers—no elderly crone-figures like Mother Sawyer here—who secretly plot to overturn the established and entrenched order of the town. The women are so of the same mind and so in sync that they even finish each other's rhymes; they are a unified coven, a "sisterhood" (4.5.95), in all ways. As no pamphlets or trial documents were published on this case, *The Late Lancashire Witches* was one of the only means of disseminating its details to the wider public. In so strongly relying upon popular tropes and so unambiguously illustrating the women's repeated guilt, the play had great shaping power on how its audience understood this current event.[97]

The play indulges in many popular witchcraft tropes. Moll's witchery, for example, is bound to her sexuality. In one added subplot, Moll disrupts the wedding of her former sweetheart, Lawrence. Her actions recall the *Malleus*'s claim that young women will turn to the Devil after they have been sexually rejected by their lovers. It seems likely that Heywood was familiar with some aspects of the *Malleus Maleficarum* and Bodin; he references the *Malleus* by

[97]See Herbert Berry, "The Globe Bewitched and 'El Hombre Fiel,'" *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 1 (1984): 211-230, for one potential theory about the play's role as propaganda for the prosecution.

title in his *Gynaikeion* (1624) and repurposes an anecdote from the text.[98] And, following the trajectory of the treatise, Moll does take sexual revenge against Lawrence. At Lawrence and Parnell's wedding, Moll gifts him a charmed point that he attaches to his codpiece, rendering him impotent. His impotence causes major conflict between him and his new wife, as Parnell publicly insults his masculinity, beats him, and asks for a divorce.

In the final scene of the play, another of the young witches, Meg, reveals that she has enjoyed a regular sexual relationship with the Devil for the past six years. "Twice a week he never fail'd [her]" (5.5.220), Meg tells the authorities. When questioned about her sexual pleasure, she responds that the Devil "Pleas'd her well, sir, like a proper man" (5.5.224). These remarks build upon Margaret Johnson's confession, in which she volunteers that the Devil, who she called "her god," "did by her consent defile her body by committing wicked uncleanness together."[99] The playwrights' decision to add this dialogue and to emphasize the pleasure that Meg receives from this arrangement—a detail not included by Johnson—serves to remind the audience of the witches' active participation in their own damnation. In exaggerating the sensational sexual details of the case, the play likely titillated audiences perversely fascinated with the luridness of witchcraft. Yet in doing so, the play also further situates witchcraft as a gendered spiritual crime by playing into the belief in women's inherent carnality. Indeed, all the various witchy antics of the play correspond to theories about women witches from pamphlets and demonological literature alike that emphasize their moral corruption.

---

[98]Brett D. Hirsch, "Thomas Heywood and the Werewolves: Sources for the *Witches of Lancashire*," *Notes and Queries* 53, no. 4 (2006): 531–33.

[99]Margaret Johnson's confession is reprinted in Ostovich, "Critical Introduction," 10, taken from British Library Additional MSS 36674, f. 196.

However, the sisterhood's witchy deceit, while played for laughs for much of the play, becomes a terrifying and emotional example of spousal betrayal in the subplot following Mistress Generous, the wife of the most upstanding man in town. The play traces Mr. Generous's horrified revelation that witches are, in fact, real, and that his wife is the leader of the local coven. Mr. Generous confronts his wife after he sees her transform from a horse back to a woman. Generous asks his wife, "Prithee, woman, / Art thou a witch?" (4.2.143-44). She replies, "It cannot be denied, / I am such a curs'd creature" (4.2.144-45). He then reflects that despite his own careful attempts to be "of [his] soul so chary" (4.2.148) and to "renounce all / The works of that black fiend" (4.2.149-50), his wife has violated her role as his spiritual helpmate. She has been, he calls her, "a serpent twin'd" about him (4.2.151) and the "devil in [his] bosom" (4.2.153), allusions that situate Mistress Generous as a kind of Eve-figure. Generous interprets his wife's witchery within this gendered understanding of women's spirituality. He situates himself as the innocent Adam—Generous's own hard-won spiritual health is jeopardized by his wife's satanic turn. The play evokes the fear that wives might be secretly satanic, abusing their social roles by bringing the Devil into the marriage bed, fooling their husbands for years while contaminating their souls.

This scene also explicitly confirms that Mistress Generous and the other witches have engaged in diabolic pact witchcraft. In his interrogation of his wife, Generous asks

> GENEROUS. Hast thou made any contract with that fiend,
>
> The enemy of mankind?
>
> MRS. GEN. Oh, I have.
>
> GENEROUS. What, and how far?
>
> MRS. GEN. I have promis'd him my soul. (4.2.163-165).

This affirmation that Mistress Generous—and thus the other women—have made compacts with the Devil would have conjured for an audience many of the associations I detailed in the first section of this chapter. A compact with the Devil, left vague, tantalizingly hints toward Mistress Generous's sexual licentiousness (particularly after she has just been ridden as a horse by Robert) and insinuates that she has contaminated her community and husband, converted and recruited other women, and continues to suffer from internal weakness. Generous himself realizes her confession makes her a "lost woman" (4.2.178).

In response to his strong emotional reaction to her damnation, Mistress Generous states that she still has hope for her soul, and Generous demands she "[m]ake it appear to [him]" (4.2.181), desiring to see her "penitent tears" (4.2.183). Mistress Generous obliges, asking forgiveness from heaven and from her husband—both of whom she has betrayed:

> Sir, I am sorry. When I look toward heaven
> I beg a gracious pardon; when on you,
> Methinks your native goodness should not be
> Less pitiful than they. 'Gainst both I have errr'd;
> From both I beg atonement.
> […]
> I kneel to both your mercies. [*She kneels, crying*] (4.2.187-92)

The scene is framed as Mistress Generous's repentant spiritual conversion back to God—her tears are meant to metaphorically wash away her sins. When her husband questions if they are the "tears…full of true-hearted penitence" (4.2.195-96), she affirms that they are. Her tears convince Generous of the validity of her conversion, as he first rebukes her that she "hadst need to weep thyself / Into a fountain" (4.2.212-13) as "such a penitent spring…may have power to

quench invisible flames" (4.2.213-14). In response to her convincing repentance, Generous exclaims that "all is forgiven, forgot" (4.2.216). He reinscribes her back into the Christian community—while she had "extermin'd herself" (4.2.217) in her compact with Satan, he offers her forgiveness and accepts her back as "wife, sister, daughter" (4.2.221), thus reinstating himself as her head and master, visually symbolized by her kneeling to him. Her return to Christianity is elided with the reinstatement of patriarchal order in their relationship.

The audience quickly learns, however, that Mistress Generous's spiritual conversion was fake, only a performance to avoid the consequences of her witchery. When Moll hears about the mishap with the bridle, she asks her witch-sister, **"**How pacified was your good man?" (4.4.24). Mistress Generous responds

> Some passionate words mix'd with forc'd tears
> Did so enchant his eyes and ears,
> I made my peace, with promise never
> To do the like. But once and ever
> A witch, thou knowst. (4.4.25-29)

Heywood and Brome's decision to have Mistress Generous fake her conversion back to God—and to suggest that her faking was itself a bewitchment—corresponds to the early modern belief that witchcraft was the vilest sin, a permanent and communicable form of spiritual perversion in which reconversion and rehabilitation were widely considered impossible. Being a witch, Mistress Generous tells us, is forever. Her fake conversion scene even seems drawn from the pages of *Daemonologie*. Writing on why one should be skeptical of witches who claim to repent, James argues:

> their eyes are able to shed teares (thretten and torture them as ye please) while first they repent (God not permitting them to dissemble their obstinacie in so horrible a crime) albeit the women kinde especially, be able other-waies to shed teares at every light occasion when they will, yea, although it were dissemblingly like the *Crocodiles.*[100]

Mistress Generous produces exactly these crocodile tears for her husband. The shock-value of her revelation to Moll also plays into a broader cultural anxiety about faked and performed conversions, as the internal—and therefore invisible—nature of spiritual conversion meant that it could be impossible to discern or authenticate that an individual had truly converted. When Mr. Generous learns his wife has lied (after a chaotic denouement involving her severed hand), he turns her in to the authorities, vowing that "being of these apostates rid so well, / I'll see my house no more be made a hell" (5.4.71-72). His use of "apostates" to describes the witches reinforces how the play presents witchcraft as a spiritual crime, a satanic conversion away from Christianity.

The play concludes with an epilogue in which the speaker reminds the audience that the real witches are still awaiting trial, inviting the audience to speculate on their guilt and possible executions.[101] In linking the action of the play, much of which was fiction, with the ongoing case, the playwrights lend an air of authority and authenticity to their portrayal. As Epilogue tells the audience, "We represent as much / As they have done before law's hand did touch / Upon

---

[100]James, *Daemonologie*, 81.

[101]The real 1634 Lancashire witches met with a rather anticlimactic end. There was no public execution like there had been for Elizabeth Sawyer. The women were exonerated in London, but they were then returned to the jail at Lancaster Castle in December 1634, where they were still imprisoned as of 1637. In 1642, Henry Burton claimed he was imprisoned in the room above the women. This is our last surviving record of these women, and it is unclear how long they remained jailed despite their exoneration. See Ostovich, "Critical Introduction," 31.

their guilt" (Epilogue, 7-9), signaling that the play should be understood as an accurate representation of real events. The additions and revisions made to the story, from Moll's sexual revenge against Lawrence, to Meg's satanic orgasms, to Mistress Generous's betrayal of her husband, all serve to bring the story in line with fears about satanic conversion.

Both *The Witch of Edmonton* and *The Late Lancashire Witches* provide powerful case studies for understanding witchcraft as part of a larger, complicated tapestry and expression of women's conversions within the popular imagination of the early modern period. Each of the plays understands witchcraft as a spiritual crime and brings to life for its audience demonological and popular fears about how women can introduce the Devil into domestic and community spaces. Ultimately, both plays end with men discovering these witchy crimes and excising the contaminated and harmful women from the community. However, not all drama of the period was so pessimistic about women's occult powers. In my next chapter, I turn to several London city comedies to demonstrate how early modern drama could provide a far more generous vision of the redemptive potential for women's occult conversional powers. While Mistress Generous encapsulates the spiritual dangers of a bad wife, city comedy could explore the benefits of a good one, as the godly, faithful wife-character possessed the power to turn her reprobate husband back to God.

CHAPTER TWO

Turn Back O Man: Converting the Prodigal Husband in City Comedy

"For what is a Wife, but a Woman given to Man to be an Helpe and a Comfort to him?"
—Thomas Gataker, *A Good Wife God's Gift* (1623)[1]

"Women are woe to men; No, they're the way, / To bring them homeward when they run astray."
—Richard Braithwaite, *The English Gentlewoman* (1631)[2]

Thomas Gataker's marriage sermon and Richard Braithwaite's conduct manual together bring forward a significant gendered component of early modern conversion: that wives could bring about positive spiritual transformations in their husbands. "A good wife," Gataker claims, is "God's gift" to man, created as a physical and spiritual helpmate for her husband.[3] For Braithwaite, a wife is a divine means to turn men "homeward" when they misbehave—"homeward" simultaneously signifying a return back to the domestic space of the home and family life, the holy space of the church, and a spiritual turn within a man's personal, intimate relationship with God.[4] As Chapter One explored, a wife's perceived spiritual influence over her husband originated in her own apparent closeness to divine and diabolic occult forces. We might recall that in Alexander Roberts's *A Treatise on Witchcraft*, for example, Roberts summarized that "[women's] complection is softer, and from hence more easily receive the impressions offered by the Divell; as when they be instructed and governed by good Angels, they prove

---

[1]Thomas Gataker, *A Good Wife Gods Gift and, a Wife Indeed. Two Mariage Sermons* (London, 1623), 6.

[2]Richard Braithwaite, *The English Gentlewoman, Drawne Out to the Full Body Expressing, what Habilliments Doe Best Attire Her, what Ornaments Doe Best Adorne Her, what Complements Doe Best Accomplish Her. by Richard Brathvvait Esq* (London, 1631), 30.

[3]Gataker, *A Good Wife*, "To the Worshipfull My Loving Cosens."

[4]Braithwaite, *The English Gentlewoman*, 30.

exceeding religious, and extraordinarily devout."[5] Women consciously and subconsciously spread those influences and "impressions" throughout their domestic and social networks, especially to their husbands, children, and female friends. While Chapter One focused on the first half of Robert's claim in its study of the interwoven mythologies of witchcraft belief, diabolism, and religious conversion in witchcraft drama, this chapter explores the other side of that binary: women characters who prove "exceeding religious" and "extraordinarily devout," engendering positive spiritual conversions in their husbands.

In particular, this chapter turns its attention to the conversional power accorded to faithful wife figures in city comedy. City comedy and religious conversion may seem strange bedfellows. The satiric lens of comedy, a genre defined by its interests in "sex and money" that explores some of the most corrupt facets of English society,[6] is perhaps initially difficult to reconcile with the rather sentimental and earnest journey of spiritual transformation at the heart of most conversion stories. However, city comedies frequently rely upon the grammar and structure of religious conversion narratives to bring about their generically standard fifth act reconciliation scenes—immoral behavior is confronted and seemingly reformed, the prodigal spendthrift returns home, the bad husband learns his lesson, albeit often with an ironic twist. This restoration of community harmony is made possible in city comedy through a corrupted character's outward moral transformation, even if the authenticity or longevity of that conversion might appear doubtful or dubious. To take seriously city comedy's engagement with the topic of religious conversion, however, requires that we rethink some of our basic assumptions about the

---

[5]Roberts, *A Treatise on Witchcraft,* 42-43.

[6]Angela Stock and Anne-Julia Zwierlein, "Introduction: 'Our Scene is London…'" in *Plotting Early Modern London: New Essays on Jacobean City Comedy*, eds. Dieter Mehl, et. al (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 1-24, esp. 3.

genre. In Paul Yachnin's essay on conversion and economy in Thomas Middleton's famous city comedy *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1613), Yachnin teases out the "remarkable tonal and thematic complexity or even contradictoriness of the play."[7] The play can be a "scandalously funny and savage as a satire of London social climbing and social falling," Yachnin claims, while still being "seriously invested in the possibilities of individual and collective conversion toward a good and worthy life."[8] In other words, given the early modern theatre's tremendous possibilities for characterization through the acting choices of players, satire and earnestness can coexist in city comedy without canceling each other out. This chapter takes up a similar kind of dialectical thinking about city comedy, a mode of approach that sees these plays as complexly engaging with the idea of spiritual conversion, instead of superficially employing conversion scenes to quickly wrap up the plot. Rather than writing off these fifth act conversion scenes off as out-of-place and disingenuous, I consider them as integral to the complexities of the genre. To do so, I bring together two plays, the anonymous *The London Prodigal* (1604) and John Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize; or The Tamer Tamed* (ca. 1609-1611). Neither play is a canonical example of city comedy like the iconic works of Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton, or John Marston. However, these plays have the potential to not only invite reconsideration of canonical city comedies and their depictions of women and conversion, but also demonstrate how bringing in plays that push against the strict generic boundaries that have come to define city comedy can disrupt long-held beliefs about the genre.

---

[7]Paul Yachnin, "Conversional Economies: Thomas Middleton's *Chaste Maid in Cheapside*," in *Performing Conversion: Cities, Theatre and Transformations*, eds. José R. Jouve Martín and Stephen Wittek (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 154-171, esp. 155.

[8]Yachnin, "Conversional Economies," 155.

Increasingly in the 1590s and the early seventeenth century, a particular vein of city comedy emerged which centers on the relationship between husbands, wives, and the transactional economy of marriage. For Theodore Leinwand, this became one of the trademark features of the genre—city comedies centered on the entangled relationships of "gallants, citizens, and women," using satire to make explicit the often-hidden hypocrisies in "opinions, advice, [and] admonitions…concerning merchants, the gentry, and women."[9] The final conversion moments in this type of city comedy are inspired by the prodigal protagonist's ever-faithful wife. Viviana Comensoli points out that this exact premise is repeated in five city comedies between 1600-1608 alone: *How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad* (1602), *The Fair Maid of Bristow* (1605), *The London Prodigal*, and *The Honest Whore*, Parts 1 and 2 (1604; 1605).[10] But where Comensoli locates the "superstructure" for this trend in domestic tragedy, I suggest that this narrative arc plays with the tropes of the religious conversion narrative.[11] These depictions of conversion, I argue, are derived from and dependent upon a deeply rooted cultural belief in the inherent spirituality of marriage and women's power to convert men. Like in Yachnin's reading of *Chaste Maid*, the "transactional domain of human living" gives way to the "transformational" potential of marriage.[12] In this subset of city comedy, the prodigal son becomes the prodigal husband,[13] and his waywardness extends to his ill

---

[9]Theodore B. Leinwand, "'This gulph of marriage': Jacobean City Vives and Jacobean City Comedy," *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 10, no. 3 (1984): 245-260, esp. 245.

[10]Viviana Comensoli, *"Household Business": Domestic Plays of Early Modern England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 132.

[11]Comensoli, 132.

[12]Yachnin, "Conversional Economies," 156.

[13]My use of the term "prodigal husband" is indebted to Jennifer Panek's essay on the anxieties and social pressures facing newlywed men in early modern England. See Jennifer Panek, "Community, Credit, and the Prodigal Husband on the Early Modern Stage," *ELH* 80, no. 1 (2013): 61-92.

treatment of his wife and his refusal to respect or participate in the expected rituals of marriage. In the fifth act, the prodigal husband undergoes a seemingly miraculous transformation at the hands of his ever-faithful wife that corrects both his behavior and attitude toward matrimony, a playful wink toward the audience that provides a far different vision of the feminine occult than a witchcraft comedy like *The Late Lancashire Witches*. To borrow again from Yachnin, the plays taken up in this chapter are "invested in the possibilities" of how a man could become a "good and worthy" husband.

The first section of this chapter establishes the main arguments regarding women's sacrality and wifely power in early modern culture, and I bring together an archive of conduct manuals, sermons, and defenses of women to reveal how women's virtue was imagined to be divinely supernatural, granting women immense powers of spiritual persuasion. The subsequent sections then demonstrate how this belief in the redemptive potential of female sacrality was subsumed into the conversional plotlines of several city comedies. I begin with *The London Prodigal*, a city comedy that loosely employs the parable of the prodigal son in its reprobate protagonist, Matthew Flowerdale, a young gentleman who encapsulates many of the vices of London. I show how the play uses Luce's ideal womanly and wifely qualities to generate and justify Matthew's spontaneous fifth act conversion. In doing so, I recover how Luce, a character who has been largely ignored by scholars of the play due to her supposedly conventional patience and passivity, is in fact integral to its structure and thematic work.[14] While Dieter Mehl asserts that "[a]part from the girl's name, there is nothing in the text to prepare us for her

[14]To date, Luce's character has not inspired much scholarly ink. See Comensoli, "*Household Business*," 132-34; Marianne Montgomery, "Wife, Whore, and/or Dutchwoman: Shifting Female Roles in *The London Prodigal*," *Early Modern Literary Studies* 27 (2017): 1-11; Ezra Horbury, *Prodigality in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2019), 136.

heavenly mission" to convert her husband,[15] contextualizing the play within the ongoing debate about women and conversion reveals that Luce's actions are neither surprising nor improbable by early modern standards. Instead, Luce's role within *The London Prodigal* provides crucial insight into how city comedy was topically engaged with and poetically indebted to discourses about the feminine occult and its spiritual influence.

I then turn toward Fletcher's reverse-taming narrative *The Woman's Prize; or The Tamer Tamed* (ca. 1609-1611). The play, a satirical response to Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (ca. 1590-1594), transfers the action to London to follow Petruchio's second wife, Maria, a seemingly docile woman with a mission: to "wrought a miracle" (1.2.69) in Petruchio, converting him from a "monster" into a "man" (1.2.104).[16] A sister-comedy to Ben Jonson's *Epicene* (1609), performed around the same time, the play turns the "taming" trope on its head. In doing so, *The Tamer Tamed* draws upon the language of religious conversion, as Maria, a fiery but faithful wife, uses a combination of erotic, emotional, and physical persuasions to break down and recreate Petruchio into a better husband and equal partner. A gender-oriented reading of the conversional dynamics of *The Tamer Tamed* provides a new avenue for making sense of how the play's famously feminist impulses still operate within the domain of Christian patriarchal values. Additionally, the play reveals how the internal logic of early modern comedy inextricably linked a character's morality and spiritual health to their attitude toward love and

---

[15]Dieter Mehl, "*The London Prodigal* as Jacobean City Comedy," in *Plotting Early Modern London: New Essays on Jacobean City Comedy*, eds. Mehl, et. al (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 165-76, esp. 171.

[16]For essays which contextualize *The Tamer Tamed* within the city comedy tradition, see Leinwand, "'This gulph of marriage'," 245-50, and *The City Staged: Jacobean Comedy, 1603-1613* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); Robyn Bolam, "Rewriting City Comedy through Time and Cultures: *The Taming of the Shrew* – Padua to London to Padua U.S.," in *Plotting Early Modern London: New Essays on Jacobean City Comedy*, eds. Dieter Mehl, et. al (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 195-207.

marriage. The way a man treats his wife provides the audience with an outward signifier of the state of his soul.

In fashioning strong parallels between being a good husband and being a good Christian, both *The London Prodigal* and *The Tamer Tamed* draw upon and contribute to the intertwined relationship between marriage and godliness in Christian theology. "A familie," William Gouge writes in his manual *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622), "is a little Church," and serves as a microcosm and mirror of one's relationship to God.[17] Ste. B's *Counsel to the Husband: To the Wife Instruction* (1608) similarly argues that the ideal partnership between man and wife is a "a lively paterne of more heavenly things," that reflects the "Image of Gods love, and…our eternall and most happie conjunction with Christ."[18] Created and solemnized by God, earthly marriage signifies "the sacred, spirituall, reall, and inviolable union betwixt Christ and his Church."[19] Theologians frequently employed allegories of marriage to describe the relationship between God and his congregation—"[Christ is] the husband, and we the wife"[20]—but these allegories also reflexively and firmly associated the state of one's marriage with the spiritual health of both the husband and the wife. A poor marriage or a reluctance to marry suggested a poor relationship with God.[21] In contrast, a "united" and "equal" marriage brought the believer closer to God. This closeness to God found through heterosexual love and marriage occurred not only because it

[17]William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties Eight Treatises* […] (London, 1622), 18.

[18]Ste. B., *Counsel to the Husband: To the Wife Instruction* […] (London, 1608), 2-4.

[19]Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, 211.

[20]Ste. B., *Counsel to the Husband*, 4.

[21]Gataker, for instance, suggests that men who want a wife must first "reconcile thy selfe…unto God." See, *A Good Wife*, 65.

provided a living example of the similar spousal relationship between the believer and Christ,[22] but because marriage and procreation were essential for the propagation of Christianity and the development of the English, Christian nation-state. Gouge describes marriage as not only a religious covenant but "a kind of publike action" where "the well or ill ordering therof much tendeth to the good or hurt of family, Church, and common-wealth," because "by mariage families are erected, and Church and common-wealth increased and continued."[23]

The domestic bliss found in a heteronormative union was thus the triumph of Christian patriarchy and nation-building. The faithful wife in particular—defended across prose writing and venerated on the early modern stage—was granted a central role in advancing England's larger conversional mission within the domestic space of the home, ensuring the spiritual wellbeing of both spouse and children. Through my reclamation of the significance of stage-wives, then, I also seek to emphasize the importance of the wife-figure to English conversion narratives and Christian nation and empire-building writ large.[24] In early modern drama, romance plotlines centered on reforming one's husband or lover were deeply bound to the idea of spiritual conversion—Christianity demanded happy Christian couples, and, again and again, the public playhouse provided them, showing how Christian women had the innate power to domesticate and civilize even the most chauvinistic of men, returning them, as Braithwaite claims, "homeward."[25]

---

[22]Ste. B., 4; Gouge, 211.

[23]Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, 204.

[24]For more on the relationship between marriage and English imperialism and colonialism, see Britton, *Becoming Christian*, 142-171.

[25]Braithwaite, *The English Gentlewoman*, 30.

This faithful city wife, a character type that is often overshadowed by the more outspoken and ostentatious bawds, courtesans, and adulterous wives of city comedy, is most often contextualized by scholars as an iteration of the "Patient Griselda" archetype.[26] Disseminated in England first through Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale," the tale of the "Patient Griselda," Pamela Allen Brown reminds us, was repurposed into over "sixteen plays, ballads, and pamphlets" during the early modern period, including the popular chapbook translation, *The Antient, True, and Admirable History of Patient Grisel* (1619).[27] In most iterations of the story, Griselda's husband tests her loyalty and obedience by forcing her to turn over her children to be slaughtered, publicly humiliating her, stripping her naked before his entire court, pretending to annul their marriage, and forcing her to return to court to serve his new wife. Each time, Griselda humbly submits. These trials are all fictions—her children have grown up with their aunt, and her husband's new wife is really her daughter in disguise, leading to a triumphant and joyous reunion scene in which Griselda is finally rewarded for her submissiveness and obedience by being restored to her rightful place at her husband's side. The chapbook in particular romanticizes decades of quiet suffering and patience, and Griselda is canonized as the "wonder of women, and Champion of true vertue."[28] In Griselda, we most clearly see Suzanne Hull's immensely

[26]See, for example, Comensoli, *"Household Business,"* 132.

[27]Pamela Allen Brown, *Better a Shrew than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 181-184. The story seems to originate in Bocaccio's *Decameron*, and is then subsequently adapted by Petrarch in *Historia Griseldis*, on which Chaucer bases "The Clerk's Tale."

[28]Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Antient, True, and Admirable History of Patient Griselda* (London, 1619), chp. 10.

influential paradigm for understanding the prescribed ideal female behaviors in the early modern period: the trinity of chastity, silence, and obedience.[29]

Such a totalizing view of the desired behavior for women, however, has limited feminist critical interest in those women and female characters who now seem little more than puppets or mouthpieces for Christian patriarchal ideology. As Patricia Crawford notes, in the pantheon of early modern dramatic women, the "godly woman" has been considered "unexciting" to study in comparison to her more vivacious and rebellious theatrical counterparts.[30] Designating any faithful city wife we come across as a "Patient Griselda" has in effect stifled any sustained scholarly inquiry into the theatrical purpose of these characters or their cultural significance. Yet, as scholars such as Crawford and Jessica Murphy have suggested, early modern concepts of ideal womanhood were far more complicated than Hull's thesis allows, and "Patient Griselda," a character marked by her quiet passivity, does not seem the most accurate moniker for this cluster of wife-characters who take it upon themselves to challenge and correct their husbands. And, indeed, most writing about women posed necessary boundaries for female obedience and silence, especially when a husband's behavior jeopardized the spiritual health of the family unit. "If the husband were an unbeliever, or of a different faith," Crawford summarizes, "whom was the wife to obey?"[31] For Gouge and others, the answer seemed clear: "*If an husband require his wife to doe that which God hath forbidden she ought not to doe it.*"[32]

---

[29]Suzanne Hull, *Chaste, Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982).

[30]Crawford, *Women and Religion in England, 1500-1720*, 4.

[31]Crawford, 52.

[32]Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, 328.

Female rebellion was thus not only sanctioned but desirable when it was performed in service of taming one's husband, returning him to family values, economic and sexual restraint, and, in due course, the spread of Christianity through reproduction.[33] City comedies like *The London Prodigal* and *The Tamer Tamed* brought to life this conundrum about female obedience, and, across the play's five acts, staged scenarios in which women tamed their husbands for the better without permanently threatening patriarchal structures. Reducing wife-characters in city comedy to "Patient Griseldas" flattens the dynamic agency these wife-characters possess when they recognize the poor behavior they are subjected to and take action to foster their profligate husband's reformations. It also denies the important religious power and influence women were believed to hold within early modern culture. In bringing together *The London Prodigal* and *The Tamer Tamed*, I strive to show how godly Luce and rebellious Maria are far more similar than modern feminist critique has allowed. I demonstrate how both these women characters have much to offer us with regards to thinking about gendered patterns of conversion. This chapter therefore reshapes our understanding of the faithful city wife archetype by reading her through a new, much more active context: the wife's power and responsibility to convert her husband.

"Is women not a miracle?": Supernatural Virtue and the Power of the Wife

In response to the sweeping array of anti-woman writing produced during the period, defenses of women sought to instead argue that women were sacred, innately closer to God than men. Theories explaining this sacrality returned to Genesis for evidence, arguing that the means of Eve's creation were proof that women were not inferior to men but superior, more divine

[33]As Holly Crocker writes, when "masculine governance is decayed, feminine rule is allowed, albeit temporarily;" see Holly Crocker, "The Tamer as Shrewd in John Fletcher's the *Woman's Prize: Or, the Tamer Tam'd*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 51, no. 2 (2011): 409-426, esp. 420.

because of the very materials that made the first woman. While the poet Aemilia Lanyer famously defended Eve in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611), the pamphleteer Jane Anger and tract writer Barnabe Rich insisted that women were inherently better than men because they were made from Adam's rib—Adam was fashioned from clay and dust, but Eve was created from man himself. Anger writes that, "GOD making woman of mans fleshe, that she might bee purer then he, doth evidently showe, how far we women are more excellent then men," while Rich notes that women are "*the purified mettall of man*."[34] Purified of man's lowly earthiness, women exist in a stratum closer to God and are thus more virtuous and capable of performing God's will. This sense of female sacrality and superiority also extended into symbolic readings of women's creation. While the infamous misogynist Joseph Swetnam claimed Eve's creation from Adam's rib allegorized women's "froward nature"—"a ribbe is a crooked thing" and therefore "women are crooked by nature" [35]—Ester Sowernam proposed a different signification. "The ribbe is in Substance more solid," she writes, "in place as most neare, so in estimate most deare, to mans heart."[36] Rather than demonstrating women's crookedness, the rib symbolizes that women are solid, stable helpmates who protect men's hearts and souls. In Anthony Gibson's *A Womans Woorth* (1599), he extends this vein of thinking to women's humoral physiology. As we saw in Chapter One, in antifeminine writing, women's coldness and wetness were weaponized to explain their weakness, vulnerability to Satan, and changeability. Gibson rewrites these associations—"Divine *Homer*," he explains, "instructs us, that the estate of all things is drawne

---

[34]Jane Anger, *Jane Anger Her Protection for Women to Defend them Against the Scandalous Reportes of a Late Surfeiting Lover* (London, 1589), sig. C1; Barnabe Rich, *The Excellency of Good Women the Honour and Estimation that Belongeth Unto them* (London, 1613), 1.

[35]Joseph Swetnam, *The Araignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women* (London 1615), 1.

[36]Ester Sowernam, *Ester Hath Hang'd Haman: Or an Answere to a Lewd Pamphlet* (London, 1617), 6.

from the Occean, and that it is the cheefest of the elements."[37] Because women are "much more moyste," he reasons, "frenzies and furiousnes is not so familiar with them as men," and virtue can have "greater efficacie," as women's humoral makeup renders them "prudent and apprehensive, whereas men are commonly rashe and unrulye."[38] The theological and biological arguments designed to justify women's inferiority—Eve created after Adam, Eve as a crooked rib, women's humoral physiology—were recuperated as evidence for women's perfection, and these writers sought to rebrand women from Satan's agents into sacred objects and conduits of divine grace.

Consequently, in both anti- and pro-women writing, the occult qualities of women are an accepted fact. The debate instead centers on the origins and morality of this feminine occultness and the motivations behind women's supernatural power. The fetishization of female sacrality outlined in this section, for example, went so far as to suggest that women possessed, in the words of Gibson, "qualities… celestiall and supernaturall," arguing that women were literally divine.[39] A woman's soul is "*purely celestiall*," Gibson declares, a "treasurie of celestiall and divine vertues."[40] Calling on the poetry of Propertius, he hyperbolizes that woman are

---

[37]Anthony Gibson, *A Womans Woorth, Defended Against all the Men in the World Prooving them to be More Perfect, Excellent, and Absolute in all Vertuous Actions* (London, 1599), 3.

[38]Gibson, *A Womans Woorth*, 3, 20.

[39]Gibson, 2. The celestial, divine qualities of women, the closest earthly creatures to God, translated into an array of positive attributes. Abraham Darcie writes, "To be short, *vertue* is feminine…in Women all vertues and rare perfections, all graces of heaven and earth flourish." See *The Honour of Ladies, Or, A True Description of their Noble Perfections* (London, 1622), 10. For pro-woman writers, one of the clearest signs that women were better than men was that the classical virtues were embodied in female figures. Rich remarks that it is no coincidence that "*Justice Temperance Fortitude, Patience, pitty, Mercy, Charitie, Humilitie,* and many other like, are all of the feminine gender." See Rich, *The Excellency of Good Women*, 3.

[40]Gibson, sig. A1v, sig. B1r.

themselves god-like: "Is women not a miracle? / Her voice a perfect oracle? / Nay, is she not a deity[…]?"[41] Gibson's words here, "miracle," "oracle," and "deity," each position women as an extension and articulation of God on the earthly plane. Women's existence is both a manifestation and proof of godly grace; in their capacity as "perfect oracle[s]," their voices relay the word of God. Sowernam similarly asserted women were "Paraditian creature[s]," composed of "Quintessence."[42] In her claim that women are "Quintessence," the ethereal fifth element that constitutes celestial bodies, Sowernam not only argues that women are marvelous, celestial beings, but also implies that this otherworldly divinity marks women as elementally and foundationally different from men—women share a primordial relationship with heaven that men can never access. For Rich, the Devil approached Eve instead of Adam, not because of her female vulnerability, as anti-women writing claims, but because she was closer to God than Adam, "telling *Her she wanted but one thing to make her self like God*."[43] This believed similarity and intimacy between women and God also featured across early modern conduct manuals as evidence for why guardians should bring up young women properly to reach their full potential. As Giovanni Michele Bruno's *The Necessarie, Fit, and Convenient Education of a Yong Gentlewoman* (1598) claims, in good women, "wee may behold the image of God to be most lively imprinted."[44]

---

[41]Gibson, 58.

[42]Sowernam, *Ester Hath Hang'd Haman*, sig. A4r, 6.

[43]Rich, *The Excellency of Good Women*, 1.

[44]Giovanni Michele Bruno, *The Necessarie, Fit, and Convenient Education of a Yong Gentlewoman* (London, 1598), n.p.

Given women's natural celestiality, divine virtue, and "superaboundaunce of goodnesse," pro-women writing argued that women were more inherently religious than their male counterparts.[45] In his instruction manual for husbands and wives, Ste. B. proclaims that "[women] serveth God, as an excellent instrument and handmaide, to store and fulfill his kingdome."[46] Ste. B. outlines one of women's foremost roles, to serve and work as "instruments" for God on Earth. We might note that this language of service recalls the description of women in witchcraft literature as "servants…to the Devil" and "fit instruments" to enact Satanic conspiracies.[47] Here, however, women's mission is to "store" God's kingdom, a verb brimming with layered meanings, signifying women's responsibility to restore, reinforce, and reproduce and rear children, to create new Christians and reform the old. Rather than undermining God's kingdom, they are imagined to "fulfill" it, and women are rewritten as the central upholders of Christian doctrine. Similarly commenting on women's responsibility as God's handmaids, Gibson notes that "our God…hath made more redound to his glorye under the persons of women, then ever it pleased him to doo the like by men," contending that God prefers and chooses women over men to perform his works.[48] Jane Anger focuses her attention instead on women's intrinsic faithfulness. "A woman was the first that beleeved," she writes, "& a woman likewise the first that repented of sin."[49] In a similar vein, Rich and Sowernam highlight the fierce loyalty of women throughout Christ's life and resurrection. Rich questions,

---

[45]Gibson, *A Womans Woorth*, 42.

[46]Ste. B., *Counsel to the Husband*, 57.

[47]James I, *Daemonologie*, 9; Stearne, *A Confirmation*, 11.

[48]Gibson, *A Womans Woorth*, 19

[49]Anger, *Jane Anger Her Protection*, sig. C1r.

"who loved him most intirely who imbraced his doctrine, who confessed him to be a Prophet, who enterteyned him into their houses, who ministred unto him even of there owne substance? onely women, *Mary, Martha,* the woman of *Samaria, Jonna Susanna,* and many others."[50]

Ester Sowernam particularly draws attention to the important roles of women across the history of Christianity:

> In all dangers, troubles, and extremities, which fell to our Saviour, when all men fled from him, living or dead, women never forsooke him…[women] have beene chosen both to set out Gods glory, and for the benefit of all mankinde, in more glorious and gratious imployments then men have beene. The first promise of a Messias to come was made to a woman: the birth and bearing of that promised Messias was performed by a woman. The triumphant resurrection with the conquest over death and hell, was first published and proclaymed by a woman.[51]

In so strongly emphasizing women's position at Christ's side, from his birth by Mary to the discovery and proclamation of his return by six women, these writers argue for the centrality of women within Christian theology as instruments of God, oracles selected to promote Christianity and protect its interests. These writers establish a historical and biblical precedent not only for women as God's chosen, but also for women's responsibility to publicly spread that message, a concept that will be explored further in Chapter Four.

Pro-women writers used classical, biblical, and historical anecdotes as evidence of women's ability to foster sudden conversions in men through their compassion and virtue.

---

[50]Rich, *The Excellency of Good Women*, 3-4.

[51]Sowernam, *Ester Hath Hang'd Haman*, 14.

For example, three stories included by Gibson outline for his readers how women have ended tyranny, encouraged civility, and inspired forgiveness and admiration in men. First, he describes how

> *Soclaris,* daughter to *Cibaris* Governour of Athens, first Prince of Morea, sometimes called *Peloponnesus,* after the conquest of Combly, was delivered into the hands of *Selim* to use at his pleasure…The great Monarch, toucht to the quicke with extraordinary compassion, made a sodaine change of his love to a perpetuall admiration, and his over fond commaund tooke ending with a moste majesticall respect.[52]

Soclaris, simply by talking with Selim, appealing to heaven and to her virginity, transforms him from conquering tyrant to lover, as he begs her, Gibson reports, to "teach me the science of good life in so holy a Schoole."[53] The "sodaine change" he experiences is a testament to the innate goodness of Soclaris. Gibson's careful phrasing in the anecdote renders this not only a story of spiritual conversion—Selim morally reformed—but of racialized interfaith conversion. While Soclaris was not herself Christian, her appeals to heaven and to her soul ask the reader to position her in religious contrast to Selim, often referred to solely as "the Turk."[54] In her reformation of Selim's tyranny, Soclaris also curbs him of "the barbarous custome" of his people and their "Easterne luxuries"—namely, his desire to bring her into his harem.[55] Instead, Soclaris "begin[s] a new Historie" in which she teaches Selim the moral wrongness of these actions until

---

[52]Gibson, *A Womans Woorth*, 8-9.

[53]Gibson, 10.

[54]Gibson, 11.

[55]Gibson, 8; 9.

he agrees to dispense with them and "repent[s] for offending [her]."[56] While not an explicitly interfaith conversion story—Selim is never baptized as a Christian—Gibson's narrative is used to evidence the power that women have to turn even the most exotic and foreign of men toward Christian ethics and sexual mores.

Gibson follows this anecdote with the tale of Clotilda and Clovis, writing that, "I could say, that Frenchmen had not been Christians, but by the especiall vertue of *Clotilda,* whom God ordained to inspire the heart of *Clovis,* onely made a Christian by her charitable admonitions and faithfull enstructions."[57] Here, Gibson attributes the spiritual identity of an entire nation to women's power to engender conversion. In his suggestion that God "ordained" Clotilda to convert Clovis, who then "enstruct[ed] him," Gibson not only provides evidence for his (and other's) claims that women are God's instruments on earth, uniquely privy to God's will, but that God entrusts women with matters of global religiosity and nation-building. Gibson finally declares that

> *Plato* in like manner affirmeth, that womens society hath made civill the moste outragious condition of mens lives…Amongst the prophane they have so exceeded, as there is not nowe so many women living, as we can number men reclaymed, onely by the discreete counsell of theyr company, and brought into the perfect path of wisedome.[58]

[56]Gibson, 11.

[57]Gibson, 19.

[58]Gibson, 33.

Drawing on one of the foremost classical authorities, Gibson asserts women's ability to make men "civill," suggesting the immense number of men who have been "reclaimed" by women. Such an exaggerated number is meant to be a testament to this conversional act as a regular and expected function of womanhood. The use of the word "reclaimed" indicates that women bring men back to a state that they have wandered away from. In the early modern period, the idea of "reclamation" was specifically tied to spiritual conversion; by the sixteenth century, the word referred to a moral reformation that signaled the turn away from vice back to God.[59] By claiming that men are restored to "civility" as a result of these moral transformations, Gibson also signals women's role in domesticating men, bringing them back into ordered society, most often through marriage.

Because of women's occult divinity, natural religiosity, and ability to render sudden deep-seated moral changes in men, these writers claimed that wives were uniquely equipped and positioned to foster spiritual turns in their husbands. For Gouge, this is one of the main motivations for marriage. Gouge counsels that "two beleevers being maried together…endevour mutually to build up one another more and more" because "a spirituall edifying of one another is the best use which we can make…of those *joynts* and *bonds* whereby we are knit one to another."[60] "By vertue of what bond should we edifie one another," he questions, "if not by vertue of the *mariage bond*?"[61] Gouge's attitude toward the spiritual benefits of marriage evidences the role that both husband and wife were expected to play within their spouse's

[59]"reclaim, v.". OED Online. December 2021. Oxford University Press.

[60]Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, 240.

[61]Gouge, 240.

spiritual life. This expectation, however, appears to have disproportionately fallen to wives. As Abraham Darcie writes in *The Honour of Ladies* (1622):

> Wifedom is called in Latin *Auriga Virtutum* because she is the sure guide, the tutulaire guide, the nursing Mother of all vertues, the salt of life, the lustre, the uniting and seasoning of all actions, the square and rule of all affaires, the propriety and elegance of our Soules (as *Socrates* calls it) the rule of life, without which our strength cannot raise buildings, but they will fall themselves to ruin.[62]

In citing wifedom as the *Auriga Virtutum* or "charioteer of virtues," Darcie claims a wife is the driver of morality, the one responsible for instilling Christian values in her husband and family. He bestows upon wives a great level of agency, and thus, responsibility—without a good wife serving as a husband's "tutulaire guide," he will fall to ruin. Darcie is not alone in placing the burden of men's spirituality and morality on their wives. In the anonymous *Court of Good Counsell* (1607), for example, the writer claims that

> I could here bring in divers vertuous women, who…have caused their husbands to cast of[f] pride, cruelty, and other wicked vices: whereby some have pardoned their enemies, and drawne backe their hands from doing vengeance. Other some have undone unlawfull bargaines, lest swearing, and other vanities: and given themselves to devotion, and the health of their soules, they being brought thereunto by the honest and earnest perswasions and intreatie of their wives.[63]

---

[62]Darcie, *The Honour of Ladies*, 33.

[63]Anonymous, *The Court of Good Counsell Wherein is Set Downe the True Rules, how a Man should Choose a Good Wife from a Bad, and a Woman a Good Husband from a Bad* (London, 1607), sig. D2r.

Wifely virtue engenders a diverse range of behavioral changes in their husbands, from curbing their worst tendencies toward revenge and violence, to stopping their vices, to inspiring holy devotion.

Such conversional powers evidence Solomon's proclamation that through a wife's "grace and obedient faithfulnes, *shee will doe him good*."[64] Sowernam notes that, for example, "so that as woman was a meanes to loose Paradice, she is by this, made a meanes to recover Heaven."[65] While allowing for women's culpability in the fall, Sowernam also renders women necessary for salvation, a vehicle for men to "recover Heaven" through spiritual conversion. "The finall cause, or end, for which woman was made," Rachel Speght argues, "was to glorifie God, and to be a collaterall companion for man to glorifie God, in using her bodie, and all the parts, powers, and faculties thereof, as instruments for his honour."[66] For Speght, this is women's true purpose—to do whatever it takes to bring men to God, drawing together the physical ("bodies") and the rational ("faculties"). Speght's more elusive mention of women's "powers," read in the context of discourses of women's sacrality, including Speght's, seems to refer to women's natural ability to access divinity and foster conversion. As Abraham Darcie writes of the immoral and tyrannical husband, at every turn, women "pruned their hearts, and polished their spirits, with the smooth file of wisedome."[67]

This "smooth file of wisedome," a tool that prunes and polishes men, also becomes a tool for early modern playwrights to craft stories of men's reformations and tamings at the hands of

---

[64]Ste. B., *Counsel to the Husband*, 44.

[65]Sowernam, *Ester Hath Hang'd Haman*, 9.

[66]Rachel Speght, *A Mouzell for Melastomus, the Cynicall Bayter of, and Foule Mouthed Barker Against Evahs Sex* (London, 1616), 11.

[67]Darcie, *The Honour of Ladies*, 3.

their Christian wives. Relying upon this cultural belief that marriage offered women a certain set of powers over their husbands, early modern comedy frequently featured plotlines in which a husband converts, seemingly spontaneously, on the strength of his wife's wifeliness. The spontaneity of these conversion moments has led scholars to doubt that they were meant to be interpreted as authentic or to write the play off as "unbelievable;" however, contextualizing these plays within these discourses surrounding female sacrality suggests that this phenomenon was considered a means for conversion, and it became a common trope in a playwright's toolbox. In the two sections that follow, the "smooth file of wifedome" manifests very differently—what Luce achieves in her prodigal husband Matthew through genuine earnestness and patience, Maria wrings out of the tyrannical Petruchio through sexual manipulation and the reversal of his own taming strategies—but the result is the same: a spontaneous conversion moment in the play's fifth act that opens a space for a marriage based on mutual love, respect, and obedience.

"Wonder Among Wives!": *The London Prodigal*

Of all the subgenres of city comedy, the prodigal son play most naturally invites a conversional reading. The story of the prodigal son is impossible to untangle from early modern conversion—as Jill Robbins notes, the trope "underwrites all narratives of personal conversion," and Darryl Tippens describes it as the "archetype of death and rebirth…encompass[ing] a crisis of 'soul-stripping catastrophe'" that ends with a moment of "divine comedy" and reconciliation.[68] Dramatic adaptations of the prodigal son story yoke together two theatrical traditions: the medieval morality play and Roman New Comedy, using a moral arc to shape

[68]Jill Robbins, *Prodigal Son/Elder Brother: Interpretation and Alterity in Augustine, Petrarch, Kafka, Levinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 10; Darryl Tippens, "Shakespeare and the Prodigal Son Tradition," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 14 (1988): 57-77, esp. 60.

domestic comedy plotlines about family squabbles and young lovers.[69] The prodigal son play reemerged in early modern drama in full force around 1575, with at least thirty known prodigal son plays produced between 1575 and 1642, and fifteen of them between 1593 and 1610.[70] Many scholars have connected this resurgence to the changing economic systems and new mercantile class of the late sixteenth century, as financial prodigality became a growing possibility—and concern—for young men.[71] However, we can also contextualize this renaissance in prodigal son comedy as an extension of interest of religious conversion on the stage during this period, especially given the trope's origins as a conversion narrative.

What is particularly striking about the use of the prodigal son parable in the early seventeenth century is how the story adapts to center women characters as the catalysts for the prodigal's redemption. The importance of these women characters, however, remains critically underestimated. Ervin Beck, for example, notes that the prodigal's "return to grace is often rewarded with marriage to a good girl, which becomes a token of his permanent regeneration."[72] In situating the faithful wife as a "token," a reward for good behavior, Beck misses how these "good girl[s]" are instrumental to that "return to grace" that suggests a prodigal's "permanent regeneration." For Erick Rodney Kelemen, women's roles in these stories are meant to be "emblematic moment[s] of the woman's conversion in marriage," as the female character must decide between her loyalties to her father or her new husband. Through her wifely faithfulness,

---

[69]Ervin Beck, "Terence Improved: The Paradigm of the Prodigal Son in English Renaissance Comedy," *Renaissance Drama* 6 (1973): 107-122, esp. 108.

[70]Beck, "Terence Improved," 108.

[71]See, for example, Horbury, *Prodigality in Early Modern Drama*; Panek, "Community, Credit," 62.

[72]Beck, "Terrence Improved," 117.

the central female character then also becomes a prodigal, denying her father in favor of her husband.[73] We might do well to remember, however, that rather than prodigal behavior, being faithful to one's husband was ideal wifely behavior. Claiming this decision of husband over father as one of "prodigality" implies that it is a somehow wayward act, threatening the sustainability of domestic order, when, in fact, wifely faithfulness was considered foundational to the health of the patriarchal household. Suggesting that these faithful wife characters themselves turn prodigal—likely in an attempt to make their characters more interesting by modern standards—obfuscates the ways their characters were interesting by early modern standards. As *The London Prodigal* demonstrates, through wifely faithfulness, women were believed to have great power to shape their husband's temperament and behavior.

The London Prodigal (ca. 1604) follows Matthew Flowerdale, a profligate gambler and libertine, who constantly borrows money from his inner circle of friends and family. His father, Flowerdale Senior, disbelieving the severity of the problem, goes undercover as Matthew's servant, growing increasingly horrified at how dissolute his son has become. In the play's subplot, Sir Lancelot negotiates marriage offers for his three daughters, Frances, Delia, and Luce. The two plotlines intersect when Matthew and his father conspire to marry Luce to Matthew—Matthew for the dowry money, Flowerdale Senior because he thinks marriage will tame Matthew—by drawing up a fake will that convinces Sir Lancelot that Matthew truly loves her. His father, however, realizes that Matthew intends to use and abandon Luce, and arranges for Matthew to be taken to debtor's prison moments after the wedding. When Sir Lancelot discovers Matthew's deceit, he gives Luce an ultimatum: her father or her husband. Despite being forced

[73]Erick Rodney Kelemen, "Early English Performances of the Prodigal Son Parable: Text, Audience, Conversion," (University of Delaware, 1998), 176-180.

into the marriage, Luce says that, as a wife, her duty is to Matthew, believing she can inspire reformation in him. Later, after Matthew has degenerated further, all the characters meet on stage for a final intervention with Matthew, now believing he may have murdered Luce. Luce, having disguised herself to keep an eye on Matthew, suddenly appears and pledges her loyalty and faith to him, and Matthew experiences an instantaneous spiritual conversion.

The London Prodigal is often denigrated in studies of prodigality in early modern drama for being "offensively conventional," full of a "heavy didacticism" that muddies any poetic potential.[74] These two veins of criticism have historically merged together under the banner that this play is far too unoriginal and poorly written to be Shakespeare's; as William Hazlitt rationalized, if Shakespeare is the author, *The London Prodigal* must surely be "among the sins of his youth."[75] Modern critics have deemed the play to be "hastily sketched," with "pasteboard" characters.[76] "If one were inclined to speculate," Dieter Mehl writes, "one could imagine Shakespeare drafting a rough sketch of plot and scenic structure, and some hack penning the dialogue, with little verbal subtlety and less poetic imagination."[77] This animosity toward the play largely stems from Matthew's spontaneous fifth act conversion, which has long been judged to be either unbelievable—a symptom of unskilled writing—or embarrassingly preachy. The consensus seems to be that Matthew's Act 5 conversion must be satirical or insincere in order for

---

[74]Ezra Horbury, "Performing Repentance: (In)sincerity in Prodigal Son Drama and the *Henry IV*s," *Renaissance Studies* 32, no. 4 (2017): 583-601, esp. 591; Alan R. Young, *The English Prodigal Son Plays: A Theatrical Fashion of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Salzburg; Institut für Anglistik and Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1979), 234-235.

[75]William Hazlitt, Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, 3rd ed (London: 1838), 316; qtd. in Horbury 591.

[76]Ervin Beck*, Prodigal Son Comedy: The Continuity of a Paradigm in English Drama, 1500-1642* (Indiana University, 1973), 166.

[77]Dieter Mehl, "*The London Prodigal* as Jacobean City Comedy," 166-167.

the play to have any merit or internal logic. Ezra Horbury notes that "Flowerdale's repentance, when it comes, lacks motivation," casting doubt on Luce's conversion of her husband, as "[l]ittle has happened to change his perspective save the revelation that Luce is alive, which should matter little to Flowerdale, who was unmoved by reports of her death."[78] Marianne Montgomery similarly critiques the play's conclusion, claiming that "Flowerdale's sudden reform appears largely unmotivated," and Mehl argues that the play's audiences "will easily agree" with a cynical version of the ending in which Flowerdale's conversion is yet another of the prodigal's tricks.[79] Yet, the ending of *The London Prodigal* has the capacity to be simultaneously satirical and sincere. The play's wry tone does not negate its ability to invite vital questions about spiritual reformation. Indeed, reading the play through the context of women's conversional powers addresses many of these skeptical readings of the play. Luce's instantaneous conversion of her prodigal husband makes far more sense—and seems far more poetically credible—when we consider the play in light of an entire strain of thinking about women that claimed they could do just that.

From the opening scene of the play, the text establishes its two central questions: can Matthew be reformed? And, if so, what will it take? The play's first lines, a conversation between Matthew's father, Flowerdale Senior, and his uncle, reveal the history of Matthew's poor behavior for the audience: he swears, drinks, borrows money from everyone, breaks oaths, and brawls. Flowerdale Senior, a confessed former prodigal himself, does not see a problem with his son's behavior, proposing to his brother a thesis of prodigality not dissimilar from the future aphorism that "reformed rakes make the best husbands"—reformed prodigals, he argues, make

[78]Horbury, "Performing Repentance," 593.

[79]Montgomery, "Wife, Whore, and/or Dutchwoman," 10; Mehl, "*The London Prodgial*," 173.

the best Christians. "Believe me brother," he beseeches, "they that die most virtuous, hath in their youth, lived most vicious, and none knows the danger of the fire, more than he that falls into it" (1.1, sig. A2v).[80] Describing his son as a "mad unbridled colt," Flowerdale Senior suggests the best remedy is "Time" to "all his madness tam[e]" (1.1, sig. B1r). Matthew's uncle, however, is less optimistic that time alone will be sufficient to reform Matthew, as is Sir Lancelot Spurcock, Luce's father. As Matthew attempts to woo both Luce and her father, Spurcock proclaims that "God can work miracles / But he were better make a hundred new, / Then thee a thrifty and an honest one" (2.1, sig. B4r). For Spurcock, Matthew's conversion would be one of God's greatest and most difficult miracles to procure, situating any potential redemption of Matthew as a divine act. By describing Matthew's potential reformation as a "miracle," Spurcock's lines invite the audience to interpret his conversion as such when it finally occurs on stage in Act 5. Spurcock, nonetheless, doubts that such a miracle will ever occur, and chooses instead to marry Luce to another of her richer suitors, Oliver.

Enter Flowerdale Senior, disguised as a servant and ready to assist his son in winning the woman he believes that Matthew loves, helping him to create a falsified will to trick Spurcock. However, after they are successful, Flowerdale Senior is shocked and disgusted to discover that Matthew does not "regard [Luce] a pin," but only desires her "gold" to "bring my pleasures in" (2.2, sig. D2v). It is this disregard for Luce and for marriage that finally convinces Flowerdale Senior of the severity of Matthew's behavior, and he denounces Matthew's actions as "[f]orsaking God" and "himself to the devil giving" (2.2, sig. D2v). Against the backdrop of a host of other abominable behaviors—including not caring that his own father has supposedly

[80]All citations come from "The London Prodigal," *A Digital Anthology of Early Modern English Drama*, Folger Shakespeare Library. This edition is a facsimile of the 1605 quarto, and parenthetical citations refer to Act number, Scene number, and page signatures.

died—it is striking that this is Matthew's most unforgivable act, an act that Flowerdale Senior believes to be antichristian and nigh-apostatic, a sign that Matthew is secretly working for the Devil. Invoking Matthew's deceased mother who was "firm" and "chaste," he declares he would question Matthew's paternity, if not that Matthew's mother would also "shun" "so foul a deed" (2.2, sig. D2v). Such a strong reaction evidences how the play draws upon the connections between love, marriage, and godliness—Matthew's willingness to abuse his marital bonds and his lack of love for Luce translate in his father's mind to abandoning God himself. The "one thing [that] comforts [him]," he tells Uncle Flowerdale, is that "tomorrow he's to be married / To beauteous Luce" (2.2, sig. D3r). Flowerdale Senior sees this marriage as a method to "curb" Matthew (2.2, sig. D3r), an allusion to the spiritual persuasiveness and "smooth file" that wives could use to reform their husbands. Not only will Luce, her name meaning "light," have a softening effect on his son, but Flowerdale Senior also arranges to have Matthew arrested and taken to debtor's prison after the ceremony, hoping that by "increas[ing] his shame" in front of his new wife and friends he will engender a reformation in his son.

Unfortunately for all involved, it does not work. Matthew finagles his way out of going to prison, and Luce, forced to choose between her father and her new husband, picks Matthew in a show of faithfulness:

> He is my husband, and high heaven doth know,
> With what unwillingness I went to Church.
> But you enforced me, you compelled me to it:
> The holy Church-man pronounced these words but now:
> I must not leave my husband in distress,
> Now I must comfort him, not go with you. (3.3, sig. E1r)

Despite Luce being forced into this marriage (she had wanted to marry the solider, Arthur Greenshood), Luce becomes an instantly faithful wife to Matthew, refusing to abandon him and desiring only to "comfort" him. Signaling Luce's new identity by addressing her solely as "Huswife," Spurcock disowns her over her choice, declaring "Never come near my sight nor look on me, / Call me not father" (3.3, sig. E1v). Luce, begging her father not to further "oppress" her "grieved soul," declares that "God knows my heart doth bleed at [Matthew's] distress" (3.3, sig. E1r). Luce's feelings and faithfulness toward Matthew extend beyond just begrudgingly accepting the legal reality of their union, which is the only way the other characters on the stage respond. Luce's former suitor Oliver, for example, responds to Spurcock's request to rescue and marry Luce now with "chil break no Laws" (3.3, sig. E1r), gesturing toward the legal rather than emotional nature of this union. Yet, from the moment the "holy Church-man pronounced these words," Luce embodies all the most ideal virtues of a wife. Her inherent goodness and virtue extend even to Matthew, the man who has wronged her most terribly, to the point that she feels deeply sorry for him. She begs the Sheriff to "for my sake pity him" (3.3, sig. E1v) and kneels to his uncle to beg for mercy on Matthew's behalf. Uncle Flowerdale is won over, speaking of her "sweet soul," and announcing that he "love[s] [her] with my heart" (3.3, sig. E1v). Matthew, however, dismisses her immediately, denouncing her as "a rattle baby" and advising that she "turn whore" to make money (3.3, sig. E3r).

By the end of the tumultuous wedding scene, both Luce and Uncle Flowerdale acknowledge that Matthew's conversion depends upon Luce and their marriage. "Impute his wildness, sir, unto his youth," she begs Uncle Flowerdale, "And think now is the time he doth repent" (3.3, sig. E2r). Drawing a juxtaposition between Matthew's "youth" and "now," Luce implies that marriage is the central ritual connecting two states of life: youth and adulthood.

Now, in marriage, Luce claims, Matthew will finally repent, emphasizing marriage as just the tool for such a reformation. For Uncle Flowerdale, repentance similarly depends solely on Matthew's treatment of Luce. "If well he useth thee, he gets him friends," he tells her, "If ill, a shameful end on him" (3.3, sig. E2v). In this way, the play maps Matthew's spiritual health onto the strength of his marriage—the way to judge the state of his soul is to look at how he treats his wife. While Uncle Flowerdale is skeptical, however, Luce believes that Matthew's conversion is firmly at hand.

It is Luce's inherent goodness and faithfulness toward the undeserving Matthew that have led critics to define her as an "innocent Patient Griselda-type."[81] Luce's decision to hand Matthew his uncle's money, for example, has been cited as a particularly Griselda-esque moment in which she follows Matthew's demands over her own desires and good sense. However, her goodness is not the same as blind obedience, and Luce does not follow Matthew's commands to leave him alone or to take up sex work. Instead, with the help of Flowerdale Senior, she goes undercover as a Dutch housemaid, so that she "shall know all" and keep watch over Matthew (3.3, E3v). In choosing to not simply silently fade into the background but instead put on a disguise, act out a role (accent included), watch over Matthew, flirt with him to gain his erotic interest, and directly intercede when necessary, Luce makes a series of active choices. While not as flashy as Maria's open rebellion (as we will see in the next section), Luce is by no means a passive character. Even in the disastrous wedding sequence—so often considered the height of her passivity—she stands up to her father's manipulations, takes charge when Matthew is about to be taken to jail, and pleads with both the Sheriff and his uncle until they agree to leave

[81]Horbury, *Prodigality in Early Modern Drama*, 156.

Matthew alone and give her one hundred angels. Her actions and her agency, however, are entirely centered around Matthew's reformation. As she tells her sister Delia:

> Sister, I see you know me; yet be secret.
>
> This borrowed shape, that I have ta'en upon me,
>
> Is but to keep myself a space unknown,
>
> Both from my father, and my nearest friends,
>
> Until I see how time will bring to pass
>
> The desperate course of Master Flowerdale. (4.3, sig. F2v)

When Delia expresses her doubts, denouncing Matthew as "worse than bad" (4.3, sig. F2v), Luce counters that:

> Yet one lover's time may all that ill undo,
>
> That all his former life did run into.
>
> Therefore kind sister do not disclose my estate:
>
> If ere his heart doth turn, tis nere too late. (4.3, sig. F2v)

Luce's insistence that a "lover's time" can undo and repair Matthew's sins corresponds to the belief in the redemptive nature of a woman's love—Luce believes that, through love, his "heart doth turn." Luce's phrasing—"heart doth turn"—explicitly renders this passage about Matthew's spiritual conversion. Using "turn" as a shorthand used to describe conversion, the turned heart signaled a repentant sinner who had returned to God.[82] We might recall, for example, Acts 3:19, "Amend your lives therefore, and turn, that your sins may be put away," or Joel 2:13, "rent your heart…and turn unto the Lord." Matthew's "former life" will give way to a new, more moral life through his marriage with Luce. Luce's connection between a "lover's time" and the possibility

[82]See Shinn, *Conversion Narratives*, 1-3.

of Matthew's turning heart links his spiritual conversion to love and marriage. It might be for this reason that Luce seeks to stimulate Matthew's erotic interest in her disguise, hoping to generate those husbandly impulses that will later spark his conversion.

In the end, Luce succeeds where Flowerdale Senior failed; the wife is able to do what the father could not. With Luce missing, disguised as the Dutch housemaid, her family and friends assume that Matthew has killed her, and they all gather to confront him and send him to jail. Luce intervenes, revealing herself to the crowd by changing her accent and perhaps, in performance, removing some part of her costume. "Know you me now?," she asks, telling the gathered crowd to "nay, never stand amazed" at her seeming resurrection (5.1, sig. G2v).[83] The "amazement" the crowd displays at Luce's return registers this reappearance—for the characters onstage—as a kind of miracle, even if the audience knows that Luce has been disguised. The start of this scene with just such an "amazing" event seems designed to prepare the audience for another, far more miraculous one, recalling Spurcock's earlier claim that Matthew's conversion would be a true godly miracle. Furthermore, Luce's use of the verb "know" in this context yokes together the sacred with the sexual. As Patricia Crawford reminds us, "knowing" a woman insinuates having sexually penetrated her, but it also recalls Paul's description of his conversion and desired relationship with Christ: "to know, even as I am known."[84] For Luce to want Matthew to "know" her, then, brings the full power of the erotic relationship between man and wife to bear upon this moment of conversion. Like Paul, Luce wants to see Matthew face-to-

[83]Luce's inability to be recognized by her family and friends may allude to Mary Magdalene and the apostles' inability to recognize Christ following the Resurrection. Mary, for example, believes Jesus to be the gardener in John 20:11-18.

[84]Crawford, *Women and Religion*, 14. See, 1 Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see through a glass darkly: but then *shall we see* face to face. Now I know in part: but then shall I know even as I am known."

face, turning toward him as she tells the crowd, "Yet this ways do I turn, and to him yield / My love, my duty and my humbleness" (5.1, sig. G3r).

Even as she turns toward Matthew, Luce also wants Matthew to physically and emotionally turn toward her. It is this turn, Matthew's turn to Luce, that is the climactic moment to which the entire play has been building. Given Luce's name, turning toward her symbolizes a turn toward the light itself, an outward, physical gesture that signifies not only his commitment to his wife and marriage—just as her turn demonstrates her "love," "duty," and "humbleness"—but toward the larger, spiritual connotations of that new commitment to their marriage. With marriage serving as the "lively pattern of more heavenly things," the strengths and weaknesses of Matthew and Luce's marriage have thus provided a living example of Matthew's soul.[85] As Uncle Flowerdale had earlier asserted, Matthew's eternal fate was tied to the way that he treated Luce. In the play's logic, which models a larger early modern paradigm, to make himself right in his marriage is to make himself right with God.

Yet, Matthew hesitates to turn to Luce. As she kneels before him, Luce begs him to:

> Turn not away, I am no Ethiop,
> No wanton Cressid, nor a changing Helen:
> But rather one made wretched by thy loss.
> What, turnst thou still from me? O then
> I guess thee woefulst among hapless men. (5.1, sig. G3r)

Luce's insistence that she is "no Ethiop, / No wanton Cressida, nor a changing Helen" but rather his "faithful wife" (5.1, sig. G3r), weaves together positive female spirituality with racial and sexual purity by linking Luce's whiteness and chastity to her faithfulness. She neither looks like

[85]Ste. B., *Counsel to the Husband*, 2.

an Ethiopian, nor does she resemble Cressida or Helen, women infamous for their changeable hearts that led men to their doom.

While such an emphasis on race and whiteness in this moment may seem strange, Luce's status as a white, Christian English woman is imperative to her characterization as a faithful wife and to the positive redemptive power she embodies as a woman. As Dennis Austin Britton reminds us, "the stage dictates…what kinds of relationships can achieve comedic resolutions." Arguing that "[c]omedy sans tragedy is unable to incorporate infidels into a theological system and a dramatic tradition in which blackness and Jewish, Moorish, Turkish, and pagan identity all signify evil," Britton explains that plays interested in "interreligious and interracial relationships" were almost exclusively marketed as tragicomedy.[86] While, as Britton writes, the religio-racial "ideological work of comedy can go largely unnoticed in plays featuring romantic relationships between people who share the same racial and religious background," Luce's insistence that she is not an "Ethiop" renders this ideological work central to the moment of Matthew's conversion.[87] Her appeal to her whiteness is meant to signify her desirability as a wife in two crucial ways: it gestures toward English beauty standards that privileged white skin as superior to dark even as it serves as a visual indicator of her Christianity. She is not the Ethiopian who will seduce you away from God or Helen leading you to your ruin, but the Christian wife who will save and restore your soul. Luce's whiteness is thus invoked to neutralize the potentially threatening features of her spiritual power and to reiterate its godliness. The play's reliance upon Luce's whiteness in this particular conversional moment emphasizes the indivisibility of

[86]Britton, *Becoming Christian*, 143-144.

[87]Britton, 144.

whiteness, Christianity, and female sacrality on the early modern stage and within early modern culture.

The stage directions built into Luce's speech—"Turn not away" and "What, turnst thou still from me"—indicate that the player portraying Matthew must stay and remain physically turned away from the player portraying Luce throughout her speech. When he does turn to her, his language highlights not only his conversion, but Luce's role in creating it:

> I am, indeed, wife, wonder among wives!
> Thy chastity and virtue hath infused
> Another soul in me, red with defame,
> For in my blushing cheeks is seen my shame. (5.1, sig. G3r)

Calling her "wife" for the first time, Matthew finally acknowledges and submits to their marriage. Like Paul on the road to Damascus, Matthew has also been struck by a light from heaven, Luce, recalling the Latin root of her name. His insistence that she is a "wonder" recalls the use of "wonder" in this period to describe miraculous, supernatural events attributed to God.[88] Even if Matthew's conversion is faked, he still relies upon this same discourse about wives in order to try and sell his conversion to the crowd. In his claim that Luce has "infused / Another soul in me" through her "chastity and virtue," Matthew argues that Luce's sacred womanly and wifely qualities are responsible for his conversion—"infusing" him with a new soul indicates that Matthew feels he has had little power over this act. She achieves through her female sacrality what Flowerdale Senior could not: Matthew's shame. Matthew's "red" and "blushing cheeks" are interpreted by some of the crowd as physical evidentiary signs that Matthew's reformation is authentic, a way to outwardly verify the inner change to his soul.

---

[88]"wonder, n.". OED Online. December 2021. Oxford University Press.

Despite Matthew's seemingly convincing tell-tale blush, the gathered onlookers—much like the play's modern critics—do debate the authenticity of this conversion, especially as it occurs right as he is about to be arrested. Spurcock "trust[s] him not" (5.1, sig. G3r), questioning whether "he will have grace" (5.1, sig. G3r), and his uncle denounces him as a "beast" (5.1, sig. G3r). In contrast, Arthur Greenshood announces that Matthew's conversion has "move[d] my heart" (5.1, sig. G3r), Weathercock remarks that "I must weep, I can not choose" (5.1, sig. G3r), and Oliver believes "he is changed" (5.1, sig. G3v) as he gives Matthew money. In response to this mixed reception to his spontaneous conversion, Matthew repeats his commitment to "redeem my reputation lost," promising that "your eyes shall behold such change, / As shall deceive your expectation" (5.1, sig. G3r). When he apologizes to Flowerdale Senior, his father forgives him, but reminds both Matthew, the other characters, and the audience to "applaud thy fortune in this virtuous maid, / Whom heaven hath sent to thee to save thy soul" (5.1, sig. G4r). Through Flowerdale Senior's speech, the play reinforces that Luce is heaven-sent, a godly handmaiden sent to save Matthew, directly responsible for his conversion. A good wife, we might remember, is God's gift. But a good husband is a good Christian—as Oliver advises Matthew, "be a good husband, lov[e] your wife: and you shall not want" (5.1, sig. G3v). In committing to his marriage to Luce, Matthew will be able to remain on the righteous path, "hat[ing]" his previous activities, he tells his father, "as hell" (5.1, sig. G4r). In the words of Braithwaite, Luce has turned Matthew "homeward," helping him to make amends with his father, make himself right within his community, and devote himself to his marriage, all of which are treated as signs of his conversion.

The play's final moments, however, seem to complexly open a space to critique the burdens placed on women that the play's resolution has just venerated. Luce's sister Delia, rather

than pairing off with one of the remaining suitors, decides to remain celibate. “Not that I do condemn a married life / For ‘tis no doubt a sanctimonious thing,” she tells the crowd, but she refuses to take on the “care and crosses of a wife” (5.1, sig. G4v). Having just watched her sister be forced into a union she did not desire, abandoned by her husband and father, and then labor to bring about her husband’s reformation, Delia does not see the same value in the wifely role that Luce, Flowerdale Senior, and Matthew do. Through Delia’s final speech, the play registers an awareness of the disproportionate expectations for women and women’s perceived responsibility for their husbands. Even as the play invites us to celebrate Matthew’s potential reformation and newfound union with Luce, it also uses Delia to disrupt the assumption that this is fully happy or without its problems. Has Matthew truly reformed? Will such a reformation last? The play leaves its audience with many unanswered questions about the veracity and longevity of Matthew’s conversion. Yet these questions are neither the unintentional consequences of bad writing nor are they moments which undermine the play’s plot. Instead, the play consciously provokes them, engaging comprehensively with larger social questions about conversion and, specifically, the responsibility and power of the wives. In foregrounding these “cares and crosses of a wife,” *The London Prodigal* brings us to another play about the female labor required to tame a husband, John Fletcher’s *The Woman’s Prize*; *or The Tamer Tamed*.

Griselda Fights Back; or, *The Tamer Tamed*

At a first glance, *The Tamer Tamed* may seem an odd play to choose for a discussion of religious conversion, and an odder choice still to bring into conversation with *The London Prodigal*. Maria, a woman who refuses to have sex with her husband until he meets her financial and social demands, appears the antithesis of Luce, who willingly hands Matthew her last coin.

Yet, Luce and Maria, I suggest, share similar theatrical and cultural functions. Both women are faithful wives committed to their rather troublesome husbands, and both reform these men, fostering within them a newfound commitment to companionate marriage. This boisterous battle of the sexes has a strong conversional core, and, like *The London Prodigal* or its sister-play *The Taming of the Shrew*, grafts a reformation arc onto a domestic romance plotline borrowed from Roman New Comedy. However, while *The Taming of the Shrew* follows Petruchio's torturous methods to force a conversion in Katherina until she is moved to preach his doctrine about wives in her final speech,[89] *The Tamer Tamed* takes up the opposite question: do men need to change to be good husbands? In the case of Petruchio, *The Tamer Tamed* seems to answer with a resounding yes. Employing the vocabulary of religious conversion to describe Maria's tactics to tame Petruchio, the play emphasizes the spiritual undergirdings and moral trajectory of marriage plots in early modern comedy, where healthy marriages reflect a healthy relationship with God.

While *The Tamer Tamed* features some characters from *The Taming of the Shrew*, it makes several major revisions, and it works well as a standalone drama. Relocating the story from Padua to London, *The Tamer Tamed* incorporates many topical allusions and recognizable tropes of city comedy and is defined as such by its modern editor, Lucy Munro. Before the play begins, Petruchio's first wife, Katherina, has died, and Petruchio has remarried the quiet, virtuous Maria. Petruchio and the other men are taken by surprise, however, when Maria, under the advisement of Katherina's sister, Bianca, decides she will tame Petruchio rather than submit to his tyrannical expectations for a wife. In a parallel to *The Taming of the Shrew*, Petruchio's

[89]For conversional readings of *The Taming of the Shrew*, see Dale G. Priest, "Katherina's Conversion in *The Taming of the Shrew*: A Theological Heuristic," *Renascence* 47, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 31-40; Margaret Lael Mikesell, "'Love Wrought These Miracles': Marriage and Genre in *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Renaissance Drama* 20 (1989): 141-167; Ellen Crosby, *The Turning of the Shrew: Conversion as a Literary Methodology* (McGill University, 2016).

marriage squabbles are again juxtaposed with the courtship of two young lovers: while *Taming* had Bianca and Lucentio, *The Tamer Tamed* features Maria's sister Livia and her paramour, Roland, as they conspire to be together against her father's wishes. Barricading themselves in their room, Bianca, Maria, and Livia join together to impose a sex strike reminiscent of *Lysistrata* that recruits women from London and the English countryside to rail against bad husbands. After their successful rebellion, Maria continues her efforts to tame Petruchio, sabotaging his attempts to regain control under the auspices of wifely obedience and concern. The battle between them comes to a climax when, in the final scene, Petruchio pretends to have died and Maria harshly eulogizes his flaws. Rising from his coffin, Petruchio experiences a spontaneous conversion, and he promises to become a better husband.

Critical discourse on *The Tamer Tamed* centers on the play's famously subversive gender politics, as scholars have sought to explain how Fletcher was able to stage such a proto-feminist piece in the early seventeenth century. Molly Easo Smith, for example, contends the play must be understood as a farce, arguing that the play relies upon carnival and charivari to hide its more politically subversive qualities.[90] Yet for David Bergeron, *The Tamer Tamed* responds directly to the *querelle des femmes*, and he contextualizes the play's feminist politics within an ever-expanding canon of early modern texts that declared "war on misogynistic views."[91] Similarly, Todd Lidh suggests that the play was potentially less disruptive than modern critics assume, proposing that its original audience was receptive to the growing archetype of the "new London

[90]Molly Easo Smith, "John Fletcher's Response to the Gender Debate: *The Woman's Prize* and *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Papers on Language and Literature* 31, no. 1 (1995): 38-60, esp. 41.

[91]David M. Bergeron, "Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize*, Transgression, and *Querelle des Femmes*," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 8 (1996): 146-64, esp. 149.

woman."[92] In direct contrast, a smaller pool of critics contend the play is not subversive at all. "This feminist reading of *The Tamer Tamed* is simplistic and largely wrong," David Wootton argues, offering instead a "patriarchalist reading" that he claims "most of the play's audience would have taken away."[93] For Jochen Petzold, the play's restoration of male authority in its final scenes problematizes any feminist reading of the text, and he asserts that "Petruchio is presented as a victim and the audience is invited to share his point of view."[94] In insisting the play must belong to either side of a binary—feminist or patriarchal—critics of *The Tamer Tamed* have collapsed not only its nuance but the complexity of English gender politics at the time the play was written and staged. Interpreting the play within the context of the ongoing debate about women and conversion provides an avenue for understanding how the play can be both subversive *and* conversative, sanctioning female rebellion because it serves the needs of the larger patriarchal Christian nation-state. Through Maria's conversion of Petruchio, the play fantasizes about how women might navigate and challenge aspects of male authority, not to overthrow patriarchal systems entirely, but to fashion these systems—and the men who embody them—so that they become stronger and better. As Lidh reminds us, Maria wants to "be married

---

[92]Todd Lidh, "John Fletcher's Taming of Shakespeare: *The Tamer Tam'd*," *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium* 4 (2004): 58-71, esp. 59. See also Margaret Maurer, "Constering Bianca: *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Woman's Prize, or the Tamer Tamed*," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 14 (2001): 186-06.

[93]David Wootton, "*The Tamer Tamed*, or None Shall Have Prizes: 'Equality' in Shakespeare's England," in *Gender and Power in Shrew-Taming Narratives, 1500-1700*, eds. David Wooten and Graham Holderness (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 206-225, esp. 206.

[94]Jochen Petzold, "Subverting the Master Discourse? The Power of Women's Words in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize, or The Tamer Tamed*," *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 31 (2006): 157-70, esp. 164. For a reading that problematizes the impulse to create a pan-women rebellion that ignores the play's class politics, see also Huey-Ling Lee, "Women, Household Stuff and the Making of a Gentleman in John Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize, or The Tamer Tamed*," **戲劇研究** (2008): 237-258.

to Petruchio, just not married to the Petruchio who had the reputation for aggressively taming his first wife and for being an overbearing, dominating husband."[95]

While not expressly a financial prodigal like Matthew Flowerdale, the play emphasizes from its opening lines that Petruchio's treatment of wives and marriage need reformation. Through the voices of Petruchio's friends—who should presumably be his male allies—the play registers an immediate discomfort with Petruchio as a potential husband. As they leave his wedding ceremony, Sophocles laments that Maria is a "poor wench" (1.1.2) who will likely not "know'st good hour more" (1.1.3).[96] Tranio, a crossover character from *The Taming of the Shrew*, explains why: her father has "dealt harshly / Exceedingly harshly, and not like a father, / to match her to this dragon," noting that he "pit[ies] the poor gentlewoman" (1.1.5-8). In citing Petruchio as a "dragon," Tranio marks him as monstrous, his behavior unnatural and uncivilized, and even, in early modern symbolism, fiendish and devilish.[97] When Moroso, new to the group, protests that Petruchio is "not so terrible as people think him" (1.1.9) and "a good man" (1.1.13), Petruchio's friends equivocate. "Yes, sure, a wealthy," Sophocles hedges, "But whether a good woman's man is doubtful" (1.1.14-15), as he "fear[s]" that Petruchio will unleash "that long-since-buried-tempest" on "this soft maid" (1.1.20-21). He is not, Sophocles concludes, "[a] fit match for [Maria's] tender soul" (1.1.40). Tranio highlights his tyrannical nature, claiming that to avoid his violent temper she must "do nothing of herself, not eat, / Sleep, say 'Sir, how do ye,' make her ready, piss, / Unless he bid her" (1.1.45-47). Both Sophocles and Tranio fear the worst for Maria. "There is no safety," Tranio asserts, "nor moral wisdom / To be a wife and his"

---

[95]Lidh, "John Fletcher's Taming of Shakespeare," 63.

[96]All quotes are from *The Tamer Tamed*, ed. Lucy Munro (London: Methuen Drama, 2010). Parenthetical citations refer to act, scene, and line number.

[97]Because dragons were imagined as serpentine, the dragon could stand in for Satan as the "Old Serpent."

(1.1.29-30). Sophocles takes this idea to its natural conclusion, betting that Petruchio will cause her death within three weeks.

Throughout this early first act, the play goes to great lengths to establish that Maria is not a shrew like Petruchio's first wife. When the women enter the stage, Bianca offers Maria a similar warning. "Your modesty and tenderness of spirit / Make you continual anvil to his anger," she cautions, "Nothing can bind his rage" (1.2.57-58; 60). Maria is not a wife in need of taming, she is "modest," has a "tenderness of spirit," and, as her sister Livia notes, is renowned for her "sweetness" (1.2.132). Fearing that Maria will be crushed under the weight of Petruchio's tyranny, Bianca and Maria appear to have hatched an offstage secret plan to temper Petruchio, to which Maria now agrees:

> I'll do it.
>
> Like Curtius, to redeem my country have I
>
> Leaped into this gulf of marriage;
>
> Farewell all thoughts but spite and anger,
>
> Till I have wrought a miracle upon him. (1.2.65-69)

Situating herself as a martyr like the Roman solider Marcus Curtius, who leapt into a chasm to save his fellow Romans,[98] Maria takes on this conversional task to help her "country," all her fellow women and wives. By endowing this act with grand stakes, Maria's language recalls Gibson's anecdotes about Soclaris and Clotilda, whose individual acts of converting their lovers brought far greater outcomes for their countries. And, indeed, the other women seem to believe that Maria's taming of Petruchio belongs to the annals of history. "Thou wilt be chronicled" (1.2.76), Bianca exclaims, even as, later in the play, the City Wife proclaims that their rebellion

[98]Munro, *The Tamer Tamed*, 15 n.1.

belongs with all "[t]hat ever yet was chronicled of woman" (2.4.92). For Bianca, Maria's taming mission has the potential to correct unbalanced marriages writ large, noting that Maria should draw strength from:

> All the several wrongs
> Done by imperious husbands to their wives
> These thousand years and upward strengthen thee!
> Thou hast a brave cause. (1.2.122-25)

Wishing "Adieu all tenderness!" (1.2.72), Maria strives to become an example to all "[m]aids that are made of fears and modest blushes" (1.2.73) in how to craft a better, more equal marriage. It is important to stress that Maria does not advocate for the overthrow of marriage entirely; instead, she seeks a companionate marriage, refusing to become

> that childish woman
> That lives a prisoner to her husband's pleasure
> Has lost her making and becomes a beast
> Created for his use, not fellowship. (1.2.137-40)

Maria sees her conversion of Petruchio as a means to retain not only her dignity but her subjectivity and personhood; she wants to be in "fellowship" with Petruchio as an equal partner.

In the first battle sequence between Maria and Petruchio, she confirms that she does, indeed, love Petruchio and want to be married to him. Maria tells everyone gathered at her wedding that "were I yet unmarried, free to choose / Through all the tribes of man, I'd take Petruchio" (1.3.160-61); however, in her first act to temper Petruchio she refuses to leave her barricaded bedroom and give in to his sexual demands. When he loses his temper, calling all women "flayed cats" (1.3.250) with "no souls" (1.3.260), a common antifeminine argument for

female inferiority,[99] Maria counters that women are

> for men to wonder at,
> But too divine to handle. We are gold
> In our own natures pure, but when we suffer
> The husband's stamp upon us, then allays,
> And base ones, of you men are mingled with us,
> And make us blush like copper. (1.3.253-258)

Echoing pro-women writing, Maria sees women as elementally superior to men. Women are "gold," men, "base" metal. Whereas alchemists sought to convert base metal into gold as an elemental manifestation of the process of spiritual conversion,[100] Maria claims that marriage enacts the opposite process for women: gold women become less valuable when mingled with the base metal of men. In this analogy, men's actions make women appear less than they are, so that the blushes engendered by their husbands make their golden selves appear like the lesser metal of "copper." Maria's assertions that women are made to be "wonder[ed] at" and are "too divine to handle" again evoke the language of the feminine occult that sought to depict women as celestial handmaidens of God. Maria, it seems, subscribes to this ideology.

In her proclamation that she will "wrought a miracle upon [Petruchio]," Maria, like Spurcock in *The London Prodigal*, situates Petruchio's taming as a divine, godly act. In her confidence that she can procure such a miracle, the play alludes to the close relationship between women and God. As Maria herself insists, women are "divine" (1.3.254). Words such as "wrought" and "upon" indicate that this is something Maria does *to* Petruchio; she has the

---

[99]See Sarah E. Johnson, *Staging Women and the Soul-Body Dynamic* and "'A spirit to resist' and Female Eloquence in *The Tamer Tamed*," *Shakespeare* 7, no. 4 (2011): 310-324.

[100]See Shoulson, *Fictions of Conversion,* 13-14.

agency within this scenario, and she is in control. If Petruchio is to be converted, it will happen by Maria's hands. To do so, she will turn herself into the kind of tempest that the men fear Petruchio to be:

> I am no more the gentle, tame Maria;
> Mistake me not, I have a new soul in me
> Made of a north wind, nothing but tempest,
> And like a tempest shall it make all ruins
> Till I have run my will out. (1.2.75-79)

In her description of her new, tempestuous self, Maria employs the language of conversion—"I have a new soul"—to emphasize this change, foreshadowing the major conversional acts to come. When Livia, confused and dismayed by this seeming change in her previously gentle sister, suggests Maria go obediently to await her husband in their bed, Maria responds:

> There is a fellow
> Must yet before I know that heat – ne'er start, wench –
> Be made a man, for yet he is a monster (1.2.102-04)

Just as Maria has transformed herself from "gentle" and "tame," to "made of a north wind," she seeks to transform Petruchio in the opposite direction, from "monster" into "man." Maria's insistence that he will "[b]e made" this way emphasizes Maria's role as the convertor, the agent and procurer of such a change.

Maria's characterization of Petruchio as a "monster" recalls Tranio's earlier claim that Petruchio is a "dragon" (1.1.8), and both descriptors indicate that Petruchio's behavior operates outside the bounds of accepted human codes of conduct. Such a transformation—from monster into man—stresses Petruchio's conversion as a domesticating process, drawing upon the belief

that "womens society hath made civill the moste outragious condition of me[n]."[101] By civilizing the monster before she will bed him, Maria is conceiving of her marriage, as Gouge says, as a "kind of publike action," as she readies Petruchio for the task of increasing and continuing the "Church and common-wealth."[102] "Never unlock the treasure of my womb / For human fruit to make it capable" (1.2.108-109), she prays to Lucina, the goddess of childbirth, "Till I have made him easy as a child" (1.2.114). Even though Livia thinks this task is impossible, declaring that "'Tis with a sieve to scoop the ocean, as / To tame Petruchio" (1.2.106-07), Maria insists that she will "Turn him, and bend him as I list, and mould him / Into a babe again" (1.2.173-74). Her use of the verb "turn" in this context situates this as an act of conversion, just as Luce sought to "turn" Matthew toward her. Maria's desire to make Petruchio "easy as a child" or to "mould him / Into a babe again" gestures toward the responsibility and power mothers were believed to have to spiritually shape their children. In seeking to render Petruchio like a child, Maria imagines herself exerting this shaping influence over him. Later in the play, Maria again acknowledges the responsibility and ability women have to mold their domestic networks. When Petruchio claims that he expects her to have a care for his and their family's reputations, Maria responds:

> MARIA. That's in my making.
>
> PETRUCHIO. Tis true, it is so.
>
> MARIA. Yes it is, Petruchio,
>
> For there was never man without our moulding,
>
> Without our stamp upon him. (3.2.157-60)

[101]Gibson, *A Womans Woorth*, 33.

[102]Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, 204.

Here, Maria insists that all men are shaped by the women who surround them, that women leave their "stamp" on the men with which they associate. While such immense power is threatening in its potential to corrupt men, it also has, as in the cases of Luce and Matthew or Maria and Petruchio, the ability to reform them.

When Petruchio and Maria finally see each other after the wedding, him down below at the party, her above, barricaded in her room, she reveals her plans to him. "I'll make you know and fear a wife, Petruchio," she declares, "There lies my cause" (1.3.276-77). Her plan to make Petruchio "know a wife" echoes Luce's desire to be known by Matthew. While Maria withholds sex—one interpretation of "knowing"—she seems to want Petruchio to "know" her much in the way of Paul. To look at each other face-to-face, in "fellowship" (1.2.40), rather than in Petruchio's usual position of authority and superiority as a "woman-tamer" and "wife-breaker" (1.3.278-79). Her desire for Petruchio to "fear" a wife, however, perhaps requires more parsing. It does not seem that Maria wants Petruchio to be physically afraid of her in the way that Petruchio has garnered a "feared name" (1.3.279) among women for his violent temper and tyrannical nature. Rather, it seems here that Maria calls upon the use "to fear" in a more divine context, "fearing" as "regarding with reverence and awe" often used to refer to how one might "fear God."[103] By wanting Petruchio to not only "know" a wife but "fear" one, in conjunction with Maria's confidence that she can tame Petruchio, Maria alludes to the great power she believes wives have over their husbands. If Petruchio does not believe in or respect that power, Maria will demonstrate it for him.

What follows is a war between Maria and Petruchio in which the sides are drawn along gender lines, as the play employs marital language to literalize the battle of the wills between the

[103]"fear, v.". OED Online. December 2021. Oxford University Press.

sexes. This fighting, however, is not just any battle, but characterized as a religious war. As Petronius refers to it, the women's position is their "doctrine" (2.5.79), and he sees them as "catechiser[s]" who attempt to convert all other women to their cause. Quite successfully too, as by the play's second act, women come from both the country and the city to help Maria fight (2.5.82). Early on, Livia joins the women's cause, declaring that the "little faith I have in husbands" has been replaced by "the great zeal I bear your cause" (2.1.75-76). In citing her previous feelings about marriage as a "faith," Livia models for the audience that this is a battle not just between men and women, but between two opposing faiths or doctrines: Maria's belief in marriage as gender parity and fellowship on the one side; Petruchio's belief in marriage as total wifely obedience on the other. Romantic faithfulness and spiritual faith become conflated. Thus, when Roland believes that Livia has betrayed him, his insistence that he will never love again because "worship[ing]" love and women makes you a "slave" (3.1.26), for example, leads Tranio to remark "That's a new doctrine" (3.1.29). Roland invokes Eve and asks Tranio if "woman ever had a faith / After she had eaten?" and rails against "faithless women" (2.2.8), signifying not only his belief that Livia has been sexually unfaithful, but that she is without faith in the spiritual sense.

Through the religious underpinnings of Maria's mission, the space of the women's chamber and cause itself begin to take on sacred dimensions. When Livia attempts to enter the room, claiming to have converted to the cause after having been previously on the men's side, Bianca admonishes:

> If ye be false, repent, go home, and pray,
> And to the serious women of the city
> Confess yourself; bring not a sin so heinous

To load thy soul to this place. (2.1.84-87)

Bianca fears that Livia might be a false convert. Her suggestions that Livia "repent" and "pray" cast this battle as a spiritual as well as sexual conflict. In Bianca's logic, "women of the city" become priests, authorities who are now working to promote and manifest Maria's doctrine across London. For Bianca, siding with the men is "a sin so heinous," a betrayal not only of Maria, but of the cause itself. Such a sin, she asserts, cannot enter the woman's chamber without contaminating it. As Maria notes, the women's chamber is "sought by soundness" (2.1.112), a word which simultaneously signifies both freedom from weakness and religious conviction.[104] Petruchio himself twice notes that Maria is incredibly persuasive in the ways that she preaches her doctrine. He first remarks that she would make "a most rare Jesuit" (4.1.54) in her ability to rhetorically twist every word and situation to fit her creed, and then later asks Sophocles:

PETRUCHIO. What would this woman do, if she were suffered,

Upon a new religion?

SOPHOCLES. Make us pagans. (4.4.166-67)

Here, Petruchio and Sophocles remark upon the incredible persuasive power that Maria holds, noting that if she wanted to create a "new religion" the men would be helpless not to follow her, thus becoming "pagans." Sophocles use of "make us" suggests that they would have little agency in the choice.

By the end of Act 2, Petruchio decides to parlay with Maria, giving in to her first set of demands for "liberty and clothes" (2.5.137) and Livia's freedom from marriage for a month. In describing his surrender to Maria, he employs the vocabulary of conversion, telling everyone that "If nothing but repentance and undoing / Can win her love, I'll make a shift for one" (2.5.150-

[104]Munro, *The Tamer Tamed*, 59.

51). Calling upon the concepts of "repentance"—the returning of a sinner to God—and "undoing"—here referencing leaving behind his wife-breaking ways—Petruchio says he will do both if it means he can be with Maria. In the closing lines of Act 2, however, Petruchio ominously reveals to the audience that this is a false conversion. Instead, he reaffirms that "[e]ither I break, or this stiff plant must bow" (2.5.174). Maria, wise to Petruchio's tricks, tests this supposed reformation in Act 3. "A bravery dwells in his blood yet of abusing / His first good wife," she tells Sophocles, "he's sooner fire than powder" (3.2.167-68). She is immediately proven right when Petruchio's temper explodes, as he blusters, "Thou disobedient, weak, vainglorious woman, / Were I but half so wilful as thou spiteful, / I should now drag thee to thy duty" (3.2.173-75).

Petruchio's continued threats of marital rape and physical violence prove to Maria that, even though he may act out conversion well, he has yet to be reformed. He is still the same old Petruchio. Maria threatens him back, not with physical violence, as Katherina did in *The Taming of the Shrew*, but by withholding her love:

> I defy you,
> And my last loving tears, farewell. The first stroke,
> The very first you give me, if you dare strike –
> Try me, and you shall find it so – forever,
> Never to be recalled (I know you love me,
> Mad till you have enjoyed me), do I turn
> Utterly from you (4.1.142-148)

As the play has continually used the language of "turning" to connote conversion, Maria's insistence that, should Petruchio hurt her, she will "turn utterly" from him gives this moment

larger stakes. Throughout the play, Maria has attempted to create fellowship with Petruchio; she wants him to "know" her, just as she "knows" him. She wants them to be, in the words of Paul, face-to-face. But here, she reveals the line she will not cross: spousal abuse. Should Petruchio use violence against her, she will no longer seek that kind of companionate marriage with him but turn away from him "utterly."

Where Petruchio threatens violence as a means to try and break Maria down, she uses her wifeliness to tame him. Under the cover of perfect obedience, love, and faithfulness, Maria disrupts each of Petruchio's planned tricks to subdue her. First, Petruchio claims that he is ill in order to make her sympathetic to him. In response, Maria claims he has the plague and walls him up inside. When he furiously emerges, she feigns confusion, insisting that she only sought to provide for his care. Next, Petruchio decides he will pretend to abandon Maria on a long sea voyage; acting the ever-faithful wife, however, Maria wishes him well on his journey. Telling him that "I love ye" (4.4.145), Maria insists that she will not resort to "weakly…weep[ing] your loss" or "hang[ing] about your neck" (4.4.143-144)—the reactions Petruchio hopes to foster—because she only wants what is best for him. "Go worthy man," she says, "and bring home understanding" (4.4.153). She will be his "glad Penelope" (4.4.173), patiently and faithfully awaiting his return, as she "commit[s] [his] reformation" (4.4.227) to the new knowledge she pretends he will gain on this imaginary journey. In each case, by acting the perfect wife, Maria leaves no room for anyone to critique her behaviors, even as she frustrates Petruchio's every attempt to force her into submission. Her "smooth file of wifedom" so disrupts Petruchio's *modus operandi* that he has no choice but to take extreme action, faking his own death in a last-ditch effort to upset Maria.[105]

[105]Darcie, *The Honour of Ladies*, 3.

In the final scene of *The Tamer Tamed*, Petruchio lies in a coffin, as everyone arrives in mourning attire to grieve his death-by-wife. “There lies your husband, there your loving husband,” Petronius admonishes Maria, “Your stubborn and unworthy way has killed him” (5.4.2-3). But if Maria’s actions have killed Petruchio, they also have the power to “resurrect” him. In a eulogy befitting the infamous “wife-breaker,” Maria finally weeps. But she weeps not out of sadness for Petruchio’s supposed death, but the sorry state of his life. Bemoaning his “poor, unmanly, wretched, foolish life” (5.4.20), Maria laments:

> To think what this man was, to think how simple,
> How far below a man, how far from reason,
> From common understanding, and all gentry
> While he was living here he walked amongst us.
> He had a happy turn he died. I’ll tell ye,
> These are the wants I weep for, not his person. (5.4.22-28)

Her words seem to shock everyone, especially Petruchio. Rising from his coffin, he cries out “Oh, Maria! / Oh, my unhappiness, my misery!” (5.4.40-41) and “Why, why, Maria!” (5.4.42). Something in the player’s performance must here cue Petruchio’s transformation, as Maria takes his exclamation as a sign of his conversion. As she tells him,

> Forgive me;
> From this hour make me what you please. I have tamed ye,
> And now am vowed your servant. Look not strangely,
> Nor fear what I say to you. Dare you kiss me?
> Thus I begin my new love. (5.4.44-49)

Having achieved her aim, Maria recommits to her role as a wife, her husband's "servant." While Maria's vow to Petruchio problematizes feminist readings of the text that attempt to claim Maria has been advocating for female liberty all along, her easy return to wifely obedience here makes far more sense when we understand that her aim has been different: to convert Petruchio into a better husband. The eponymous "woman's prize" of the lesser-known title, it would appear, is not a feminist overthrow of patriarchal marriage, but simply a reformed husband. In response to Maria's voiced commitment to him, Petruchio confirms that he too has changed:

> PETRUCHIO. Never no more your old tricks?
>
> MARIA. Never, sir.
>
> PETRUCHIO. You shall not need, for, as I have a faith,
>
> No cause shall give occasion.
>
> MARIA. As I am honest,
>
> And as I am a maid yet, all my life,
>
> From this hour, since you make so free profession,
>
> I dedicate in service to your pleasure. (5.4.52-57)

Petruchio's insistence that Maria will no longer need these taming tricks because he now has "faith" and therefore will not ever resort to his former behavior casts this moment as Petruchio's conversion. He has been brought over to Maria's doctrine and exclaims:

> I am born again!
>
> Well, little England, when I see a husband
>
> Of any other nation stern or jealous,
>
> I'll wish him but a woman of thy breeding (5.4.60-63)

Petruchio's declaration that he "is born again" further emphasizes this as a moment of conversion, a spiritual rebirth. He even goes so far as to suggest that he will begin preaching this new doctrine to men of other nations who behave like him, hoping that they will end up with "a woman of thy breeding," a good, faithful English woman who can turn them to the right path.

Both *The London Prodigal* and *The Tamer Tamed* wed together the satirical view of the transactional nature of marriage and sex—staples of city comedy—with the transformational potential of both of those same acts. City comedies like *The London Prodigal* and *The Tamer Tamed* thus add to our discussion of women and conversion a means for redeeming the feminine occult by illustrating its redemptive capacity. An undercurrent in both plays, however, is also an exploration of how the emotional transformation necessary for conversion could be aided by faked death and performed resurrection—both Luce and Petruchio do this. The emotional responses that these resurrection motifs engender attest to the conversional possibilities of theatrical play itself. In my next chapter, I turn to two Shakespearean comedies, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Winter's Tale*, to consider how Shakespeare weaves together the feminine occult, theatrical performance, and spiritual reformation.

CHAPTER THREE

Staging Conversion in Shakespeare's Resurrection Comedies

"[Plays] are the Cuppes of Circes, that turne reasonable Creatures into brute Beastes."
–Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579)[1]

"There's magic in thy majesty, which has / My evils conjured to remembrance"
–The Winter's Tale (5.3.39-40)[2]

It may seem absurd to suggest that Shakespeare had anything in common with Stephen Gosson, one of the period's most virulent antitheatricalists. And yet, in their own ways, both men acknowledged the early modern theatre's capacity to engender spiritual conversions and portrayed that potential through the imagery of the feminine occult. For Gosson and his ilk, as I will demonstrate in the first section of this chapter, these conversions took the form of the kind of devilish temptations outlined in Chapter One. The theatre could stimulate satanic conversions and was portrayed as akin to a witches' coven by antitheatricalists. Shakespeare similarly recognized the theatre as a conversional space, but, across his plays, modeled the moral reformations made possible by witnessing playacting. This chapter extends our understanding of how Shakespeare stages conversion by focusing on the intersection between the occult woman, conversion, and theatre as both an art form and cultural institution in *Much Ado About Nothing* (ca.1598-99) and *The Winter's Tale* (ca. 1610-11). In both plays, female characters—and men's assumptions and desires surrounding women—drive Shakespeare's visions of spiritual conversion, combining the antifeminine belief in inherent female sinfulness discussed in Chapter One with the redemptive possibilities of heteronormative desire explored in Chapter Two.

---

[1]Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse Conteining a Plesaunt Invective Against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Jesters* (London, 1579), sig. 2v.

[2]All citations come from *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. Sheldon P. Zitner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) and *The Winter's Tale*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Yet, Shakespeare further complicates these depictions of conversion by emphasizing their dependence on theatricality and playacting. *Much Ado* and *The Winter's Tale* yoke together the conversional capital of the feminine occult with the ongoing debate between players, playwrights, and antitheatricalists about the early modern playhouse's—and, more broadly, performance's—ability to convert or pervert spectators. As the first section of this chapter demonstrates, antitheatrical tracts collapsed anxieties surrounding the often feminized supernatural with their fear of the satanic, contagious, and effeminizing power of plays. The theatre was charged with inflaming harmful lust, celebrating cuckoldry, bewitching, infecting, and harming spectators, and delivering souls to Satan—all accusations that also haunted discourses around women's power to convert men. This chapter argues that by weaving the feminine occult into scenes of play-acting, *Much Ado* and *The Winter's Tale* disrupt the derogatory assumptions surrounding women and the theatre, instead offering models of how both work together to invite conversion.

The antitheatricalist argument against the public stage was predicated on the assumption that all human beings were porous and thus easily corruptible, drawing upon ideas of human impressionability heard at the pulpit. Lieke Stelling notes that as Calvinism gained traction in England, "Protestant preachers…play[ed] down the role of free will in conversion, and possibly even den[ied] human agency in conversion altogether."[3] Plays like *The London Prodigal* and *The Tamer Tamed* seem to take up this idea, showing how the power of the feminine occult could overtake individual will, albeit in more holy ways than the diabolic temptations of witchy women. Luce, we might recall, "infused / Another soul" (*LP* 5.1, sig. G3r) in Matthew, language which suggests that she overpowered him. Maria too "wrought a miracle upon [Petruchio]" (*TT*

[3]Stelling, *Religious Conversion*, 46.

1.2.69), the preposition serving to stress his relative powerlessness against her. In both plays, the individual agency of the conversional subject is lessened in favor of asserting the wife's miraculous conversional powers. These conversions happened *to* Matthew and Petruchio, and, frankly, in spite of their best efforts to tame their wives.

Shakespeare takes a more nuanced approach to the conversional potential of the feminine occult, underscoring the role that individual subjects and human personhood play in conversion. Plays such as *Much Ado* and *The Winter's Tale* reveal a sustained dramatic interest in exploring the agency of the human subject in the face of an overwhelming cultural movement that largely erased it. In Shakespeare's worlds of Messina and Sicilia, the persuasive natures of women and the theatre may invite conversion, but the onuses for apostasy and redemption fall to each individual man, evidenced by the varying successes of each play's conversions. While Benedick initially refuses to marry because he distrusts women and fears cuckoldry, his friends' playacting invites Benedick to view Beatrice and the institution of marriage in newly desirable lights, and Benedick wills himself to fall in love with Beatrice, actively participating in his own conversion by performing the cultural scripts of the lover. However, Claudio's own biases leave him susceptible to Don John's tricks, and Claudio's repentance is left uncertain, despite the Friar's plot to redeem him. In *The Winter's Tale*, misogynistic fervor fuels Leontes's apostasy, and both Leontes and Polixenes are quick to associate women with witchcraft, widely considered a communicable, and generally female, form of spiritual perversion. After the tragic deaths of his wife and son reveal his own tyranny and guilt, Leontes still requires sixteen years and the miracle of a moving statue of his late wife to awaken his faith.

Shakespeare's canon is politically, thematically, and structurally bound to religious conversion. As Helen Smith has surveyed, religious conversion touches nearly every one of

Shakespeare's plays.[4] In particular, the vast and remarkable body of criticism on conversion in *The Merchant of Venice* (1600) and *Othello* (1603) provides crucial foundations for the study of this topic across Shakespeare's works and especially the ways in which religious conversion brings forward questions about race and religious identity.[5] This chapter contends that *Much Ado* and *The Winter's Tale* are important additions to the category of Shakespearean conversion plays. These plays demonstrate how the occult, Christian misogyny, and the conversional power of theatre are crucial discourses that influence Shakespeare's interpretation of the conversion process. In female characters like Beatrice, Hero, Paulina, and Hermione, Shakespeare locates the supernatural and spiritually regenerative powers conventionally associated with conversion, a

[4]Helen Smith, "Grace and Conversion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Religion*, ed. Hannibal Hamlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 84-100.

[5]It would be impossible to provide an exhaustive list on the subject of conversion in these two plays. However, some of the most foundational works about conversion in *The Merchant of Venice* include, Kim Hall, "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? Colonisation and Miscegenation in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Renaissance Drama* 23 (1992): 87-111; James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Janet Adelman, "Her Father's Blood: Race, Conversion, and Nation in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Representations* 81, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 4–30; Heather Hirschfeld, "'We All Expect a Gentle Answer, Jew': *The Merchant of Venice* and the Psychotheology of Conversion," *ELH* 73, no. 1 (2006): 61–81; M. Lindsay Kaplan, "Jessica's Mother: Medieval Constructions of Jewish Race and Gender in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2007): 1–30; Michelle Ephraim, *Reading the Jewish Woman on the Elizabethan Stage* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Lara Bovilsky, ""A Gentle and No Jew": Jessica, Portia, and Jewish Identity," *Renaissance Drama* 38 (2010): 46-76; Gorman Beauchamp, "Shylock's Conversion," *Humanitas* 24 no. 1-2 (2011): 55-92; Efraim Sicher, "Daughteronomy: Conversion and Exchange in Early Modern England," in *The Jew's Daughter: A Cultural History of a Conversion Narrative* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), 91-124; Stelling, *Religious Conversion*, 124-141; Yachnin, "Shylock, Conversion, Toleration," 28-32.

For religious conversion in *Othello* see, Ana María Manzanas, "Conversion Narratives: *Othello* and Other Black Characters in Shakespeare's and Lope de Vega's Plays," *Sederi* 7 (1996): 231–36; Daniel Vitkus, "Turning Turk in *Othello*: The Conversion and Damnation of the Moor," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 145-176, and *Turning Turk*, 77-106; Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Burton, *Traffic and Turning*, 233-256; Matthew Dimmock, *New Turkes: Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2005); Julia Reinhard Lupton, "Othello Circumsised," in *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 103-124; Dennis Austin Britton, "Re-'Turning' *Othello*: Transformative and Restorative Romance," *ELH* 78, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 27-50 and *Becoming Christian*, 112-141; Degenhardt, *Islamic Conversion*, 32-72; Lieke Stelling, "'For Christian Shame': Othello's Fall and the Early Modern Conversion Play," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 25, no. 1 (2016): 19-31 and *Religious Conversion*, 142-154.

poetic association made possible because women were already considered supernatural and spiritually influential in early modern culture.

The complex depictions of spiritual conversion in these plays, especially *Much Ado*, have been largely overlooked. In one of the only essays that takes seriously the conversional language of the play, Helen Smith argues that Beatrice and Benedick are "converted not through their eyes, but through their ears" where "simply hearing that the other is in love with them is enough."[6] This chapter pivots from Smith's reading to draw attention to the deliberate craftiness and stage-managing of Don Pedro and his cohort's performative play-acting, which elevates that scene beyond the simple verbal exchanges that Benedick overhears. Jason Gleckman reads the conversion narratives in *Much Ado* and *The Winter's Tale* as examples of a post-Reformation Protestant paradigm that sees "eroticism as the primary means of conversion to God."[7] While Gleckman rightfully notes the sexual and gendered underpinnings in Benedick, Claudio, and Leontes's journeys from celibacy to marriage, my reading restores the crucial importance that the supernatural, medical, and spiritual understandings of women and the theatre play in each of these narratives. Taken together, the three sections of this chapter reveal that one of Shakespeare's greatest additions to the bustling enterprise of early modern conversion plays produced during this period was a self-reflexive critical focus on the theatre as a tool of spiritual conversion, most explicitly brought forward through stories that center occult women. The connections between the theatre and conversion are made explicit in the antitheatrical treatises of the early modern period, which interweave cultural anxieties about women, conversion, and the playhouse.

---

[6]Smith, "Grace and Conversion," 88.

[7]Jason Gleckman, *Shakespeare and Protestant Poetics* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 160.

Visiting that "Chappel of Satan": Antitheatricalism and Conversion

This section establishes the conversional anxieties that undergirded antitheatrical writing across this period, beginning with John Northbrooke's publication of *A Treatise Against Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine Playes Or Enterluds with Other Idle Pastimes* (1577) and ending with the closing of the public theatres in 1642.[8] The lively debates between antitheatrical writers and players used classical and patristic sources alongside anecdotal and personal examples to theorize and dissect public, university, and amateur theatre as tools of spiritual conversion or perversion. The conversion missions that drove antitheatrical pamphlets, tracts, and treatises had two major parts: 1) to prove to readers that the theatre wrought satanic conversions by detailing the playhouse's diabolic origins, abuses, and means of spiritual and sexual contamination; 2) to convert readers and players away from satanic playhouses and back toward God through direct appeals and personal conversion stories. The arguments put forward by the antitheatricalists thrived by denying spectators agency and free will within this process of conversion. They positioned the theatre as an infectious, bewitching, satanic monster against which individual resistance was futile—the only possible protection was to avoid contagion by not attending plays. To further amplify the threat playhouses posed to ordered, godly society and to the spectator's soul, antitheatricalists drew upon the vocabulary of the occult, and especially witchcraft, to make their cases, aligning playgoing with the apostasy and demonic manipulation

[8]The antitheatrical trend is taken up in Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 9-40; Howard, *Stage and Social Struggle*, 22-73; Bryan Reynolds, "The Devil's House, 'or Worse': Transversal Power and Antitheatrical Discourse in Early Modern England," *Theatre Journal* 49, no. 2 (May 1997): 143–67; David Hawkes, "Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in the Antitheatrical Controversy," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 39, no. 2 (Spring, 1999): 255-273; Anthony Dawson and Paul Yachnin, *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare's England: A Collaborative Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Alison Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2010), 30-78; Stelling, *Religious Conversion,* 51-56.

linked with witchcraft (see Chapter One). These writers also decried the sexual deviance they claimed the theatre celebrated and encouraged, with particular attention to how playgoing would easily overwhelm and corrupt the permeable bodies and, thus, spirits of both young and married women. Women playgoers, antitheatricalists argued, caused domestic anarchy and familial corruption. As Chapter One demonstrated, the corruptible, secretive female body and suspected sexual deviance appear frequently in tracts about witchcraft—the figures of the witch and the sexual temptress are inextricably entangled. The antitheatricalists' reliance upon these two antifeminine discourses demonstrates how thinking about occult women and the female body in relation to conversion translated across many different cultural spheres as a useful shorthand to aggrandize threats of spiritual perversion.

An extended study of these pamphlets and defenses reveals the fraught cultural atmosphere surrounding playacting that marked the period in which Shakespeare wrote, staged, and performed his plays.[9] As Paul Yachnin has noted, we must be careful not to overestimate the prevalence of the antitheatricalist argument within mainstream public opinion about the theatre.[10] There is no evidence that the governments of Elizabeth, James, or Charles—or the monarchs themselves—took seriously these writers' claims. Quite the opposite: William Prynne's vitriolic attacks against the theatre led him to lose his ears at the pillory, and he was branded as a

[9]There is a long critical tradition examining how Shakespeare's plays engage with antitheatrical discourse. See for example, Jyotsna Singh, "Renaissance Antitheatricality, Antifeminism, and Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Renaissance Drama* 20 (January 1989): 99–121; Grace Tiffany, "Anti-Theatricalism and Revolutionary Desire in *Hamlet* (Or, the Play without the Play)," *Upstart Crow* 15 (1995): 61–74; Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jennifer Waldron, "Gaping upon Plays: Shakespeare, Gosson, and the Reformation of Vision," *Critical Matrix* 12, no. 1–2 (2001): 44-77; Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theater in Renaissance England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Darryl Chalk and Mary Floyd-Wilson, eds., *Contagion and the Shakespearean Stage* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

[10]Yachnin, *The Culture of Playgoing*, 76.

seditious libeler, imprisoned, and fined.[11] Furthermore, as previously failed playwrights and actors, writers such as Stephen Gosson and Anthony Munday were intimately connected to the theatre they denounced, and acting companies deflated their attacks as sour grapes by reviving their poorly received plays as testaments to their hypocrisy.[12] However, despite its lack of meaningful political power, the antitheatricalist movement remains useful to the study of early modern theatre because it demonstrates how these writers brought other cultural anxieties to bear upon the theatre and play-acting. Yachnin reminds us that "the anti-theatricalists' key ideas, which included…the openness of the senses, the impressionability of the spectator, and the general plasticity of the person, had easy purchase on the culture as a whole."[13] I would add to this assertion that the antitheatricalist movement also speaks to the larger cultural moment in England through how antitheatrical writing adopted the structure of conversion narratives and the vocabulary of the femininized occult, inherent female sinfulness, and female bodily weakness to demonstrate the theatre's spiritual threats.

---

[11]Tanya Pollard, *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Sourcebook* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 279-280.

[12]Gosson was initially a playwright and actor of several unsuccessful plays, and theatre companies retaliated and attempted to discredit his publications by reviving these works. Gosson openly admits to his playwriting past in *The Schoole of Abuse* to demonstrate not only his authority to speak on the abuses of playing, but also to exhibit that it was possible for righteous theatrical practitioners to leave behind Satan's schoolhouse and return to the path of the godly. "I have sinned, and am sorry for my fault," Gosson confesses, "hee runnes farre that never turnes, better late then never" See, *Schoole of Abuse*, sig. 23v. Munday initially tried his hand at playwriting and clowning, but Pollard notes that he was "booed and hissed off the stage." Pollard, *Shakespeare's Theatre*, 62. Munday wrote *A Second and Third Blast* in the wake of this failure, narrativizing it as a conversion moment: "when it pleased God of his mercie to cal mee…I began to loath my former life, and to mislike my owne doings; and I was no sooner drawen with an hartie desire to returne unto the Lorde, but I found my selfe strengthened with his grace unto good desires." See Anthony Munday, *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters* (London, 1580), 51. Much to Gosson's disappointment, Munday eventually returned to the theatre and enjoyed a moderately successful playwriting career.

[13]Yachnin, *The Culture of Playgoing*, 76.

Reading *Much Ado* and *The Winter's Tale* within the context of these antitheatrical debates suggests that Shakespeare's marriage of occult women and playacting is not incidental, but a purposeful addition to this preexisting discourse. Shakespeare directly challenges many of the central tenets of the antitheatrical project in both plays as amateur play-acting combines with occult femininity to serve as necessary tools for spiritual reformation. Crucially, however, neither the theatre nor the occult woman has the ability to force such a transformation by overriding an individual's free will; in both plays, conversion requires the active and conscious participation of the human subject. *Much Ado* and *The Winter's Tale* restore to the process of conversion the human personhood denied by antitheatricalists, and, in doing so, rescue the theatre and the occult woman from the most virulent lines of attack against them.

Called the "nest of the Divel," "the chappel of Satan," and "the schoolhouse of Satan" by Munday, the "roote of Apostacy" by Gosson, "Sathan's Synagogue" by both Phillip Stubbes and John Greene, "the divels owne recreation" in William Crashaw's sermons, and the "very instinct, and Tutorship of the Devill" by William Prynne, the early modern theatre was regularly condemned by antitheatricalists as one of Satan's key tools in his plot to overthrow God and the English Commonwealth.[14] Michael Questier and Peter Lake suggest this satanic rhetoric emerged as a result of anxiety about the permanence of the Reformation, in which the theatre was feared to be "part of a literally diabolic plot to win back ground lost to the cause of true

[14]Munday, *A Second and Third Blast*, sig. A2v, 90, 92; Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions Proving that they are Not to be Suffred in a Christian Common Weale* (London, 1582), sig. G8v; Phillip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses* (London, 1583), sig. L7v; John Greene, *A Refutation of the Apology for Actors* (London, 1615), 57; William Crashaw, *The Sermon Preached at the Crosse, Feb. Xiiii. 1607.* (London, 1608), 170; William Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix. the Players Scourge, Or Actors Tragœdie* (London, 1633), 17.

religion during the reformation."[15] But many antitheatrical writers reached back beyond the Reformation, arguing that the initial creation of the theatre was itself a satanic ploy. Northbrooke, Gosson, and Greene, for example, claimed that the Devil invented stage-plays solely to aid his nefarious plot to steal souls. Referring to the teachings of the church father John Chrysostom, Northbrooke proclaims that "the Devill found oute Stage playes first, and [they] were invented by his crafte and policie…the Divell builded Stages in cities."[16] The agency assigned to the Devil, the sole arbiter and grand designer of the theatrical tradition, is echoed by Gosson in *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (1582). "Stage Plays are the doctrine and invention of the Devill," writes Gosson, where the Devil created comedy in order to "drag such a monstrous taile after them, as is able to sweep whole Cities into his lap."[17] Both Northbrooke and Gosson's visions of this demonically constructed theatre emphasize its ability to recruit and corrupt on a mass scale—with one sweep of a theatrical tail, the Devil could possess London. Such an image negates the role each spectator might play in their own corruption—satanic perversion is rendered not as the result of individual human choices, but as a spiritual attack from a larger-than-life supernatural monster. In *A Refutation of the Apology for Actors* (1615), Greene draws the reader's attention to the playwright's role in this diabolic plot, writing that the Devil created plays "by his heathenish agents, first the Idolatrous *Greekes* and after the pagane *Romaines*, and at present by his Ministers, the almost-heathenish Poets."[18] Greene's description of historical and

---

[15]Michael Questier and Peter Lake, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 428.

[16]John Northbrooke, *A treatise wherein dicing, dau[n]cing, vaine plaies or enterludes with other idle pastimes, &c. commonly used on the Sabboth day, are reprooved* (London, 1579), 71.

[17]Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions*, sig. B4r; sig. B6r-B6v.

[18]Greene, *A Refutation of the Apology for Actors*, 54.

contemporary poets as the Devil's "heathenish agents" and "Ministers" not only reinforces the common antitheatrical belief that, through plays, actors preached Satan's doctrine, but also aligns playwrights and actors with another popular type of demonic agent—the witch.

Antitheatrical discourse about these satanic recruitment missions seized upon the gendered vocabulary of witchcraft to emphasize the perversity and danger of playhouses.[19] In *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579), Gosson famously correlates playgoing with Odysseus's encounter with the mythological enchantress Circe, writing that plays are "the Cuppes of *Circes,* that turne reasonable Creatures into brute Beastes."[20] Gosson's allusion is particularly relevant to an understanding of how the antitheatricalist project exploited the feminine occult to align playgoing with a very specific kind of spiritual threat. At its most basic level, the metaphor equates playgoing with drinking from Circe's cups—plays are a bewitchment that override individual personhood and rationality, leaving spectators like beasts who will then give in to baser impulses. Yet by naming Circe, Gosson also brings forward the gendered underpinnings of such a comparison: players are akin to the predatory female witch who entraps and debases virtuous men through both magical knowledge and the lust that she arouses. By the early modern period, the figure of Circe connoted not only female witchcraft, but exaggerated, dangerous female sexuality.[21] Geffrey Whitney's *A Choice of Emblemes* 82 (1586), entitled *Homines*

---

[19]These connections are also attended to in Richard Grinnell, "The Witch, the Transvestite, and the Actor: Destabilizing Gender and the Renaissance Stage," *Studies in the Humanities* 23, no. 2 (1996): 163–84 and Kirstie Gulick Rosenfield, "Nursing Nothing: Witchcraft and Female Sexuality in *The Winter's Tale*" *Mosaic* 35, no. 1 (2002): 95–112.

[20]Gosson, *School of Abuse*, sig. 2v.

[21]Circe also became aligned with the figure of the prostitute. Kathryn DeZur has shown how this tradition builds upon Horace's commentary on Circe as a "whorish mistress" and Ovid's depiction of her in *Metamorphosis*, Book XIV; see *Gender, Interpretation, and Political Rule in Sidney's* Arcadia (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013), xxii.

voluptatibus transformantur [Men are transformed by pleasures], rewrites the Circe episode from the *Odyssey* into a short moral warning by suggesting that the transformed men do not desire to be returned to their human states, as "they had rather CIRCES serve, and burne in theire desire / Then, love the onelie crosse, that clogges the worlde with care, / Oh stoppe your eares, and shutte your eies, of CIRCES cuppes beware."[22] Whitney, like Gosson, recasts Circe's story to render it about conversion—men are persuaded by witchcraft and sexual pleasure to turn from Christ. While Whitney uses the story as a commonplace warning against licentiousness and women, Gosson's metaphor brings this cultural weight to bear against the theatre, encapsulating how the feminine occult—and the sexual connotations it amassed in antifeminine discourses—were reproduced by antitheatrical writers to serve their larger project against playhouses. Gosson further reinforces these connections between women, witchcraft, and the playhouse when he compares attending the theatre with women "run[ning] unto Witchcrafte" to solve their problems.[23] Gosson's *Short Apologie of the Schoole of Abuse* (1579) assigns damning womanly occult power to theatrical practitioners, arguing that playwrights themselves perform witchery when they "bewitch the reader with bawdie charmes," and talented players "inchant" spectators "by their pleasant action of body, & sweete numbers flowing in verse."[24] This connection between players and the figure of the female enchantress was further amplified by the cross-dressed nature of the playhouse, where male players appeared as women and convincingly performed female-coded cultural scripts—"bawdie charmes" and "pleasant action of the body"

---

[22]Geffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes, and Other Devises* (Leiden, 1586), 82.

[23]Gosson, *Schoole of Abuse*, 43v.

[24]Stephen Gosson, *The ephemerides of Phialo devided into three books. […] And a short apologie of the Schoole of abuse, against poets, pipers, players, [et] their excusers* (London, 1579), sig. 84r, 87v.

refer to acting generally, but also gesture toward cross-dressed actors as witchy female-presenting seductresses.

In *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters* (1580), a response to the first blast published by Gosson a year earlier, Munday warns of the observable conversional impact he has witnessed in playgoers: "[m]anie of nature honest, and tractable, have bene altered by those showes and spectacles, and become monsterous."[25] This "monsterous" transformation stemmed from impressionable spectators not only absorbing sin and vice through their eyes and ears, but actively imitating it. After remarking on the danger of plays that "counterfet witchcraft" or show the use of charms and potions designed to overpower men's wills, Munday shares an anecdote in which a jealous wife "did practice with a sorceresse to have some powder, which might have force to renew her husbandes wonted goodwill towardes her."[26] Munday's example, though simply inserted without further commentary in the tract, connects playgoing to witchcraft on two levels: on the one hand, it suggests that playgoing can inspire women to seek out witchcraft; yet, crucially, it also implies that the results of witchcraft—men losing their rational minds and agency, forced "to like even those whome of themselves abhor"—are reproduced by the theatre. In other words, Munday argues, in a similar vein to Gosson, that the theatre, like women using witchcraft to sexually control their husbands, bewitches spectators, erasing their individual agency so that they may behave in ways contrary to their personal beliefs.[27] In *Th'Overthrow of Stage-Playes* (1599), Rainolds explicitly warns his readers that they may be the victims of witchcraft: "if thou have bene bewitched…see whether th'advised perusall of this

[25]Munday, *A Second and Third Blast*, 93.

[26]Munday, *A Second and Third Blast*, 100-101.

[27]Munday, *A Second and Third Blast*, 101.

excellent treatise may happely by Gods mercy unwitch thee againe."[28] Rainolds division of spectators into binary states of being, "bewitched" and "unwitched," gives his treatise an explicit conversional trajectory—not only does he imply that all who have attended the theatre are currently bewitched, he also markets his own work as a curative.

By proclaiming the theatre as a satanic tool and a parallel to witchcraft, antitheatrical writers directly connected playgoing and playacting to religious conversion. They asserted that playwriting, playing, and spectating were all acts of apostasy—an active turning away from God and toward Satan. Stubbes writes in *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583) that plays "are quite contrarie to the Word of grace, and sucked out of the Devills teates, to nourish us in ydolatrie hethenrie, and sinne."[29] Stubbes's image of satanic breastfeeding perhaps most obviously emphasizes the feminized nature of the occult language antitheatricalists adopted. Rather than positioning theatre as a devilish ruse or manipulation, Stubbes claims that plays are literally sourced from the Devil's body—a demonic subversion of a mother's role to provide life-giving breastmilk to her children. The image of players sucking creative material from the Devil's teat also recalls claims that witches themselves performed deviant sexual acts on the Devil's body—including sucking and being sucked from various teats—to solidify a demonic pact, signal their allegiance, and gain and nourish power.

By associating theatrical writing, playing, and spectating with witchcraft, antitheatrical writers significantly amplified the potential threats of the theatre and emphasized the gendered entanglement of the occult with theatricality. As I argued in Chapter One, witchcraft was viewed

---

[28]John Rainolds, *Th'Overthrow of Stage-Playes, by the Way of Controversie Betwixt D. Gager and D. Rainoldes Wherein all the Reasons that can be made for them are Notably Refuted* (Middelburg, 1599), "The Printer to the Reader," n.p.

[29]Stubbes, *Anatomie of Abuses*, sig. L6r.

as one of the vilest sins, a permanent and communicable form of spiritual perversion in which re-conversion and rehabilitation were widely considered impossible. Using the cultural vocabulary of witchcraft—"Circe," "running unto Witchrafte," "bewitch," "unwitch," "sucked out of the Devill's teate," "inthrall"—invited readers to interpret theatergoing as a parallel to practicing witchery. Theatergoing became an act that emphasized the epitome of a corrupted soul, resulting in permanent exile from God's favor and signaling allegiance to Satan. Plays were bewitchments through which individual subjects lost control over their own minds and bodies.

Antitheatricalists claimed that the theatre was uniquely positioned to bewitch and infect spectators because it engaged the mind through a combination of visual and auditory displays which in turn aroused emotions—a bodily invasion that corrupted the spirit. For most antitheatricalists, the more pressing and prevalent anxieties stemmed from the stage's sexual perversions that infected even the most chaste of playgoers. Such perverse displays were especially dangerous for women, who, as the more impressionable sex, could become contaminated by the playhouse and then, just as with the taint of witchcraft, spread that contagion through their domestic networks. Northbrooke calls plays the "the instrumentes and armour of Venus and Cupide" where wives learn to "deceyve [their] husbandes, or husbandes their wyves, howe to playe the harlottes, to obtayne ones love, howe to ravishe, howe to beguyle."[30] This type of knowledge is particularly risky for women, who Northbrooke notes are "muche infected with th[e] vice" of curiosity, and whose presence in the playhouse not only renders them potential objects of others' sexual desire, but also instructs women how to be desiring subjects themselves.[31] This leads Northbrooke to claim that, through playgoing, "folks

[30]Northbrooke, *A Treatise*, 67.

[31]Northbrooke, *A Treatise*, 68.

myndes be enticed and snared, and especially the women, on whome pleasure hath sorest dominion."[32] Gosson claims that watching players fall in love onstage can "whet desire too inordinate lust," in women, warning in his section dedicated to "The Gentlewoman Citizens of London" that being "weake," "go[ing] to theaters to se sport, *Cupid* may catche you ere you departe."[33] Munday writes that "it is a miracle, if there be found anie either woman, or maide, which with these spectacles of strange lust is not oftentimes inflamed even unto furie."[34]

Antitheatrical and antifeminine discourses come together in the misogyny and transmisogyny that undergirds many of these tracts. Because women's humors and penetrable bodies were believed to leave them more sensitive to spiritual perversion and satanic plots, antitheatrical writers primarily used women-centric anecdotes to warn of the perilous corruption that awaited good housewives, chaste maidens, and their families at the playhouse. Munday warns:

> Some citizens wives, upon whom the Lord for ensample to others hath laide his hands, have even on their death beds with teares confessed, that they have received at those spectacles such filthie infections, as have turned their minds from chast cogitations, and made them of honest women light huswives; by them they have dishonored the vessels of holines; and brought their husbandes into contempt, their children into question, their bodies into sicknes, and their soules to the state of everlasting damnation… there can be found out no stronger engine

[32]Northbrooke, *A Treatise*, 132.

[33]Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse*, sig. 14r, Fv, 42v.

[34]Munday, *A Second and Third Blast*, 100.

> to batter the honestie as wel of wedded wives, as the chastitie of unmarried maides and widowes, than are the hearing of common plaies.[35]

Plays, then, were positioned like witchcraft as another threat to the patriarchal domestic order. While young women learned to trick their fathers and woo and beguile suitors, wives who became infected and inflamed by stage plays made cuckolds of their husbands and brought the legitimacy of their children into question. Theatrical defenders also drew upon antifeminine discourse and employed women-centric examples to argue that the theatre was a useful mechanism for revealing the hidden crimes and sins of women. Thomas Heywood's *An Apology for Actors* (1612) uses one such anecdote to argue for the social good the theatre can provide:

> At *Lin* in *Norfolke,* the then Earle of *Sussex* players acting the old History of Fryer *Francis,* & presenting a woman, who insatiately doting on a yong gentleman, had (the more securely to enjoy his affection) mischievously and seceretly murdered her husband, whose ghost haunted her…As this was acted, a townes-woman (till then of good estimation and report) finding her conscience…extremely troubled, suddenly skritched and cryd out Oh my husband, my husband! I see the ghost of my husband fiercely threatning and menacing me. At which shrill and unexpected out-cry, the people about her, moov'd to a strange amazement, inquired the reason of her clamour, when presently un-urged, she told them, that seven yeares ago, she, to be possest of such a Gentleman (meaning him) had poysoned her husband, whose fearefull image personated it selfe in the shape of that ghost: whereupon the murdresse was

[35]Munday, *A Second and Third Blast*, 53-54.

> apprehended, before the Justices further examined, & by her voluntary confession after condemned.[36]

Undergirding Heywood's argument is the same understanding of women and the female body that led Northbrooke, Gosson, and Munday to warn women away from the theatre. Here, however, Heywood repositions women's porousness and uncontrollable emotional responses as positive reasons to encourage women to attend the theatre: rather than plays teaching women to perform secret crimes against men, the theatre serves as the tool that brings the secret crimes women have already committed to light. Additionally, as I argue in Chapter One, women functioned within the domestic sphere as moral educators and spiritual guides for their husbands. This meant that female theatergoers were not only at risk of infection themselves but were vehicles for potentially spreading this perversion. The collateral damage threatened by even one woman going to see a play was far-reaching indeed.

Even more alarming and sinister than learning vice, however, was the real fear that women could easily fall prey to demonic possession while at the playhouse. In *The Theatre of God's Judgements* (1597), Thomas Beard cites a report by Tertullian of a woman "that went to the theater to see a play, and returned home possessed with an uncleane spirit" and another of a woman "that went to see a Tragedie acted…and five daies after, death himselfe seised upon her."[37] Similarly, Greene and Leighton repeat a popular anecdote attributed to both Augustine and Tertullian of a women who entered the theatre "well and sound, but she returned and came

---

[36]Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors Containing Three Briefe Treatises. 1 their Antiquity. 2 their Ancient Dignity. 3 the True Use of their Quality. Written by Thomas Heywood* (London, 1612), sig. G1v-G2r.

[37]Thomas Beard, *The Theatre of God's Judgements* (London, 1648), 290-291.

forth possessed of the Divell," an example shared "to affrigten and deter any from entring into Theaters."[38]

In response, broader defenses of poetry and theatre like Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* (1590), George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), and Thomas Nashe's *Pierce Penilesse, His Supplication to the Divell* (1592), alongside direct critiques of antitheatrical works published by Thomas Lodge and Thomas Heywood, used the same evidence to argue that the theatre modeled vice solely as a means to teach virtue and wisdom. The whole-character nature of acting and the emotions aroused by the theatre, pro-theatre writers argued, were precisely what granted it such powerful reforming potential. Through these writings, playhouses were recuperated into sites of positive spiritual conversion. These theatrical defenders asserted that the purpose of staging vice was not to encourage spectators to imitate the actions of villains, but to reveal and deflate evil and ridiculous behaviors. In *A Reply to Stephen Gosson's Schoole of Abuse* (1579), Lodge ridicules Gosson for not understanding that most spectators (Gosson apparently excluded) were able to grasp metaphor, allegory, and fiction. "No marvel though you dispraise poetry, when you know not what it means," Lodge mocks, "since you left your college [you] have lost your learning."[39] Poets, Lodge argues "can correct, yet not offend" as they "mitigate the corrections of sin by reproving them covertly."[40] Nashe's pamphlet *Pierce Pennilesse* (1592) includes a similar defense of the theatre's plots. Nashe claims that

---

[38]Greene, *A Refutation of the Apology for Actors*, 44; Alexander Leighton, *A Shorte Treatise Against Stage-Playes* (Amsterdam, 1625), 27.

[39]Thomas Lodge, "A Reply to Stephen Gosson's School of Abuse, in Defence of Poetry, Music and Stage Plays," in *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Source Book*, transcribed and edited by Tanya Pollard (Blackwell Publishing, 2004): 37-61, esp. 41-42.

[40]Lodge, *Reply*, 53.

plays showcase "pride, lust, whoredome, prodigalitie, or drunkenness" only to "beat[e] them downe utterly" so that, rather than making vice look desirable, plays "shew the ill successe of treason, the fall of hastie climbers, the wretched ende of usurpers, the miserie of civill dissention."[41] Heywood's *An Apology For Actors* (1612) furthers this argument. Not only does the theatre show the consequences of vice, but it models virtuous behavior by "animating men to noble attempts" and "instruct[ing] them in civility and good manners, shewing them the fruits of honesty."[42] By demonstrating the monstrousness of vice and the attractiveness of virtue, theatre prompted conversions and redemptions in its spectators. "We present men with the uglinesse of their vices, to make them the more to aborre them," Heywood explains, and this exhibition makes "them hate that sin in themselves" and instead see in virtuous characters new models "to shape [their] lives by."[43] Women who come to the theatre do not learn adultery, lechery, and seduction, but instead, are taught to emulate examples of virtuous women: "[w]omen likewise that are chaste, are by us extolled, and encouraged in their vertues."[44]

Plays were uniquely positioned to invite such reformations because of the whole-character nature of performance and the emotional responses that it sparks. Sidney advocates for the didactic power of all imaginative literature in his *Apology for Poetry* (1590), claiming that the poet serves as a better teacher than the historian or the philosopher because "he doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way, as will entice any man to enter into

---

[41]Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Divell Describing the Over-Spreading of Vice, and Suppression of Vertue. Pleasantly Interlac't with Variable Delights* (London, 1592), n.p.

[42]Heywood, *Apology for Actors*, sig. F3v.

[43]Heywood, *Apology for Actors*, sig. G1r.

[44]Heywood, *Apology for Actors*, sig. G1v.

it."[45] Lodge describes performance's ability to "in the way of pleasure…draw men to wisdom," and Nashe calls plays the "sower pills of reprehension wrapt up in sweete words."[46] Heywood theorizes that "[a]ction [is] the nearest way to plant understanding in the hearts of the ignorant" because "[a] Description is only a shadow received by the eare but not perceived by the eye: so lively portrature is meerely a forme seene by the eye, but can neither shew action, passion, motion, or any other gesture, to moove the spirits of the beholder to admiration."[47] Theatre—in its combination of auditory and visual displays—is uniquely able to move its audiences in ways that can foster spiritual reformation. The theatre's greatest conversional potential, Heywood argues, is that "so bewitching a thing is lively and well spirited action, that it hath power to new mold the hearts of the spectators and fashion them to the shape of any noble and notable attempt."[48] Heywood's use of the word "bewitching" recalls antitheatrical associations between the theatre and witchcraft only to redeem and expand the possibilities of the occult—here, bewitching things are spiritually beneficial rather than ominously frightening. In their power to "new mold hearts," bewitchments can enact positive and ennobling conversions.

In the style of his fellow defenders, Shakespeare challenges antitheatrical claims about the corrupting power of the playhouse. Through *Much Ado* and *The Winter's Tale*, he argues that plays use their sensory qualities and emotional affect to spiritually reform their audiences. He does so, however, in the way of poetry—not by directing appeals to readers in a pamphlet or by

---

[45]Philip Sidney, "Apology for Poetry," in *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*, edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 212-251, esp. 226.

[46]Lodge, *Response*, 41; Nashe, *Pierce Pennilesse*, n.p.

[47]Heywood, *Apology for Actors*, sig. C3r, B3v.

[48]Heywood, *Apology for Actors*, sig. B4r.

critiquing the antitheatrical argument point-by-point in a direct response, but rather by allowing us to experience these claims in real-time as his characters discover and live them on the stage. For example, we watch as Benedick learns, through a play extempore, that Beatrice "loves" him. However, this realization does not prompt him to become enraged with lust and mindlessly "deverginat[e]" and seduce her, as Stubbes claims romantic interludes will.[49] Instead, *Much Ado* offers an alternative result: Benedick decides that he must marry her, and he wills himself to be in love with her. The stage-play he witnesses presents him with a new way of interpreting Beatrice, and it invites him to leave his bachelorhood behind and join the other lovers.

"May I be so converted?": Domesticating Men in *Much Ado About Nothing*

In the opening scene of *Much Ado*, Claudio confesses to the skeptical and flippant Benedick his newfound love of Hero, "the sweetest lady that ever [he] looked on" (1.1.183-84). Wary of Claudio's earnest insistence on his love, Benedick retorts, "I hope you have no intent to turn husband, have you?" (1.1.187-88). Benedick's use of the verb "turn" implies that he sees Claudio as moving away from one identity, bachelor, toward another, husband. The language of turning adopted by Benedick recalls the popular shorthand "turning Turk," "turning witch," and "turning Jew," used similarly to express fears about interfaith conversion during this period. Less of a question than a desperate "hope," Benedick's response reveals the play's anxieties surrounding marriage and cuckoldry, the loss of homosocial bonds forged through male friendship and war, and the distrust of women, themes that have dominated scholarly discussions of the play for the past thirty years.[50] What has been less developed in scholarship on *Much Ado*,

[49]Stubbes, *Anatomie of Abuses*, sig. L8v.

[50]See Janice Hays, "Those 'Soft and Delicate Desires': *Much Ado* and the Distrust of Women," in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, eds. Carolyn Lenz, et. al (Urbana: University of

however, is how the play frames these anxieties and their resolutions through the vocabulary and process of religious conversion, styled here as the turn between two metaphorical faiths: bachelorhood and marriage.[51] Rather than reading the play as "merry wars" between the sexes, as is standard in scholarship, I read the play as a war between these two competing "faiths," in which cynical hearts find themselves newly softened to love and marriage.[52] This section argues that Benedick's and Claudio's conversions demonstrate how the theatre can operate as a positive

---

Illinois Press, 1980), 79–99; Shirley Nelson Garner, "Male Bonding and the Myth of Women's Deception in Shakespeare's Plays," in *Shakespeare's Personality*, eds. Norman Holland, et. al (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 135–50; Graham Holderness, "*Much Ado about Nothing*: Men without Women," in *Critical Essays on Much Ado about Nothing*, eds. Linda Cookson and Brian Loughrey (Harlow: Longman, 1989), 74–87; Michael Friedman, "Male Bonds and Marriage in *All's Well* and *Much Ado*," *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 35, no. 2 (1995): 231–49; Lori Haslem, "Tongue-Tied Women and Embarrassed Men in *Much Ado about Nothing* and *The Winter's Tale*," *Shakespeare Yearbook* 7 (1996): 381–401; Dale Priest, "'Here's a Dish I Love Not!': Patriarchy, Misogyny, and Men's Sexual Fears in *Much Ado about Nothing,*" *Publications of the Mississippi Philological Association* (1997): 99–103; Katherine Lyon, "Male Bonds in *Much Ado about Nothing* and *Othello*," *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium* 2 (2002): 161–73; Stephen Cohen, "'No Assembly but Horn-Beasts': The Politics of Cuckoldry in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies," *Journal For Early Modern Cultural Studies* 4, no. 2 (2004): 5–34; Cristina León Alfar, *Women and Shakespeare's Cuckoldry Plays: Shifting Narratives of Marital Betrayal* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

[51]See Gleckman, *Protestant Poetics*, 131-153, for an extended study of how Protestants rejected celibacy in favor of companionate marriage, giving conversion an explicitly sexual dimension. While Gleckman see the play's focus on erotic desire as having significant religious undertones, the lack of any explicit divine intervention or presence within the play complicates his claim.

[52]For readings which emphasize conflict between men and women as the driving force of the play, see Barbara Everett, "*Much Ado about Nothing:* The Unsociable Comedy," in *English Comedy*, eds. Michael Cordner, et. al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 68–84; Harry Berger, "Against the Sink-a-Pace: Sexual and Family Politics in *Much Ado about Nothing,*" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (1982): 302–13; Neely, *Broken Nuptials*, 24-57; Carol Cook, "'The Sign and Semblance of Her Honor': Reading Gender Difference in *Much Ado about Nothing*," *PMLA* 101, no. 2 (1986): 186–202; Claire McEachern, "Fathering Herself: A Source Study of Shakespeare's Feminism," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (1988): 269–90; Roy Battenhouse, "Toward Understanding Patriarchy in *Much Ado,*" *Shakespeare Yearbook* 2 (1991): 193–200; Thomas Scheff, "Gender Wars: Emotions in *Much Ado about Nothing,*" *Sociological Perspectives* 36 (1993): 149–66; Mihoko Suzuki, "Gender, Class, and the Ideology of Comic Form: *Much Ado about Nothing* and *Twelfth Night*," in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Dympna C. Callaghan (Malden: Blackwell, 2000), 121–43; Ann Pellegrini, "Closing Ranks, Keeping Company: Marriage Plots and the Will to Be Single in *Much Ado About Nothing,*" in *Shakesqueer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. Madhavi Menon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 245–53.

conversional force. Each of the men's conversions are sparked during moments of playacting—Don Pedro, Claudio, and Leonato's theatrical declarations of Beatrice's intense love turn Benedick; Borachio and Margaret's staged sexual liaison triggers Claudio's rejection of Hero and their impending marriage; and finally, Hero's tomb and staged resurrection chasten Claudio. These plays extempore are specifically designed by their players to stir up powerful emotions for the purposes of converting their spectators, signaling the play's engagement with contemporary debates about theatre, spectatorship, and conversion.[53]

Additionally, because of the play's investment in the evolving relationships between men and women, the play-acted plots and the conversions they hope to foster center on the destructive nature of antifeminine belief and the reforming potential of women. The feminine occult—most obviously represented by Hero's fake death and resurrection—reunites Hero and Claudio and allows Hero to return to her community after Claudio's accusations. Claudio's public shaming of Hero wrought a social death for the young woman; therefore, when Hero's name is cleared, she is metaphorically resurrected.[54] The play literalizes this metaphor by staging her return as an

---

[53]The play's relationship to theatrical practice and its meta-theatrical significance is examined in Anthony B. Dawson, "Much Ado about Signifying," *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 22, no. 2 (1982): 210–21; J.B. Thompson, "'The Only Love-Gods'?: The Manipulation of Feeling in *Much Ado about Nothing*," *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 5 (1992): 33–42; Jean Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle*, 47-73; Ejner Jensen, "'Knowing Aforehand': Audience Preparation and the Comedies of Shakespeare," in *Acting Funny: Comic Theory and Practice in Shakespeare's Plays*, ed. Frances Teague (London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994), 72–84; Nova Myhill, "Spectatorship in/of *Much Ado about Nothing*," *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 39, no. 2 (1999): 291–311; Ros King, "Plays, Playing, and Make-Believe: Thinking and Feeling in Shakespearean Drama," in *Embodied Cognition and Shakespeare's Theatre: The Early Modern Body-Mind*, eds. Laurie Johnson, et. al (London: Routledge, 2014), 27–45.

[54]The historical context of Claudio's slander of Hero, as well as the social implications of sexual slander within early modern culture, are taken up in Joyce Sexton, *The Slandered Woman in Shakespeare* (Victoria: University of Victoria, 1978); Marilyn Williamson, "Doubling, Women's Anger, and Genre," *Women's Studies* 9 (1982): 107–19; Mary Williams, "Much Ado about Chastity in *Much Ado about Nothing*," *Renaissance Papers 1984* (1984): 37–45; Andrew Fleck, "The Ambivalent Blush: Figural and Structural Metonymy, Modesty, and *Much Ado about Nothing,*" *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews* 19, no. 1 (2006): 16–23; Cyndia Susan Clegg, "Truth, Lies, and the Law of

actual resurrection sequence, made explicit when her father explains, "She died, my lord, but whiles her slander lived" (5.4.66). Hero, once dead, is now alive again. Hero's resurrection brings together the sometimes disparate threads of the play and effectively ends the war between these two faiths, as both sets of lovers reunite and dance together prior to a double wedding.[55]

By merging the grammar of love with the grammar of religious conversion, Shakespeare explores the idea of conversion as a social rather than explicitly theological process. The play seems to directly contradict the antitheatricalist argument that conversion operates outside of human agency and action, instead presenting a vision of conversion entirely dependent on community action and active individual participation. Conversion in *Much Ado* is secularized and brought to the human plane. There is no true divine presence in *Much Ado*; despite the over sixty appeals to God that characters make within the play-text, there is no moment of godly intercession, no hint that there is a higher power controlling the action of the play. Instead, it is up to the characters themselves to set these events into motion and convert each other's hearts. As Don Pedro brags, "we are the only love-gods" (2.2.382). His displacement of Cupid for the collective "we" and his use of "only" in this passage are meant to be a playful assertion of the group's power as manipulators, but these words also betray a stark reality of this play-world: there is no other God, not even Cupid, who will take on or assist in this task. This is further

---

Slander in *Much Ado about Nothing,*" in *The Law in Shakespeare*, eds. Constance Jordan and Karen Cunnignham (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 167–88; Stephanie Chamberlain, "Rotten Oranges and Other Spoiled Commodities: The Economics of Shame in *Much Ado about Nothing*," *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium* 9 (2010): 1–10. Hero's resurrection is explored more fully in Kaara Peterson, "Shakespearean Revivifications: Early Modern Undead," *Shakespeare Studies* 32 (2004): 240–66; Greta Perletti, "'A Thing like Death': Medical Representations of Female Bodies in Shakespeare's Plays," *Gender Studies* 12, no. 1 (2013): 93–111; Sean Geddes, "The Fortunes of Fame in *Much Ado About Nothing*," *Review of English Studies* 70, no. 293 (2019): 54–73.

[55]Hero's treatment and function in the play is taken up in Jonathon Bate, "Dying to Live in *Much Ado about Nothing*," in *Surprised by Scenes: Essays in Honour of Professor Yasunari Takahashi*, ed. Yasunari Takada (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1994), 69–85 and Raychel Haugrud Reiff, "The Unsung 'Hero' in *Much Ado about Nothing*," *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium* 4 (2004): 139–49.

evidenced when Hero, during Claudio's attack on her virtue, cries out, "Oh, God defend me!" (4.1.77). Yet it is not God who defends Hero, but Beatrice, Benedick, and, ultimately, Friar Francis who maps out a return for Hero that requires the participation of the entire community. Unlike *The Winter's Tale*, where Apollo's Oracle reveals the prophetic truth of Hermione's innocence, the Friar does not receive this information from any divine source. Rather, he deduces Hero's chastity from her bodily signs, noting that he has marked "[a] thousand blushing apparitions / To start in her face; a thousand innocent shames" (4.1.159-60). It is his sensory perception as a human being, not his status as a Friar, that allows him to determine her innocence.

Even the theatrical conversion games the characters play with one another have their limitations—these moments of playing do not, as the antitheatricalists argue, bewitch Benedick and Claudio, turning them into mindless beasts overcome with raging lust or vice. Instead, they operate as persuasive invitations for change—opportunities to view the world, and especially its women, through different eyes. On the one hand, Claudio demonstrates how conversional potential can be limited by an individual's refusal to take up such invitations. His misogyny influences his interpretations of Margaret and Borachio's interlude and Hero's blushes—while the Friar correctly reads them as signs of innocence, Claudio construes them as the masterful performance of a rotten, guilty woman. In a direct challenge to the antitheatrical belief in the helplessly impressionable spectator, Shakespeare preserves human agency and subjectivity: Don Juan and Borachio's scheme has not penetrated and perverted Claudio's soul but merely confirmed his inherent view of women. The Friar's plan to restore Hero, contingent upon Claudio experiencing a strong emotional response to her death and a subsequent impulse to repent, faces difficulties when Claudio initially refuses to participate in the way the Friar has

imagined, focusing instead on preserving his own sense of guiltlessness. If Claudio demonstrates how conversion can be forestalled by a lack of participation and interest by the subject, Benedick models how active participation produces transformative results. Benedick enthusiastically takes up the invitation to be in love with Beatrice after his friends' melodramatic scene, repeatedly performing the expected role of the lover: sighing, shaving his beard, wearing perfume, and trying to compose love songs. In *Much Ado*, love is not an infection, but an active choice that must be continually enacted through performative utterances and ritualized social codes.

"I will live a bachelor": Benedick vs. the Neighborhood Love-Gods

At the beginning of the play, Benedick views marriage as an act of apostasy. In Benedick's mind, Claudio apostatizes himself when he abandons the military bachelor life, Benedick's "faith" (1.1.245) as Don Pedro terms it, in service of a more sociable ideal—the feminized husband who prefers "the tabor and the pipe" (2.1.15) to "the drum and the fife" (2.1.14). Seeing his friends turn to love around him, Benedick situates himself as the "obstinate heretic" (1.1.226) of the group. He claims that his opinions on love and marriage are so firm "that fire cannot melt [them] out of [him]" (1.1.224), and he protests that he will "die in it at the stake" (1.1.224) rather than undergo a conversion like Claudio's, recalling two early modern punishments for religious martyrs who refused to convert. Indeed, for the first two acts of the play, he and Beatrice are the last martyrs willing to die for what they perceive as the true religion, bachelorhood. Even Don Pedro makes a failed attempt to propose to Beatrice, signaling his own desire to turn husband. Benedick reiterates his firmness of faith (albeit less stubbornly) in 2.3 when, pondering the transformation he has observed in Claudio, he wonders if he might too experience such a shift in perspective. "May I be so converted and see with these eyes?"

(2.1.22) he muses. “I cannot tell,” he decides, “I think not” (2.1.23). The play traces the process through which Benedick and Beatrice do begin to see with “these eyes,” the converted eyes of the lover. By 3.4, Margaret wonders to Beatrice, “how you may be converted I know not, but methinks you look with your eyes as other women do” (3.4.86-88).

If Benedick’s determination to never marry is his “faith,” Don Pedro appears determined to convert this faith to something deemed more socially acceptable and productive. The world of post-war Messina, so different from the battlefield from which these men have just arrived, is a domestic family space that seems to instantly turn men’s thoughts toward carnal desire and marriage. As Claudio tells Don Pedro, “now I am return’d and…war-thoughts / Have left their places vacant, in their rooms / Come thronging soft and delicate desires” (1.1.290-92). Unmarried, single people are outliers within this brave new post-war world. Don Pedro appears anxious to see both Beatrice and Benedick properly married, and, if Benedick refuses to open up to the possibility for love, Don Pedro will force his hand and “fashion” (2.1.364) it for him. “I shall see thee ere I die,” he tells Benedick, “look sick and pale with love” (1.1.238). Benedick’s response, “With anger, with sickness, or with hunger, my lord; not with love” (1.1.239-40), goads Don Pedro, as he later remarks, “Nay, if Cupid have not spent all his quiver in Venice, thou wilt quake for this shortly” (1.1.260-61).

To spark Benedick’s conversion, Don Pedro, Claudio, and Leonato stage a play extempore, to which Benedick serves as an unwitting audience. The men rely upon the emotional, social, and ethical effects generated by this play-acting to ignite his planned transformation. After confirming that Benedick hides in the arbor, Don Pedro starts the scene: “Come hither, Leonato. What was it you told me of today, that your niece Beatrice was in love with Signor Benedick?” (2.3.94-6). As the scene progresses, the characters monitor Benedick’s

engagement and tailor their subsequent lines to convert him more effectively. His physical and emotive reactions to their performance demonstrate how impactful the scene is for him. Claudio remarks to his companions, "O, ay, stalk on, stalk on; the fowl sits" (2.3.97) and "He hath ta'en th'infection" (2.3.126). This "infection" that Claudio remarks on seems to have two meanings. On the one hand, the use of "infection" here implies that this is the moment in which Benedick catches lovesickness, fulfilling Don Pedro's prophecy that he will see Benedick look "sick and pale with love" (1.1.238), a malady he suffers from in later acts when he appears "melancholy" (3.2.51), loudly sighing and losing his "jesting spirit" (3.2.55). Yet, the use of "infection" also playfully recalls the contagiousness of theatrical practice itself—an antitheatricalist might argue that this scene infiltrates Benedick's eyes and ears and now must be spiritually digested. This "infection," however, challenges the antitheatrical association of the theatre with perversity—Benedick's "infection" transforms him into the kind of man who will eventually stand up for Hero in Act 4, an act that would have been unlikely for Act 1 Benedick, the "professed tyrant" (1.1.163-64) of women who openly admits to "trust[ing] none" (1.1.236). And, crucially, after learning these astonishing revelations about Beatrice's supposed love for him, Benedick's "infection" does not overpower his rational mind; rather, Benedick chooses to take on the role of her lover. It is a conversion invited by the theatrical play of his friends but fostered and enacted by Benedick himself.

Through soliloquy, the audience is granted a window into Benedick's stream of consciousness as he undertakes and experiences this process of conversion. Benedick wonders:

> Love me? Why, it must be requited…I did never think to marry. I must not seem proud. Happy are they that hear their detractions and can put them to mending. They say the lady is fair; 'tis a truth, I can bear them witness. And virtuous; 'tis

> so, I cannot reprove it. And wise, but for loving me. By my troth, it is no addition to her wit nor no great argument of her folly, for I will be horribly in love with her. I may chance have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me because I have railed so long against marriage, but doth not the appetite alter? […] The world must be peopled. When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married. (2.3.218-41)

In the aftermath of Don Pedro's play, Benedick does not equivocate. If Beatrice loves him, "it must be requited." There is no doubt for Benedick now about whether or not he will marry as he recognizes, at the very least, an ethical obligation he has toward Beatrice. He begins to reinterpret his prior statements of belief from this new post-conversion mindset. He signals his earlier entrenched commitment to bachelorhood when he says, "I did never think to marry;" yet, his use of the past tense "did" places that commitment firmly in the past. Throughout this passage, spectators watch as he justifies his dramatic change: "doth not the appetite alter?" he asks. Continuing, "when I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married," Benedick recalls for the audience his previous statement from the first act, "I will live a bachelor" (1.1.237), but adds another clause, one that transforms the statement's meaning both for himself and for the audience. Now, he has repositioned this phrase as a commentary on his expected short lifespan, rather than its original context, a stubborn refusal to even consider marriage. Benedick also reinterprets Beatrice from this new position, and he discovers that Beatrice, as a lady who is fair, virtuous, and wise, has always already fulfilled the requirements that he himself set out for the ideal wife earlier in Act 2. He tells us (and himself) that he "will be horribly in love with her." The use of the word "will" is multi-layered: it both implies that he is not currently in love with her but "will" be at some future moment, just as it serves as a

performative utterance—a willing of himself to fall in love with her that signals his active participation in this conversion. By the end of his speech, Benedick, operating from a new emotional orientation, seems to have talked himself into participating in heteronormative structures of society as a husband and eventual father, acknowledging that "the world must be peopled." This transformation in Benedick's worldview is further emphasized when Margaret remarks to Beatrice that "Benedick was such another, and now is he become a man" (3.4.83-84). By distinguishing what Benedick used to be, an obstinate anti-lover like Beatrice, from what he is now, "a man," Margaret structures Benedick's plot arc as a conversion. Furthermore, in her claim that Benedick is only now become "a man," Margaret aligns manhood with a certain set of heteronormative expectations—men fall in love with women, men marry, men people the world. Benedick's speech in 2.3 is one definitive moment in which the audience witnesses him choose not only Beatrice, but the institution of marriage and the expectations that are attached.

Benedick's conversion not only manifests as an inner transformation, it also becomes an embodied experience that he performs. When the audience next sees Benedick upon the stage, the first thing we hear him say is "Gallants, I am not as I have been" (3.2.15). In this moment, Benedick indicates that he views himself as converted. He recognizes and admits to the change in himself and broadcasts it to his friends. Claudio, Don Pedro, and Leonato get to witness firsthand the aftermath of their conversional theatrics. As they catalogue the changes in Benedick's physical appearance, they also play a part in authenticating his conversion, both for Benedick and the audience. Claudio remarks that "If he be not in love with some woman, there is no believing old signs" (3.2.38-40), suggesting that Benedick wears the signs of love upon his body in a way that can be easily read and interpreted by those around him. As they tease

Benedick about his new apparel, shaved face, and perfumed aroma, they emphasize how Benedick embodies and performs his new post-conversion role as a lover.

Benedick's turn away from the homosocial world of men and toward the domestic world of marriage is tested and confirmed when Beatrice asks him to prove his love by killing Claudio, an act that demonstrates the great shaping power their love now has over their community. Following the disastrous failed nuptials in 4.1, Beatrice and Benedick remain alone on the stage. Beatrice exclaims that the man who deserves her is the one who will defend Hero. Desperate to stop her weeping, this new Benedick is willing to take up such a task, as he asks, "[i]s there any way to show such friendship? (4.1.263) and later, after their declarations of love, asserts, "Come, bid me do anything for thee" (4.1.287). Beatrice's response immediately tests his vow of love and decision to play the lover, and thus, she rather ominously tests the authenticity of his conversion. "Kill Claudio" (4.1.388), she demands. Benedick's gut reaction, "Ha! Not for the wide world" (4.1.389), is an almost apostatic moment—a complete denial of his earlier intention to be "horribly in love with her" (2.3.232) and his claim that he would "do anything" for her. Beatrice reads this as proof of just that, responding to his refusal, "There is no love in you" (4.1.294). When Benedick reaffirms his love for her, saying, "By this hand, I love thee" (4.1.323-24), Beatrice responds that he should use his hand to show his love "some other way than swearing by it" (4.1.326-27). She calls him to action, and she gives him, and by proxy the audience, another outward way to perform and validate that Benedick has been inwardly converted. He swears to her at the end of the scene, "By this hand, Claudio shall render me a dear account" (4.1.332-33). When he next meets his two best friends, Benedick makes good on his vow to Beatrice by declaring Claudio a villain and challenging him to a duel for Hero's honor.

Even though the play's resolution highlights Beatrice and Benedick's hesitancy toward fully admitting unrestrained love for one another, there seems to be little doubt they will marry. Before the final scene, Benedick has already spoken with Leonato, Beatrice's guardian, to gain his permission to marry Beatrice. He has also engaged the Friar to perform the ceremony. As Benedick tells the Friar, "my will is your good will / May stand with ours this day to be conjoined / In the state of honourable marriage" (5.4.28-30). Benedick's affirms that it is his "will" to be married; even if he and Beatrice struggle to voice their amorous passionate feelings for one another, Benedick actively chooses to marry Beatrice. Yet, Benedick's personality has not been altered; he will continue his "merry wars" with Beatrice even in their union. It is his relationship with the social world and how he sees himself within that has transformed. Indeed, some of Benedick's last lines of the play to Don Pedro, "Prince, thou art sad. Get thee a wife, get thee a wife" illustrate the resolution of his conversion narrative (5.4.122-3). At the play's close, Benedick and Don Pedro appear to have inverted roles. As Benedick now espouses the importance of marriage, Don Pedro is the one who appears left out of the community fold. Benedick has become a proselytizer, encouraging Don Pedro to come join the congregation of the wedded.

Resurrecting Hero, Transforming Claudio

Claudio begins the play where Benedick ends: ready to find himself a wife. In the play's first scene, he expresses his intent to "turn husband" for Hero specifically, and notes that while he originally looked on her with "a soldier's eye" (1.158-59), he now sees her with the eyes of a lover, his mind filled with "thronging soft and delicate desires" (1.1.259). Benedick remarks that Claudio used to be of his initial faith of bachelorhood, as together they "hath laughed at such

shallow follies in others" (2.3.10-11). But now, Claudio is so remarkably changed by his falling in love with Hero that Benedick nicknames him "Monsieur Love" (2.3.36). Much like Benedick in his conversion, Claudio seems to be actively performing his transformation to lover. Benedick indignantly catalogues for the audience the changes he has witnessed: Claudio's newfound love of the "tabor and pipe" (2.3.14), his care with wearing fashionable clothing, and the overelaborate and "fantastical banquet" (2.3.21) of his speech. Claudio has been taken in by Hero's beauty, modesty, grace, and feminine attributes which together have persuaded him to act in this new way.

From the play's second act, however, the audience learns that Claudio is predisposed to interpret women through antifeminine discourses—reading women's ability to spark sexual desire in men as signs of witchcraft and manipulation. Following Don John's goading, Claudio immediately believes that Don Pedro has betrayed him and wooed Hero for himself. He expresses his mistaken, jealousy-fueled anguish in a brief soliloquy in which he proclaims that "beauty is a witch / Against whose charms faith melteth into blood" (2.1.180-81). Despite his mistaken belief that "the prince woos for himself," Claudio locates the blame for his friend's apparent betrayal in Hero's "beauty." By claiming that "beauty is a witch," Claudio endows female beauty with supernatural powers that can destroy male bonds of friendship. Even "faith" cannot stand up to beauty's witchcraft; rather, faith is itself melted or transmuted, almost alchemically, into sexual passion by the supernatural, witchy qualities that women possess. Claudio positions Hero as a dangerous convertor, someone with the occult ability to turn Don Pedro toward passion and away from his friendship and duty. Such a reaction to her beauty foreshadows Polixenes's attack on Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*, in which he claims her bewitching beauty steals his son away from his filial duty. Even though Claudio is quickly

proven wrong and is engaged to Hero by the scene's end, his impulse to associate women with negative conversion, sexual infidelity, and witchcraft haunts the play, and it leads directly to his devastating rejection of Hero at the altar in 4.1.

Claudio's faith in Hero—and in women more broadly—is shaken by his mistaken belief in her infidelity. While Don Pedro and company use theatre to bring Beatrice and Benedick together, Don John and Borachio consciously decide to misuse theatre to divide Hero and Claudio. They plot to stage a scene where Borachio and Margaret play the parts of Hero and Claudio. Claudio and Don Pedro will "see me at her chamber window," Borachio explains, "hear me call Margaret Hero, hear Margaret term me Claudio" (2.3.42-44). Borachio's explicitly thought-out staging of the scene again demonstrates the conscious way characters understand how to use playacting to gain specific emotional responses. As Gosson warns, players "studie to make your affections overflow"—in this scene, Borachio and Don John understand the best way to stage this sexual drama to make Claudio's rage overflow.[56] The scene has its intended impact, and it reawakens in Claudio the same misogynist fears about women that he demonstrated earlier in the play. He publicly rebukes Hero as a "rotten orange" (4.1.32) and slanders her as one of "those pamper'd animals / That rage in savage sensuality" (4.1.60-1), recalling the popular commonplace that depraved women's naturally inflamed sexual appetites rendered them dangerously animalistic and subhuman.

As a character, Claudio constantly revolves—he turns and turns again—from soldier to Monsieur Love, from Monsieur Love to, in 4.1, an "obstinate heretic" against love and marriage in line with Benedick's previous stance. During his vicious attack on Hero, Claudio reveals his new approach to women:

---

[56]Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions*, sig. F1r-F1v.

> For thee I'll lock up all the gates of love,
> And on my eyelids shall conjecture hang
> To turn all beauty into thoughts of harm;
> And never shall it more be gracious. (4.1.103-6)

Claudio claims that Hero's betrayal has forever ruined love for him—the "gates of love" have now been locked, as he hardens and closes off his heart. In turning away from Hero at the altar, Claudio turns away from the ideas of love and marriage of which he has become a devout worshipper throughout the first three acts. In a perversion of Paul's own conversion, rather than scales falling from his eyes to reveal a divine truth, here Claudio's eyes are now rescaled with "conjecture." Henceforth, his suspicious and paranoid way of reading women will "turn all beauty into thoughts of harm." In a direct antithesis to his previous turn toward love, he will now consistently reinterpret beauty as a harmful, manipulative force: never again will Claudio trust women enough to see them with the eyes of a lover. His misreading of Hero's blushing embarrassment and failure to believe Hero's explicit denials shows how Borachio's play has reawakened his misogynistic instincts, perverting his understandings of Hero, love, and marriage as an institution. Such stubbornness and hatred can only begin to be countered by an event that appears truly divine and miraculous. Hero's resurrection, brought forward through yet another staged scene, is designed to circumvent Claudio's misogyny and restore his belief.

To resolve the Claudio problem and restore harmony to the community, Friar Francis recruits Leonato, Anthony, Beatrice, and Benedick to stage a plot which will convince the world that Hero died "[u]pon the instant she was accused" (4.1.215). This plan goes beyond just spreading the word of Hero's death—it becomes a piece of community theatre in which the family must maintain full mourning practices, "hang mournful epitaphs" (4.1.207), and properly

perform all burial rites. By so fully bringing to life Hero's death, and by making the community of Messina believe it, Friar Francis notes that they will be moved to pity and excuse her—it is the commitment to this performance that will prove her innocence in a way that her own testimony cannot. But Friar Francis has a more specific target in mind when he devises and designs this plan. It is not the community of Messina that he seeks to convert, but Claudio, whose newly hardened heart will surely be melted by this performance:

> When he shall hear she died upon his words,
> The idea of her life shall sweetly creep
> Into his study of imagination,
> And every lovely organ of her life
> Shall come apparell'd in more precious habit,
> More moving-delicate and full of life,
> Into the eye and prospect of his soul,
> Than when she lived indeed; then shall he mourn,
> If ever love had interest in his liver,
> And wish he had not so accused her,
> No, though he thought his accusation true. (4.1.222-233)

In this passage, Friar Francis constructs a linear trajectory for Claudio's repentance. First, Claudio must hear of Hero's death, as he does from Leonato and Anthony in 5.1. Then, the Friar tells his co-conspirators that Hero's memory shall "sweetly creep" into Claudio's mind through his eyes and spiritual senses. Like Benedick having "ta'en the infection" (2.3.126), the Friar tells the others that the visual and auditory elements of this plan (hearing of her death, seeing her tomb) will enter "into the eye" and "soul." Crucially, just like in the case of Benedick, this will

not pervert Claudio, but reform him. His understanding of Hero, the Friar claims, will undergo a conversion: every aspect of her person and her life, her "every lovely organ," shall suddenly seem better than it did before. From there, Claudio will begin to mourn, and this mourning will lead him to regret how he accused her. His regret and repentance, in conjunction with the Friar's plan to stage Hero's mysterious resurrection, will create space for Hero to be reborn into society. In laying out his plan for Claudio and Hero's interlocked redemptions, Friar Francis directly links the necessity of Hero's death to Claudio's conversion—none of these other steps can happen until Claudio hears, feels, and knows, in his soul, the pain of Hero's death. The emotional impact generated by this theatrical display is not harmful, but spiritually restorative and necessary. The Friar's speech traces the step-by-step process through which their piece of theatre will convert Claudio, and it makes the mechanics of this process explicit for both the other characters in the scene and the audience. Recalling Benedick's own soliloquy in 2.3 which did the same kind of work, both scenes seem positioned to demystify, defang, and consequently legitimize the theatre as a means for positive spiritual conversion.

Yet, the central shortcoming with Friar Francis's plan is Claudio, the sole uncontrollable variable, since Claudio does not take the apparent death to heart in the way that Friar Francis predicts. When Leonato reveals that Hero "lies buried with her ancestors / […] framed by thy villainy" to Claudio, Claudio reacts not with remorse but with anger, responding to the implication that he has directly caused Hero's death only by questioning it: "My villainy?" (5.1.72). When Leonato refuses to be swayed and redoubles his efforts to force Claudio to acknowledge his responsibility in Hero's demise by directly stating "Thou hast kill'd my child" (5.1.78), Claudio shuts down any further conversation by exclaiming "Away! I will not have to do with you" (5.1.77). His refusal to allow himself to be emotionally affected by Hero's death, a

key component of the Friar's plan, is further evidenced when Benedick arrives on the scene, and Claudio openly mocks Leonato and Anthony's rage. Even when he receives Benedick's challenge, Claudio writes it off as proof of Benedick's love for Beatrice rather than an indication of his own guilt. It is only through Borachio's confession that Claudio sees the truth of Hero's innocence. Even then, when he is ready to make reparations, he does not acknowledge his own culpability, telling Leonato:

> Choose your revenge yourself.
>
> Impose me to what penance your invention
>
> Can lay upon my sin. Yet sinned I not
>
> But in mistaking. (5.1.266-69)

Even here, in his lowest moment, Claudio does not fully acknowledge his own wrongdoing, willing only to take the blame for his mistake, not his violence toward Hero. This lack of acknowledgment of the gravity and breadth of his sins continues in 5.3 when Claudio and Don Pedro attend what they believe to be Hero's tomb. Claudio reads the epitaph he has prepared before the small gathering, which claims that Hero has been "Done to death by slanderous tongues" (5.3.3). The vagueness surrounding who owns these "slanderous tongues" allows Claudio to acknowledge but not fully own his role in Hero's death. The knowledge of Hero's innocence does begin to work on Claudio, however, as he reinterprets his misconceived conception of Hero, lamenting, "Sweet Hero, now thy image doth appear / In the rare semblance that I loved it first" (5.1.236-7). "Sweet Hero" has now, as the Friar intended, "sweetly cre[pt]" back into Claudio's mind, restoring Hero to his original vision of her.

In the wake of these rather uninspiring proclamations of restored faith, the wedding farce must still go on. Claudio needs to perform his penance before the community, and, crucially,

Hero herself needs to be resurrected and transformed back to her maidenly self. While the audience and many of the characters in the play know that Hero is alive and waiting to be presented to Claudio under this ruse, Hero, Leonato, and Friar Francis continually cast her reappearance as a supernatural event. Upon removing her mask and revealing herself to Claudio and the congregation of wedding guests, Hero frames herself as an entirely new entity:

HERO. And when I lived I was your other wife
And when you loved, you were my other husband.
CLAUDIO. Another Hero?
HERO. Nothing certainer.
One Hero died defiled, but I do live,
And surely as I live, I am a maid. (5.4.60-64)

Her use of the past tense verbs "lived" and "loved" and her situating of the earlier iterations of herself and Claudio as the "other" wife and husband present both Hero and Claudio as new versions of themselves. They are now something wholly different than what they were before, and Hero acknowledges and confirms those transformations. Hero claims her own journey has been one of life to death to life again, through her use of "when I lived," then "died," to the later "as I live." Yet, she sees this new Claudio as incompatible to the one who originally loved her—when he "loved," he was "other" than he is now. The status of Claudio's conversion back to lover and his spiritual reformation remain uncertain through the ending of the play. Even here, he does not answer her charge, but instead remarks upon her otherness, asking to confirm that she is, in fact, "[a]nother Hero?" The question there, rather than an exclamation, signals Claudio's own incredulity about this resurrection stage-play. Her response, "Nothing certainer," reiterates the supposedly occult nature of her return to Claudio and Don Pedro. Her explanation that "[o]ne

Hero died defiled, but I do live" again situates her as a wholly new person. Hero's insistence that she is something entirely new suggests that women cannot simply recover from social death, even if they are widely known to be innocent; instead, they must be reborn and resurrected.

Following Hero's reveal to Claudio, Don Pedro and Leonato reposition Hero's return not as a recreation, as she did, but instead as a resurrection. As Don Pedro questions the crowd:

> PEDRO. The former Hero? Hero that is dead?
>
> LEONATO. She died, my lord, but whiles her slander lived. (5.4.65-66)

Don Pedro contradicts Hero's assertion that she is "another" Hero by reframing the question. Where Claudio, responding to Hero's use of "other" husband and wife, sees this as an indication of this new Hero as an almost-doppelganger, Don Pedro's use of "former" attempts to reconstruct these two Heros back into one body. She is not a doppelganger to Don Pedro, but something else entirely, yet equally supernatural. His use of the present tense, the "Hero that *is* dead" betrays his own continued belief in this piece of theatre. For Don Pedro, her return is not marked as the revelation of a new entity, but instead a resurrection of the old, former Hero. Leonato, in contrast to Hero, confirms this event as a resurrection, saying she only "died…but whiles her slander lived." Now that her virtue has been proved, she has returned to life. The logical inconsistencies within these five lines (another Hero vs. the former Hero) suggest that it is not the precise explanations of the event which matter, but only that the event itself is structured and verbally marked as something *other*, beyond the realm of the ordinary. However, the conversional power of the theatre is such that it saves Hero from actually having to die—instead, she can perform her death and resurrection. It only matters that her audience—Claudio, Don Pedro, and the community members present at the wedding—do not openly challenge its fictionality and allow themselves to be moved by the miracle of her return—they actively

participate in the spectacle by allowing it to stand. The spectators in the playhouse are aware that the resurrection is only staged, so, while Hero's resurrection may not transcend the fictional framework of the play to emotionally move those spectators, this scene models how such theatrical, occult moments can become transformational.

Even though Hero's conversion is a fiction, its artificiality known to the audience and her family, it is a necessary fiction, enabled by the conversional power of the theatre that can bond and transform the community, for her to gain reentrance into Messina's society. The necessity of the extravagance of this ploy—her death, her family's mourning, her supernatural and theatrical return—suggests that female sexual slander can only be erased and negotiated through a cataclysmic event of this nature. It recalls the Friar's insistence that faking her death can "change slander to remorse" (4.1.211) through its emotional effect which will make every hearer "lamen[t], pit[y], and excus[e]" her (4.1.216). Friar Francis's speech here also highlights that it is not Hero's heart which needs to be converted, but the hearts of Claudio and the community. The final scene suggests that this can only happen through the rejuvenation of her body, the old body of the "defiled Hero" that was marked as tarnished, rotten, and impious by Claudio. Hero's body must be transformed, turned back toward purity and virtue—achievable only through a supernatural event like resurrection, as Don Pedro suggests, or full newness, as Hero does. In the Christ-like features of her resurrection story, Hero's female body takes on almost sacramental significance as it redeems and heals within the space of the chapel, bringing together Claudio/Hero and Beatrice/Benedick. It is a moment which perhaps most acutely anticipates *The Winter's Tale*, where the redemptive nature of Hermione's own transforming body is directly linked to Leontes's spiritual reformation.

Much Ado's exploration of the theatre and conversion restricts its conversional potential to the fictional world of the play. Hero's resurrection, for example, only surprises Claudio and Don Pedro. The audience and other characters are aware that she is only play-acting her death and resurrection. Spectators are in on the plot, provided with the information to correctly interpret this apparently occult event. "Wonder," as the Friar claims, is continually made "familiar" (5.4.70) throughout the play as it cracks open the relationship between theatre and conversion over and over again. *Much Ado* repeatedly reveals and revels in the theatrical mechanics of conversion—spectators are invited to laugh at how Beatrice and Benedick can be manipulated by theatre and desire into giving up their professed faiths. Yet the play simultaneously responds to and ultimately challenges a deep cultural anxiety about this exact possibility by showing how playacting is used not to overpower Benedick, Beatrice, and Claudio's personhood. They are not led to sin or social destruction but are instead directed toward domestic harmony. The play does not deny theatre's power to invite conversion, but rather recasts such power as a necessary force for social good.

In *The Winter's Tale*, however, Shakespeare experiments more openly with the conversional possibilities of the playhouse itself. The audience experiences the miracle of Hermione's transformation from stone to flesh at the same time as Leontes. In *The Winter's Tale*, no character prepares the audience for Hermione's resurrection before it occurs in the final scene, unlike the way that the audience hears the Friar announce his plan to trick Claudio in Act 4 of *Much Ado*. Instead, the audience, like Leontes, is invited to "awake their faith" in order to make sense of the surprising events unfolding on the stage (5.3.95). The possibility of conversion following Hermione's reanimation is two-fold: while Leontes is intended to be reformed by this event, the audience, too, has the potential for individual interpretation and regeneration.

"My evils conjured to remembrance": Converting Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*

Leontes seems a literary descendent of Claudio. Leontes's fall from grace similarly derives from a paranoid distrust of women's occult powers and perceived sexual infidelity. This section argues that *The Winter's Tale* voices antifeminine discourses surrounding women and conversion through Leontes and Polixenes in order to challenge prescriptive views of the occult woman and her influence—rather than seducing men into sin, the women of the play turn Leontes toward salvation.[57] Shakespeare creates a world where the occult nature of women is non-threatening, openly disputing Leontes's and Polixenes's fears about female witchcraft.[58]

---

[57]The play's staging of repentance and forgiveness are taken up in Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), esp. 127-147; Lysbeth Em Benkert, "Faith and Redemption in *The Winter's Tale*," *Religion and the Arts* 19 (2015): 31-50; Sean Benson, *Shakespearean Resurrection: The Art of Almost Raising the Dead* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2009), 149-183; Huston Diehl, "'Strike All That Look upon with Marvel': Theatrical and Theological Wonder in *The Winter's Tale*," in *Rematerializing Shakespeare: Authority and Representation on the Early Modern English Stage*, ed. Bryan Reynolds and William N. West (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 19–34; and "'Does Not the Stone Rebuke Me?': The Pauline Rebuke and Paulina's Lawful Magic in *The Winter's Tale*" in *Shakespeare and the Cultures of Performance*, ed. Paul Yachnin, et al. (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2008), 69-82; Sara Saylor, "'Almost a Miracle': Penitence in *The Winter's Tale*," *Enchantment and Dis-Enchantment in Shakespeare and Early Modern Drama: Wonder, the Sacred, and the Supernatural*, eds. Nandini Das and Nick Davis (New York: Routledge, 2016), 153-169; Paul D. Stegner, "Masculine and Feminine Penitence in *The Winter's Tale*," *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature* 66, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 189–202; Elizabeth Williamson, "Things Newly Performed: The Resurrection Tradition in Shakespeare's Plays," in *Shakespeare and Religious Change*, eds. Kenneth J. E. Graham and Philip D. Collington (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009), 110–32.

Studies of conversion within *The Winter's Tale* have considered the role of mimetic desire in driving Leontes's jealousy and redemption in René Girard, "The Crime and Conversion of Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*," *Religion and Literature* 22, no. 2-3 (1990): 193-219; the philosophy of authentic conversion developed by twentieth-century theologian Bernard Lonergan in Gregory Maillet, "'Fidelity to the word': Lonerganian Conversion through Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Dante's *Purgatorio*," *Religion and the Arts* 10 (2006): 219-43; and the apostasy of marriage and recovery of an erotics of faith in Gleckman, *Shakespeare and Protestant Poetics*, 211-227.

[58]Because early modern Catholic recusancy and ritual magic were affiliated with femininity and women, scholars often note the link between the play's female characters and what Phebe Jensen calls the play's "Catholic aesthetics." See Phebe Jensen, "Singing Psalms to Horn-Pipes: Festivity, Iconoclasm, and Catholicism in *The Winter's Tale*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 279–306, 281. This link between women and Catholicism is also explored in Jill Delsigne, "Hermetic Miracles in *The Winter's Tale*," in *Magical Transformations on the Early Modern English Stage*, eds. Lisa Hopkins and Helen Ostovich (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2014), 91–109; Frances E. Dolan, "Hermione's Ghost:

Paulina, as a vessel of Apollo's will, is more akin to the play's religious authority, the Oracle of Delphos, or a Sibyl, than a witch who acts in service of Satan. The play does not so much rehabilitate and realign witchcraft, as Kirstie Gulick Rosenfield has suggested, as invite an alternative, positive avenue for interpreting the supernatural attributes and capacities of women.[59] Hermione's reanimation, staged as a theatrical spectacle, serves as a crucial method for achieving this.

The Winter's Tale, like *Much Ado*, demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between the theatre and the occult woman in its conversion narrative. While, in *Much Ado*, the occult woman and female desirability are vehicles through which the play explores the theatre as a positive conversional force, this relationship is inverted in *The Winter's Tale*. Here, this fifth act spectacle serves as the key vehicle through which the feminine occult is shown to be spiritually beneficial and conversional for Leontes. Paulina's framing of the theatrical, mysterious, and unexplained transformation of Hermione as "holy" (5.3.104) and "lawful" (5.3.105), reclaims the occult nature of women as necessary for spiritual conversion, and it relies upon the emotional responses produced by this spectacle in order to do so. Hermione's return is presented by Paulina as an occult phenomenon, and the play continually interrupts any attempts at a lengthy explanation.[60]

Catholicism, the Feminine, and the Undead," in *The Impact of Feminism in English Renaissance Studies*, eds. Dympna Callaghan and Gail Kern Paster (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 213-237; Ruth Vanita, "Mariological Memory in *The Winter's Tale* and *Henry VIII*," *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 40, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 311–37.

[59]Rosenfield, "Nursing Nothing," 95-96. Rosenfield writes that "witchcraft is realigned with healing, art, rebirth, and the power of theatrical performance" where Shakespeare's "re-appropriation of witchcraft as a complex metaphor for artistic creation…links femininity and birthing to art." See also D'Orsay W. Pearson, "Witchcraft in *The Winter's Tale:* Paulina as 'Alcahueta y vn Poquito Hechizera,'" *Shakespeare Studies* 12 (1979): 195-213; Kirby Farrell, "Witchcraft and Wonder in *The Winter's Tale*," in *Renaissance Historicisms: Essays in Honor of Arthur F. Kinney*, eds. James Dutcher and Anne Lake (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 159-72.

[60]Detailed explanations for Hermione's "preservation" are repeatedly cut off—first, by Paulina's interruptive "[t]here's time enough for that" (5.3.128) and then later by Leontes, who ends the play with

Even if the women only simulate Hermione's transformation, her and Paulina's choice to embed Hermione's return in the supernatural shows not only their understanding of these cultural beliefs about women's occult natures, but also the creative way they use them to their advantage. Following Hermione's successful reanimation, Leontes cries, "If this be magic, let it be an art / Lawful as eating" (5.3.110-11). The syntactical construction, "[i]f this be magic," indicates that Leontes redefines and broadens his understanding of "magic" following Hermione's transformation—if what Paulina has done is indeed an example of magic, he declares, then it should be deemed lawful, natural, and familiar. By the end of the play, female magic not only narrowly alludes to the wicked witchcraft Leontes and Polixenes had previously feared but has expanded to include occult acts which produce holy results. The play ultimately demonstrates how that which is "*occulta et secreta*" about women proves central to repentance, forgiveness, and grace.[61]

In addition to their capacity as spiritual helpmates, women and their conversional capabilities also serve important political and social functions in the play. Hermione, Paulina, and Perdita are the primary means for unraveling the two major political crises and the family and friendship conflicts that undergird the play. While Leontes's attempted assassination of Polixenes sows discord with Bohemia, Sicilia also lacks an heir, and Leontes will not take a new wife to produce one, telling Paulina and his counselors, "[n]o more such wives, therefore no

---

the promise that off-stage they will "leisurely / each one demand and answer to his part" (5.3.170-71). The Second Gentleman's claim that Paulina "hath privately twice or thrice a day ever since the death of Hermione visited that removed house" (5.2.103-4) receives no further clarification—the gentleman only assumes that she must be working on some "great matter" (5.2.102), gesturing toward Paulina's reputation as Leontes's counselor and as a servant of Apollo. Even if Hermione has hidden herself away for sixteen years, literally occulting herself, this only raises more questions about the logistics of such a conspiracy between the women.

[61]Magnus, *De secretis mulierum*, sig. A2v.

wife" (5.1.56) and "fear thou no wife; / I'll have no wife" (5.1.68-69). As Jason Gleckman notes, like Benedick and Claudio, Leontes has become stuck in his celibacy.[62] In another parallel with *Much Ado,* the restoration of Hermione and Perdita and their conversional impact on Leontes are central to healing these rifts in both family and friendship. Perdita and Florizel's impending marriage serves as an alliance that will bind the two previously at-odds kingdoms and strengthen the renewed bonds between the two old friends, Leontes and Polixenes.

"Piece[s] of Excellent Witchcraft": Fearing Female Contamination

The Winter's Tale brings anxieties about women's conversional powers to the foreground: both Leontes and Polixenes perceive women as spiritually contaminating. When Hermione asks Polixenes to tell her about his childhood mischiefs with Leontes, Polixenes instead evokes an Edenic fantasy to highlight their boyish purity.[63] They were not mischievous, but "twinned lambs" who knew only "innocence" and could not even dream the "doctrine of ill-doing" (1.2.66-69). In this state, Polixenes claims, they would have died free of original sin. Temptation arrives solely in female form: "[i]n those unfledged days was my wife a girl; / Your precious self had then not crossed the eyes / Of my young playfellow" (1.2.77-79). Polixenes's playful quip echoes popular long-standing biblical interpretations of Eve as the primary agent of Adam's downfall in the Garden. For example, Joseph Swetnam claimed that Eve "was no sooner made but straight way her minde was set upon mischiefe, for by her aspiring minde and wanton will she quickly procured mans fall and therefore ever since [women] are & have been a woe

[62]Gleckman, *Protestant Poetics*, 211-221.

[63]Additionally, readings which align the play's women with Eve and Mary are found in Hannibal Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 171-178 and Amy Tigner, "*The Winter's Tale*: Gardens and the Marvels of Transformation," *English Literary Renaissance* 36, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 114–34.

unto man, and follow the line of their first leader."[64] For Swetnam, women's existence is entirely marked by their propensity to lure men into sin—Eve is the original example of the spiritually corrupting wife and mother: as the first wife, she leads Adam to his fall, and as the first mother, she passes down her corruption to all her daughters. In this line of thinking, women's ability to contaminate the men around them is their natural birthright; they simply "follow the line of their first leader." Hermione offers to defend women against Polixenes's charges, "lest you say / Your queen and I are devils" (1.2.80-81), indicating her own familiarity with this type of thinking about women. By associating Hermione and his wife—and by proxy all women—with Eve, Polixenes demonstrates the shaping power this tradition has over his understandings of women and spirituality.

Sixteen years later, Polixenes sees Hermione's daughter, Perdita, as yet another example of the corrupting woman. Florizel's intention to marry Perdita in 4.4 incites feelings of betrayal, as his son prioritizes love over filial duty. Yet, Polixenes directs more than half his angry speech toward Perdita. She is a "fresh piece / Of excellent witchcraft" (4.4.419-20) and an "enchantment" (4.4.431) that must be banished from his son's presence or killed. Because Perdita's adoptive family lack the social class necessary for a future queen-consort, Polixenes assumes that the strong desire Florizel feels for her cannot be natural but must instead be the result of bewitchment, that Florizel is not in his right mind and has been overpowered. However, the servant's description of Perdita in 5.1 presents her magnetism in a different light. Perdita is thought to be "the most peerless piece of earth… / That e'er the sun shone bright on" (5.1.94-95). Through the servant, the play openly contradicts Polixenes's association of Perdita with witchery, reinterpreting her as an embodiment of the divine, the shining sun a possible reference

[64]Swetnam, *The Arraignment*, sig. B1r.

to the play's deity Apollo, the sun-god. Perdita proves to be a source neither of evil nor of corruption; rather, in her roles as the lost heir and Florizel's intended wife, she is the key to communal harmony between the two families and the two kingdoms. Additionally, the servant remarks that her beauty and grace render her

> a creature
>
> Would she begin a sect, might quench the zeal
>
> Of all professors else, make proselytes
>
> Of who she but bid follow. (5.1.106-9)

Perdita is a woman with the power to convert the most zealous believers in other faiths into believers of her sect. Her inherent charms are so great that, if she desired, she could create a cult of worshippers out of both men and women. Paulina, like Polixenes, assumes Perdita's powers stem from her ability to incite heterosexual desire, exclaiming to the servant in response, "How—not women!" (5.1.109). But the servant's insistence that "[w]omen will love her that she is a woman / More worth than any man" suggests that there is more to Perdita's conversional powers than just her sexual desirability. The darker implications of her influential power, such as the association of Perdita with sectarianism, are most fully emphasized by Polixenes. Polixenes observes Perdita's intrinsic conversional powers as well, but he interprets them not as a sign that she is a "goddess" (5.1.130), which is how Leontes sees her, but as the work of witchcraft and enchantment. In an echo of Claudio's claim that "beauty is a witch" (*Ado* 2.1.180), Polixenes similarly believes that Perdita's beauty has bewitched his son. He threatens to "have thy beauty scratched with briars" (4.4.422) and to "devise a death as cruel for thee / As thou art tender to't" (4.4.437-8). Perdita's influential powers are never in question, but their source—perhaps divine, perhaps diabolic—changes with the interpreter.

In a similar vein to Polixenes's fears that Perdita has bewitched Florizel, Leontes resents Hermione's influence over Polixenes and fears her motherly power over Mamillius. In the play's opening scenes, he becomes increasingly suspicious of Hermione. He initially falls into an intense bout of misogyny-fueled paranoia when he attempts to explain how Hermione could convince Polixenes to stay when "at my request he would not" (1.2.86). Unwilling to concede that she might simply be more persuasive than he is, he assumes the only explanation is that their illicit sexual relationship grants her the power to entice Polixenes to stay. A jealous "infection of [the] brains" (1.2.144) seems to poison Leontes—he diagnoses himself with "*tremor cordis*" (1.2.109)—but this "infection," like those of Claudio and Benedick, does not originate from experiencing the sights and sounds of Hermione and Polixenes's friendly interactions, but rather from his own internal predisposition to see women as "false" (1.2.130). Here, like in *Much Ado*, it is not that visual spectacles enter the body, infecting and perverting spectators, but that an individual's own subjectivity informs how they make sense of such scenes. Taking Polixenes's postponement of his return home as proof of Hermione's immorality, Leontes then fears what she has passed on to her children, both through her teaching of Mamillius and breast-feeding of Perdita. When Leontes accuses Hermione of adultery, he takes Mamillius away, saying "Give me the boy. I am glad you did not nurse him / Though he does bear some signs of me, yet you / Have too much blood in him" (2.1.56-57). When Hermione assumes he jests, he reiterates, "bear the boy hence; he shall not come about her" (2.1.59). Leontes's relief that Hermione did not nurse Mamillius reminds us that early moderns feared corruption could pass from women to children through breast milk.

But this passage also reveals his belief that Hermione contaminated their son in other ways. Even though Mamillius physically looks like his father, Leontes understands the influence

Hermione holds over her son, that her blood runs in his veins, and that she, as his mother, can teach him goodness or wickedness. Leontes claims that Hermione's immorality has a physiological impact on her son—upon hearing of her crimes, Leontes reports that the boy "straight declined, drooped, took it deeply, / Fastened and fixed the shame on't in himself, / Threw off his spirit, his appetite, his sleep" (2.3.14-16). By removing Mamillius from Hermione's presence, Leontes attempts to prevent his son from further contamination. However, as the persecution of Hermione unfolds, Mamillius grows sicker, eventually dying offstage. His death is reported to the audience the exact moment after Leontes denies the Oracle's proclamation, so that Mamillius's death is not the result of Hermione's sexual inconstancy but is divine punishment for Leontes's apostasy. Mamillius's death is more than just the loss of a child—it is the loss Sicilia's future heir, a political catastrophe that can only be resolved, the Oracle claims, by Perdita's return and her restoration to the line of succession.

The confrontation that arises between Paulina and Leontes in the play's first three acts is also undergirded by these ready associations between women and the occult. Paulina's angry scolding of Leontes leads him to denounce her as a "mankind witch" (2.3.67), a "crone" (2.3.76), a "callet" (2.3.90), and a "gross hag" whom he threatens to have "burnt" (2.3.113). Leontes's insults place Paulina within this cultural interpretation of the angry-women-as-witch.[65] Despite her claims that she comes "with words as medicinal" (2.3.37), presenting herself as a sort of spiritual physician, Leontes believes that she is attempting to trick and harm him and Sicilia by

[65]The connection between scolding and witchcraft is detailed in Kirilka Stavreva, *Words Like Daggers: Violent Female Speech in Early Modern England* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 113-118. The significance of calling Paulina "crone" is taken up in Jeanne Addison Roberts, "The Crone in English Renaissance Drama," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama* 15 (2003): 116-37.

emotionally manipulating him to accept Perdita.[66] Her scolding provides him an outward sign of her inner corruption—a corruption he needs to find to support and sustain his current world view. Paulina's response to his threat of burning, that "[i]t is an heretic that makes the fire, / Not she which burns in't" (2.3.114-15), directly aligns witchcraft with heresy, thus recognizing witchcraft as a spiritual crime within the play. Paulina understands these accusations imply a level of spiritual perversion that she then turns onto Leontes—he is the true heretic, not her. Instead, she offers him a spiritual purgative in the form of the infant that he vehemently rejects. Paulina returns to the vocabulary of religious heresy when she reports Hermione's death, asking Leontes, "[w]hat studied torments, tyrant, hast for me? / What wheels, racks, fires? What flaying, boiling?" (3.2.173-74). Her words recall the tortures historically performed on religious heretics and suggest that the conflict between her and Leontes has a spiritual, as well as political, dimension.

Leontes's Apostasy and the Oracle of Delphos

Any consideration of occult women and their religious influence in the play must take seriously the figure of the Oracle of Delphos, yet another woman hidden away, this time in Apollo's island temple. The Oracle, also known as the Pythia, was the high priestess that resided in the inner sanctum of the temple. Anthony Ossa-Richardson has shown how debates about the power and presence of female oracles, and especially the famous Oracle of Delphi, featured prominently in both classical and patristic philosophical writing and in the literary works of

[66]Metaphors of infection and medicine were often used to describe the process of religious conversion. See Helen Smith, "Metaphor, Cure, and Conversion in Early Modern England," *Renaissance Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (2014): 473–502.

Vergil and Lucan.[67] The humanist movement's translation and interpretation of classical and patristic source texts fully revived interest in oracles.[68] Many early modern writers were quick to associate these female oracles with the demonic so that the disappearance of the oracles could be leveraged as the triumph of Christ.[69] Ossa-Richardson notes that because the Pythia gained her name from Apollo's defeat of the Python, and python skin was believed to decorate the oracular tripod, the female Oracle became associated with the serpent's seduction and manipulation of Eve, linking female prophecy to the demonic and to signs of women's easily corruptible natures.[70]

Writers wishing to degrade the oracles or other contemporary female prophetesses emphasized the inherent sexuality of how oracles were believed to receive their prophecies. It was widely accepted that the Oracle entered her trances or achieved *enthusiasmos* by sitting on a tripod over a chasm. The chasm produced vapors which induced a trance-like state and raving that would then be translated by priests.[71] These vapors were believed to enter her body in a myriad of ways. While some asserted that the vapors were inhaled, those seeking to demonize and sexualize the Oracle insisted that the vapors entered through her genitals and into her womb. The church father John Chrysostom popularized this theory, and it was picked up by early

---

[67]Ossa-Richardson's chapter outlining the classical and patristic authorities on oracles and their decline is particularly detailed and insightful. See Ossa-Richardson, *The Devil's Tabernacle*, 13-46.

[68]Ossa-Richardson, *The Devil's Tabernacle*, 13, 41-43.

[69]Ossa-Richardson, *The Devil's Tabernacle*, 14.

[70]Ossa-Richardson, *The Devil's Tabernacle*, 50.

[71]More recent studies on the figure, history, reception, and mythology of the Oracle of Delphi can be found in Ossa-Richardson, *The Devil's Tabernacle*, 1-10; Hugh Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle: Divination and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Julia Kindt, *Revisiting Delphi: Religion and Storytelling in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Michael Scott, *Delphi: A History of the Center of the Ancient World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

modern writers such as Paul Fagius, Jean Bodin, and Johann Jacob Weyer.[72] Weyer noted that "the demon used to speak from the Delphic Pythias in no other way but through the crotch with their thighs splayed."[73] This association of the female prophetess with perverted sexual intercourse became one method through which divine female power was maligned and rendered diabolic in the popular imagination, a topic that I explore in detail in Chapter Four.

The Oracle's mystical powers are intrinsically entwined with her embodied womanhood. Uterine symbolism undergirds the temple at Delphi, from the Pythia's location in the temple's hidden inner sanctum which recalls the uterus's hidden position in the body, to the uterine shape of the *omphalos*, a sacred oracular stone, to the word itself—*Delphi* is closely related to *delphus*, or "womb." The Oracle—and the tradition of Christian female visionaries which follow in her stead—is a doubly occult woman: she both possesses secret knowledge from the gods and, in her capacity to achieve *enthusiasmos*, is herself an occult object whose body becomes the vessel for divinely supernatural deeds. Her presence in the play provides a direct link between the occult woman and the play's religiosity because the Oracle's divine knowledge is channeled through her female body. She reminds playgoers of the close relationship that has always existed between women and the pagan gods, as well as women and God.

The Winter's Tale challenges views of the Oracle as an example of demonic possession or the "antithesis of holy truth." She is an authority figure, one who speaks truth to power and works for the purposes of justice and universal good. Jessica Malay shows how the classical heritage of female prophets, even as it allowed for accusations of witchery, also "defined them as divine, open[ing] up opportunities for an exploration of positive roles for women in the context

---

[72]Ossa-Richardson, *The Devil's Tabernacle*, 32, 47-49.

[73]Johann Weyer, *De praestigiis daemonum et incantationibus ac veneficiis libri sex*, 4th ed. (Basel, 1568), 183, also qtd. in Ossa-Richardson, *The Devil's Tabernacle*, 48.

of the supernatural."[74] Malay notes that reformers such as John Bale, Peter Martyr, John Jewell, John Foxe all saw female prophecy as an "instrument of divine instruction," and sibylline imagery was used during Anne Boleyn's coronation to suggest that she was a divinely heralded queen.[75] The play also aligns the Oracle with a positive construction of the feminine supernatural. As Leontes himself tells us, the Oracle is appealed to for "spiritual counsel" (2.1.186). The representation of the Oracle of Delphos not only demonstrates Shakespeare's willingness to locate spiritual authority in women, but also foreshadows Paulina's own sibylline roles as spiritual counselor, visionary, and servant of Apollo.

Leontes, then, commits blasphemy when he denies the verdict sent by way of the Oracle "in Apollo's name" (3.2.116). "There is no truth at all i'th' oracle," he claims, dismissing the Oracle's conclusions as "mere falsehood" (3.2.138-39). Because the Oracle speaks with the acknowledged voice of Apollo, Leontes is in fact denying the direct word of his god. His denial seems born from a two-fold kind of misogyny. On the one hand, his act is driven by his unshakeable belief in Hermione's adultery. Leontes expects the Oracle to confirm his suspicions. "Though I am satisfied and need no more / Than what I know," he tells the lords in 2.1, "yet shall the oracle / Give rest to th' minds of others" (2.1.189-91). When the Oracle returns the opposite response, Leontes does not hesitate to assume there has been a mistake. "Hast thou read truth?" he asks the officer (3.2.136). Yet, Leontes's insistence that the Oracle does not speak truth also reveals a deeper prejudice that Leontes has about the spiritual power of women. By claiming that her powers are a "falsehood," nothing more than a trick, Leontes once again serves as the voice of masculinist assumptions about women—here, the common conception that

---

[74]Jessica Malay, *Prophecy and Sibylline Imagery in the Renaissance: Shakespeare's Sibyls* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 2.

[75]Malay, *Prophecy and Sibylline Imagery*, 47-49.

female oracles could be written off as "crafty charlatans."[76] His misogyny prompts him to dismiss the divinely supernatural power of women. He cannot believe that women could share an ecstatic relationship with the gods and speak or enact their will, a skepticism that is redressed in the final scene when Leontes must believe in Paulina's ability to transform Hermione as a condition for her return.

Divine retribution for Leontes's apostasy and denial of the Oracle comes swiftly through the death of Mamillius. Leontes accepts his son's death as a punishment, crying in response, "Apollo's angry, and the heavens themselves / Do strike at my injustice" (3.2.144-45). But his tragedy does not end there: Hermione falls to the ground in a swoon, carried away by her ladies. Maurice Hunt suggests that Leontes's conversion happens "abrupt[ly], without any assistance" in the moment following Hermione's fall,[77] when Leontes's acknowledges that he has "too much believed [his] own suspicion" (3.2.149) and begs for Apollo's forgiveness, charting out his course for redemption:

> Apollo, pardon
>
> My great profaneness against thine oracle.
>
> I'll reconcile me to Polixenes,
>
> New woo my Queen, recall the good Camillo (3.2.151-54)

Yet, Leontes's conversion is neither abrupt nor unassisted. Paulina's sixteen-year guidance slowly prepares him, and his conversion is fostered solely through female assistance—not only does Hermione's death provide an object for him to mourn (the tears he pledges to shed on her grave will foster his "recreation" (3.2.238)), but his own forgiveness of himself is directly linked

[76]Ossa-Richardson, *The Devil's Tabernacle*, 17.

[77]Maurice Hunt, "Syncretistic Religion in Shakespeare's Late Romances," *South Central Review* 28, no. 2 (2011): 57-79, 74.

to Hermione's transforming body. His reconciliation with Polixenes, re-wooing of Hermione, and reintroduction of Camillo to his court only begin in the play's final moments. Cleomenes's insistence in 5.1 that Leontes's must "Do as the heavens have done, forget your evil; / With them forgive yourself" (5.1.5-6) reveals that there are two major blocking agents to Leontes' conversion. The first is Leontes, who has yet to "forgive [him]self." Leontes has laid out the necessary tasks to perform his repentance; however, in sixteen years, he has yet to undertake them. Without active participation in his own conversion, both he and his kingdom remain stagnant and frozen in time. Additionally, despite Cleomenes's claim, there is no clear indication that the gods have forgiven Leontes until Perdita and Hermione reappear—their returns are providential signs of grace. Earlier in the play, in her own sibylline moment, Paulina speaks for Apollo by telling Leontes his pardon will never be accepted because his sins are too heavy. Ten thousand years of naked begging in a winter's storm, Paulina tells him, "could not move the gods / To look the way thou wert" (3.2.211-12). The only hope exists in the Oracle's vague and mysterious claim that "the King shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found" (3.2.132-33), as Paulina continually reminds him. The meaning of the Oracle's prophecy takes on a double significance, signifying both Perdita and Hermione, the play's two lost women.

From Stone to Flesh

Hermione's return becomes positioned as the crucial ingredient for Leontes to complete his suspended process of conversion and find peace within himself and with the gods. Leontes himself believes that he can never heal while Hermione remains dead. As long as he remembers "her and her virtues, I cannot forget / My blemishes in them, and so still think of / The wrong I did" (5.1.6-8). Paulina further inflames these feelings of guilt as she catalogues Hermione's

virtues, until Leontes agrees "no more such wives, therefore no wife" (5.1.56). Paulina extracts a promise from Leontes that he will give her leave to choose his new queen, who will "be such / As walked your first queen's ghost" (5.1.79-80) and will only occur when "your first queen's again in breath; / Never till then" (5.1.83-84). Both of Paulina's statements serve as Shakespeare's dramatic foreshadowing for the play's final scene and Hermione's transformation. Yet they also suggest that Paulina has some idea that Hermione may soon be "again in breath." We might interpret Paulina here as akin to a Sibyl who communicates Apollo's will—after all, she positions Cleomenes and Dion's advice to marry again as contrary to the will of the heavens (5.1.44-46). Paulina reminds Leontes of what "the divine Apollo said," declaring that "the gods / Will have fulfilled their secret purposes" (5.1.35-40). Read in this context, Paulina's remarks about Leontes remarrying when his first queen is "again in breath," coupled with her eventual transformation of Hermione, suggest that she both knows the gods' secret purposes and acts as their vessel—a human agent able to manifest divine will on an earthly plane.

Much has been written about Paulina's role as Leontes's spiritual counselor.[78] Huston Diehl demonstrates how Paulina's use of the "Pauline rebuke" gives her a narrative function similar to her biblical namesake, Saint Paul.[79] For Diehl, Shakespeare associates Paulina with Paul in order to defend the theatre against charges of idolatry, and, through her womanhood, to disrupt the misogynistic traditions constructed through Paul's epistles.[80] The connections

---

[78]Paulina's harsh speeches and role as a counselor are focused on in Diehl, "Does not the stone," 69-82; Stuart M. Kurland, "'We Need No More of Your Advice': Political Realism in 'The Winter's Tale,'" *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 31, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 365–386; Stegner, "Masculine and Feminine Penitence," 192-199.

[79]Diehl, "Does not the stone," 71-74. See also Daniel Knapper, "Thunderings, Not Words: Aspects of Pauline Style in Pericles and the *Winter's Tale*," *Shakespeare Studies* 47 (2019): 169-204.

[80]Diehl, "Does not the stone," 75-82.

between Paulina and Paul, as Diehl reveals, are certainly too great to ignore. Yet we should also note that Paul was one of the Bible's most famous converts, and in his role as an evangelist preacher, one of the Bible's greatest convertors. By making a woman named Paulina into Leontes's spiritual teacher, Shakespeare also relocates the great conversional power of Paul in women. Her divine knowledge and magical powers marry the cultural weight of Paul to the feminine occult.

Paulina's two roles—servant of the gods and spiritual counselor—come together in the miraculous final scene. Paulina's magical transformation of Hermione is an occult phenomenon designed to convert Leontes. The sacrality of Hermione's stone statue kept in Paulina's chapel recalls the Oracle's *omphalos*, as the sacred stone in both instances becomes the channel through which the gods' will is enacted. The stone statue's narrative function as the vessel of conversion and divine will further endows Paulina with occult powers. Indeed, the power to bring Hermione back is earlier aligned with god-like abilities. During her lament for Hermione's death in 3.2, Paulina tells Leontes:

> if you can bring
> Tincture or lustre in her lip, her eye,
> Heat outwardly or breath within, I'll serve you
> As I would do the gods. (3.2.202-5)

Paulina suggests that were Leontes able to bring color back to Hermione's face and lips, make her warm, or cause her to draw breath, he would possess power akin to the gods, power that would make him worthy of being worshipped as a deity. Leontes does not have those abilities, but Paulina does. Paulina leads the crowd to slowly discover these properties in the statue as she

builds to her climatic conclusion: the total reanimation of the statue into a warm, breathing, moving woman whose aliveness can be verified by these outward signs.

Paulina can lead the crowd to these emotional responses because her reveal of Hermione is crafted as a piece of theatre. Paulina warns her audience that they will "see…life as lively mocked as ever" (5.3.19), and she begins the resurrection play by drawing a curtain open to reveal the statue. The emotional effect this produces is immediate and shocking—the entire gathered crowd falls silent (5.3.21). It is Leontes, however, who has the strongest reaction—largely because Paulina has designed this scene for him. While Gosson claimed that overwrought emotions are "treason to our soules," because strong emotions overpower personhood, allowing playwrights to deliver these souls to their master the Devil, Shakespeare rebukes this interpretation on both fronts.[81] Not only does Paulina frequently assert that her powers are not diabolical, but this spectacle generates the opposite reaction in Leontes. He does not betray his soul, he bares it. Leontes admits "I am ashamed" (5.3.37), and he remarks upon the power this spectacle has to persuade him to reflect on his past sins. "There's magic in thy majesty," he says directly to the statue, "which has / My evils conjured to remembrance" (5.3.39-40). The "magic" effects the statue and the theatricality of this scene have on Leontes echo Heywood's argument that "so bewitching a thing is lively and well spirited action, that it hath power to new mold the hearts of the spectators."[82]

Paulina's stage-play takes on just such a trajectory—it plans to bewitch spectators by demonstrating the aliveness of the statue with the motive to mold a new, converted heart for Leontes. Just as Hermione's exterior body is stone, Leontes shares that he has internally turned

---

[81]Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions*, sig. F1r-F1v.

[82]Heywood, *Apology for Actors*, sig. B4r.

to stone. "Does not the stone rebuke me," he wonders, "For being more stone than it?" (5.3.37-8). The conceit that the unconverted is stone inside has both Ovidian and Christian roots and significant conversional resonances in both scripture and myth.[83] Early modern religious writings frequently juxtaposed the stony heart against the fleshly one to demarcate nonbelievers from the godly. The melting of the one into the other, then, was perceived as a conversion—a turn, or return, to Christ. Paulina, acting as an agent for the god Apollo, transforms both Hermione's stone body and Leontes's stony heart, simultaneously performing an occult act and a holy conversion, crucially aided by the "bewitching" nature of theatrical spectacle in this scene.

Beyond compelling him to reflect on his sins, Hermione's statue also reawakens long-dormant desire in Leontes. Leontes wants to kiss Hermione's newly painted lips, and Paulina must intervene to prevent him from doing so. He becomes quite overwrought with a variety of emotions—chief among them, grief, desire, regret, and wonder—and these emotions are further stoked by Paulina's repeated remarks that she will draw the curtain closed, as well as her hints that, if he continues in such a state, he will believe that the statue is moving and living. He follows where she subtly leads, and he claims he can see Hermione breathe and see her eyes move. "Would you not deem it breathed," he asks, "and that those veins / Did verily bear blood?" (5.3.64-65). Polixenes remarks that "very life seems warm upon her lip" (5.3.66), and Leontes responds that "[t]he fixture of her eye has motion in't" (5.3.67). Leontes revels in the

[83]The metaphorical significance of stone in the play has been the focus on many critical studies. See Leonard Barkan, "'Living Sculptures': Ovid, Michelangelo, and *The Winter's Tale*, *ELH* 48, no. 4 (Winter 1981): 639-667; Sarah Dewar-Watson, "The *Alcestis* and the Statue Scene in *The Winter's Tale*, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 73-80; Erin Minear, "Ghost Stories and Living Monuments: Bringing Wonders to Life in *The Winter's Tale*," in *Enchantment and Dis-enchantment in Shakespeare and Early Modern Drama: Wonder, the Sacred, and the Supernatural*, eds. Nandini Das and Nick Davis (New York: Routledge, 2017), 170-184; Jennifer Waldron, "Of Stones and Stony Hearts: Desdemona, Hermione, and Post-Reformation Theater" in *The Indistinct Human in Renaissance Literature*, eds. Jean E. Feerick, and Vin Nardizzi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 205-227.

"pleasure of that madness" (5.3.73) sparked by engaging with the statue, until Paulina says, "I have thus far stirred you, but / I could afflict you farther" (5.3.74-75). Paulina "afflict[s]" Leontes, another playful echo of the medical grammar appropriated by antitheatricalists, similar to Benedick's "infection" or the "creeping" of Hero back into Claudio's affections. Leontes's response, "Do, Paulina, / For this affliction has as sweet a taste / As any cordial comfort" (5.3.75-77), reclaims this theatrical infection as not only "sweet," but as a "cordial," a restorative cure for what ails him.

Finally, when Leontes can bear the temptation of the statue no longer, Paulina reveals her life-giving, occult power:

> If you can behold it,
> I'll make the statue move indeed, descend
> And take you by the hand—but then you'll think,
> Which I protest against, I am assisted
> By wicked powers. (5.3.87-91)

Paulina declares that she can transform Hermione, although she is careful to protest that she does not use witchcraft or call upon demonic power. Rather, this act, instead of "wicked" shall be "holy" (5.3.104) and "lawful" (5.3.105). It is power that comes from the gods, an occult power that Shakespeare often locates within his female characters. Paulina is not the only Shakespearean woman to bring stone to life. In *All's Well That Ends Well* (ca. 1598-1608), Lafew reports to the King the occult phenomena that he heard Helena has performed, one of which is a "medicine / That's able to breathe life into a stone, / Quicken a rock" (*All's W.* 2.1.84-86).[84] The play correlates Helena's medical miracles with the inexplicable and mysterious, they

[84]William Shakespeare, *All's Well That Ends Well*, ed. Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, Rebecca Niles (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.).

are magic-like, part of the fairy-tale dimension of the play. Here, Paulina performs the same kind of feat, commanding Hermione to "descend; be stone no more; approach; / Strike all that look upon with marvel—come" (5.3.99). With this list of performative commands, aided by music and the imaginative faith of her audience, Paulina turns Hermione from stone into flesh, and Hermione, slowly, descends and reaches out her hand. Crucially, however, theatrical spectacle alone is not enough to transform Hermione or Leontes. As Paulina tells Leontes, and by proxy, the audience, active participation is necessary: "It is required / You do awake your faith" (5.3.94-95). Paulina's insistence on "you" emphasizes the role that the subject plays in conversion. Additionally, the vagueness of the second person pronoun "you" means this command can apply to more than just Leontes—each of the playgoers has the choice to position themselves as the "you" to which Paulina refers. The moment Hermione descends evidences Leontes's participation: it is an outward, observable sign that his inner faith—and perhaps even that of the audience—has been restored by his or their own spiritual resolve.

Consequently, we are able to see Leontes's inner, invisible conversion by watching how the cold stone statue of Hermione begins to move and come to warm life. The inner conversion of Leontes's soul is marked by the outward conversion of Hermione's body. The audience and the other characters in the play are meant to watch as Paulina brings both Hermione and Leontes back to life. It is an extreme example of Crawford's notion of "reformist physiognomy," in which "one could determine from a given bodily form the state of the soul" because "the body was transparent to the error, or righteousness, of its conscience."[85] As Leontes's wife, granted so much power and responsibility for his spiritual health within early modern culture, Hermione stands on the pedestal for all to see, the embodiment of his soul. In her roles as the sign and

[85]Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism*, 18.

catalyst for Leontes's conversion, Hermione functions as a conduit of divine grace, sanctifying her husband and making him whole. She is the literalization of Leontes's inner change. His transformation is marked on her body—a tantalizingly corporeal network of embedded images of alchemical transmutation, Ovid's Galatea, the Catholic sacrament, and the Resurrected Christ all at once. However, this literalization also serves a key theatrical function: because the stage is a visual medium, Leontes's interior, private conversion is presented to the audience through his wife's bodily one. The play addresses the early modern audience's anxiety around the unknowable interiority of conversion by inviting the spectators to feel Leontes's visceral emotional response to the statue and witness his soul's reanimation through Hermione.

The final scene, so necessary for the play to produce its reconciliations, relies centrally upon supernatural womanhood in its depiction of conversion. The decision to have Hermione stand as stone, as the physical representation of her husband's internal spirit, reproduces the conversional connections that wives apparently have with their husbands, that women have with men. Hermione and Paulina each possess enormous influence over Leontes's spiritual health, and their overall narrative function within the play is to help him achieve salvation. *The Winter's Tale*, then, is part of a larger cultural tradition that recuperated supernatural womanhood by envisioning Christian women voluntarily upholding and refashioning hegemonic structures. Given women's believed openness to the divine, Paulina and Hermione's decisions to procure a spiritual conversion in Leontes—Hermione's husband and Paulina's king—function as signs of divine approval for the emerging English nation-state and the patriarchal family unit. The restoration of both patriarchy and monarchy in the final moments neither negates the agency the women show throughout the play nor represents the returned oppression of women. Rather, this restoration serves as the ultimate expression of early modern women's power, signaling how the

theatre, too, helped envision women as particularly suited for safeguarding and symbolizing the spirit of the nation. In my final chapter, I turn to the genre of the history play to demonstrate how Christian historiographical practices portrayed women as key players within national conversion.

CHAPTER FOUR

Converting the Nation: Feminizing *Historia Sacra* on the Early Modern Stage

"I tell you plaine, these women wil stand up in judgement against you one day, for that they have followed the Lord, and ye are fallen from him."
–William Leigh, *The First Step, Towards Heaven* (1609)[1]

A KING, a PRIEST a PROPHET, all these Three
Shall meet in ONE: Sacred DIVINITY
Shall be to FLESH ESPOUSED. Oh who can scan
This Mystery UNITING GOD with MAN!
When this RARE BIRTH into the World Shall come,
He the Great God of Oracles strikes Dumb.
–prophecy of the Libyan Sibyl, recorded in Thomas Heywood, *Gynaikeion* (1624)[2]

Thomas Heywood's inclusion of prophecies by the Libyan Sibyl and her sibylline sisters in his history of women exemplifies a wider reclamation of the ancient Sibyls as the first heralds of Christ.[3] These translated poetic prophecies that supposedly "sung and declared [Christ's] prayses" were repeated in a diverse body of texts across the period, from the Catholic *Booke of Christian Exercise* (1592) to the popular Protestant ballad *O Yes, O Yes I do Cry* (1639).[4] "[T]hese Prophecies of the Sibyls," one writer noted, "are of mervailous importance to confirme the verity of our Christian religion."[5] The sibylline prophecies, often presented alongside accounts of biblical prophetesses such as Miriam, Deborah, Anna, Hulda, and Hannah, asserted

---

[1]William Leigh, *The First Step, Towards Heaven, Or Anna the Prophetesse Sacred Haunt* (London, 1609), 32.

[2]Thomas Heywood, *Gynaikeion: Or, Nine Bookes of various History. Concerninge Women Inscribed by Ye Names of Ye Nine Muses* (London, 1624), 81.

[3]Malay, *Prophecy and Sibylline Imagery*, 47-49.

[4]Heywood, *Gyanikeion*, 88.

[5]R.P., *The Second Part of the Booke of Christian Exercise, Appertayning to Resolution. Or a Christian Directory, Guiding all Men Unto their Salvation* (London, 1592), 230.

the centrality of women and women's perceived supernatural abilities to Christian history. Interest in *historia sacra*—or the history of Christianity from its primitive origins through to the contemporary moment—exploded during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As Rosamund Oates reminds us, "[h]istorical analysis" was "a central part of English Protestantism," as Protestant reformers, Evangelicals, and Catholics alike sought to defend their theologies by aligning their beliefs and practices with the "pure" church of the past.[6] This final chapter builds on my discussion of women's divine conversional influence within the family and community from Chapters Two and Three, demonstrating how the early modern stage embedded the feminine occult in historical moments of national conversion. The public theatre, I argue, legitimized and sacralized women's conversional powers by establishing their long history within and importance to the dissemination of Christian doctrine.

In particular, this chapter explores how early modern history plays used the figures of the female prophetess and martyr to make supernatural womanhood essential to English *historia sacra*. The three plays studied in this chapter—Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr* (1620), John Fletcher and Massinger's *The Prophetess* (1622), and Fletcher and Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* (1613)—take different historiographical approaches to watershed moments of Christian history. *The Virgin Martyr*, set during the reign of the Roman Emperor and infamous persecutor of Christians Diocletian, recalls the medieval saint's play or *tragedia sacra* of the Counter-Reformation, focusing on the real-life martyrdom of Dorothea of Caesarea.[7] *The*

---

[6]Rosamund Oates, "Elizabethan Histories of English Christian Origins," in *Sacred History: Uses of the Christian Past in the Renaissance*, eds. Katherine Van Liere, et. al (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 165-185, esp. 168.

[7]See, for example, Louise George Clubb, "*The Virgin Martyr* and the *Tragedia sacra*," *Renaissance Drama* 7 (1964): 103-126; Nova Myhill, "Making Death a Miracle: Audience and the Genres of Martyrdom in Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*," *Early Theatre* 7, no. 2 (2004): 9-31.

Prophetess, set in the same historical moment, more closely resembles a romantic comedy than a traditional history play, as the titular prophetess, Delphia, helps Diocletian to power in return for marrying her niece. *Henry VIII*, a dramatization of the king's "Great Matter" and subsequent break from Rome, employs supernatural tropes from tragicomic romance—including a dumb show in which Katherine of Aragon is crowned Queen of Heaven—that render the play at odds with Shakespeare's other chronicle histories. Yet, despite their generic diversity, all three plays share a concentrated investment in the feminine occult. The plays add fantastical elements to their historical narratives that establish women's uniquely intimate relationship with God and women's supernatural powers as a force for national good. By doing so, they reclaim women, and the occult qualities these women embody and employ, as the founders and engineers of England's own Christian identity, inviting their audiences to consider the vital roles that women have played in sacred history.

The public playhouse was a key site of English history-making, bringing to life for playgoers famous moments and figures from classical, European, and English history. Women's place within the dramatic canon of history plays, however, has long been a point of scholarly contention. If we subscribe to the standard critical consensus, which tends to focus on the most anthologized Shakespearean histories, we are left with the impression that women characters in the history plays are either villainous or nonexistent.[8] "History-making" on the early modern stage, Phyllis Rackin notes, appears to be "an exclusively masculine project," in which women

[8]Phyllis Rackin and Jean Howard note, for example, that women account for only 4% of the dialogue in *1 Henry IV*, and, even in plays like the first tetralogy, *King John*, or *Henry VIII*, where women speak much more, "women's parts are often cut in modern productions." See Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories* (London: Routledge, 1997), 23-24. For another overview of the representation of women in the history plays, see Nina S. Levine, *Women's Matters: Politics, Gender, and Nation in Shakespeare's Early History Plays* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998).

are relegated to peripheral or antagonistic roles.[9] Martha A. Kurtz, summarizing the wealth of scholarship produced on the history plays, concludes that the most "frequently reiterated premise" is that "the history play as a genre is fundamentally antagonistic to women and the 'feminine'."[10] Rebecca Ann Bach suggests that, because history plays obsess over questions of "manliness," womanhood becomes synonymous with "monstrosity" across this corpus.[11] And, in one of the most recent companions to Shakespeare's works, Ton Hoenselaars's essay on history plays contains only three sentences about the representation of women characters:

> The nation's history has been significantly determined by potent and influential women. In the first tetralogy, Shakespeare presented these historical figures, including Joan of Arc and Margaret of Anjou, as unruly women. In the later plays, he contained the anxiety provoked there by safely removing the women from the active political arena, domesticating and marginalizing them, as with Princess Catherine of France in *Henry V*.[12]

Even as Hoenselaars acknowledges the crucial role that women played in shaping the emerging English nation-state, his brief gloss of their roles in English dramatic historiography again reduces them to the same two options: "unruly" or "marginalized." In response to Hoenselaars

---

[9]Phyllis Rackin, "Women's Roles in the Elizabethan History Plays," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 71-86, esp. 76.

[10]Martha A. Kurtz, "Rethinking Gender and Genre in the History Play," *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 36, no. 2 (1996): 267-287, esp. 267.

[11]Rebecca Ann Bach, "Manliness Before Individualism: Masculinity, Effiminacy, and Homoerotics in Shakespeare's History Plays," in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works V. II*, eds. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), 220-245, esp. 220.

[12]Ton Hoenselaars, "Shakespeare's English History Plays," in *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, eds. Margreta De Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 137-152, esp. 147.

and the larger critical tradition he encapsulates, I turn to Rackin's assertion that our overwhelmingly "negative estimation" of women in history plays is largely an "artefact of our own construction."[13] By so heavily focusing on such a small, "elite" body of texts, we have overlooked less canonical historical dramas that provide a far more complex vision of how women's contributions to national and religious history were explored on the stage.

In this chapter, I offer a new way to consider women's roles in history plays. I suggest that more generative depictions of women's national religious influence are found, not in the chronicle plays about English monarchical history, but in generically experimental plays invested in exploring and staging England's religio-historical past. The idea of opening up our discussion of history plays to include non-Shakespearean—or at the very least less canonical—plays is not in itself revolutionary. Rackin suggests *King John* (1590s) and *Edward III* (1596) as more women-centric plays, and Kurtz considers *Woodstock* (1590-93) and *Sir Thomas More* (1592-1604). I want to turn our attention, however, to plays that have women characters at their core, showing how early modern stagings of Christian history—especially stories of Christian conversion—frequently depended upon women. Thus, approaching a play like *Henry VIII* as not only a monarchical history, but crucially a *Christian* history, helps us to better account for why it, of all Shakespeare's historical dramas, creates the most space for positive depictions of divine female power.

The two other plays studied here, *The Prophetess* and *The Virgin Martyr*, are not traditional chronicle history plays; however, each marketed itself as a historical drama. In the fourth act opening to *The Prophetess*, for example, the Chorus describes the play's action as "history," "mix'd, I hope, with sweet variety" (4.1, 38), and the play was classified as a "Tragical

[13]Rackin, "Women's Roles in the Elizabethan History Plays," 77.

History" on its title page in the 1679 Folio of Beaumont and Fletcher's works and subsequent eighteenth-century editions.[14] Similarly, *The Virgin Martyr*, based on the historical martyrdom of Dorothea of Caesarea described in John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (1563) and other martyrologies, presents itself as a "true" historical narrative. For example, when summarizing the events of the play, the character Theophilus claims that the audience and other characters have witnessed "the truth" of "how and what this blessed virgin suffered" (5.2.105-106).[15]

Through their historical settings, both *The Prophetess* and *The Virgin Martyr* contributed to a wider interest in the subject of ancient Rome on the stage and in early modern culture.[16] Because England had been part of the Roman Empire, Roman history was, by extension, a part of English history. Robert Miola argues that "[i]n Shakespeare's ancient Rome original audiences could see strangers and themselves," so that Rome was "both a world apart and, in some true sense, home."[17] Yet, invoking Diocletian in particular as both a character and historical backdrop renders both *The Prophetess* and *The Virgin Martyr* explorations of a vital moment of intersecting Roman, English, and Christian history. Diocletian was mythologized as

---

[14]All references to *The Prophetess* come from the facsimile online edition of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *Comedies and Tragedies* (London, 1647), edited by Paul Ellison (University of Exeter, 1998). Parenthetical citations refer to act, scene, and page number in the folio.

[15]References to *The Virgin Martyr* come from *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker Vol. 3*, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 365-463. Parenthetical citations refer to act, scene, and line number.

[16]Robert Miola notes that "forty-three Roman plays…survive from 1497 to 1651." See Robert S. Miola, "Shakespeare's Ancient Rome: Difference and Identity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 193-213, esp. 212. Other studies of Rome on the Shakespearean stage include the foundational Paul A. Cantor, *Shakespeare's Rome: Republic and Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Coppélia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds and Women* (London: Routledge, 1997); Maria Del Sapio Garbero, *Shakespeare's Ruins and the Myth of Rome* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

[17]Miola, "Shakespeare's Ancient Rome," 213.

an infamous persecutor of Christians in England and abroad, the last bastion of pagan heresy before Constantine's conversion and the official declaration of Rome as a Christian empire. The early modern English historian John Clapham, for example, emphasizes that Diocletian's reign was "the last and longest" persecution "in the Primitive Church."[18] Stories about Diocletian were considered directly relevant to English *historia sacra*. Richard Broughton's *The Ecclesiasticall Historie of Great Britaine* (1633) argues that "Dioclesian [and] his Persecution" are necessary inclusions in any "Religeous" "Histories…of this Nation."[19] Diocletian's abdication was situated by early modern Christian histories as the ultimate triumph for Christianity that allowed its spread across England and the Continent. "The storm of persecution afterward ceasing, when *Dioclesian* yielded up the government," Clapham writes in *The Historie of Great Britannie* (1606), "gave free passage to the profession of Christian religion."[20] Therefore, when *The Prophetess* and *The Virgin Martyr* stage Delphia and Dorothea challenging Diocletian or engendering his abdication, these plays proclaim women as directly responsible for this great Christian victory and its widely felt consequences. These two plays join others, like Hrosvitha of Gandersheim's early comedy *Dulcitius* (ca. 935-973) or William Rowley's *A Shoemaker a Gentleman* (c. 1618) that emphasize women's resistance to Roman authority—and particularly to Diocletian himself—as Christian martyrs and rebels.[21]

---

[18]John Clapham, *The Historie of Great Britannie Declaring the Successe of Times and Affaires in that Island, from the Romans First Entrance* (London, 1606), 132-133.

[19]Richard Broughton, *The Ecclesiasticall Historie of Great Britaine* (Dovai, 1633), 424.

[20]Clapham, *The Historie of Great Britannie*, 132-133.

[21]In *Dulcitius*, Diocletian attempts to convert three sisters, Agape, Chionia, and Irena, so that they can marry members of his court. They stand firm, however, and are protected from rape and torture by their faith, until they are martyred. *A Shoemaker a Gentleman* is set in Roman Britain, and, in the play's inciting incident the British Queen sacrifices herself to save her sons, revealing to Diocletian and Maximian that she is a Christian. The play's subplot stages the martyrdom of St. Winifred.

Given the concentrated effort to connect the Reformation to this sacred past, Roman history and Roman settings had political, religious, and didactic uses in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. Rome was synonymous with Catholicism in the early modern period, and the ancient Roman Empire provided the setting for the battles of the primitive Church and mass Christianization of the West. Just as the early church fought against Roman authorities, Rome was now once again the main antagonist in the fight for true religion. "In the wake of the Reformation and Elizabeth's Protestant settlement," Freya Cox Jensen claims, Roman history offered "a series of models and lessons which bore real relevance to the present."[22] Connections between Rome and Reformation England were often explicit—Queen Elizabeth herself was pronounced another Constantine by the influential Protestant martyrologist John Foxe. Foxe writes in his dedication to *Actes and Monuments* that just as Constantine "established the churche of Christ," Elizabeth now serves and protects that same church as "defendour of the faith." The tie between them is teased out further when Foxe emphasizes that Constantine was the son of "Helene an Englysh woman of this youre Realm."[23] In situating Constantine as an English citizen through his mother, a member of Elizabeth's "Realm," Foxe renders this moment of Roman history and initial conversion an important part of English history and Elizabeth's inherited legacy. Through the syntactical composition of the sentence, Helen's Englishness becomes in part responsible for Constantine's conversion, and Foxe's allusion to Constantine's mother recalls the influence of the mother upon her children's confessional identity and spirituality. For Foxe, an English woman, through her conversional powers as a

[22]Freya Cox Jensen, *Reading the Roman Republic in Early Modern England* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1-2; 6.

[23]John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* or *TAMO* (1563 edition) (Sheffield: The Digital Humanities Institute, 2011), 5. See also Malay, *Prophecy and Sibylline Imagery*, 56.

woman and mother, engendered the rise of Christianity across Europe, and another English woman, Elizabeth, now safeguards that legacy through the Religious Settlement.

The Prophetess and *The Virgin Martyr*, then, have a lot to say to *Henry VIII*, a play which culminates in the baptism of the infant Elizabeth. Despite the different historical settings of the Roman plays and *Henry VIII*, all are concerned with moments of great national religious change—the primitive church and the English Reformation—that were continually being brought together in English politics and ecclesiastical histories. In all three plays, women are central to these national conversions, and the texts celebrate prophesizing and martyrdom as feminocentric acts with the power to shape nations, and indeed, suggest that Christian history was itself shaped by these acts. In order to better understand how characters like Delphia or Dorothea resonated with early modern audiences, the first section of this chapter describes the role that female prophetesses and martyrs played in Reformation politics, exploring how the debates surrounding these figures were engaged with the larger conversation around the feminine occult and conversion. In the sections that follow, I turn to our three history plays, demonstrating how their depictions of *historia sacra* depend upon the feminine occult. Rather than discussing these plays in chronological order of their writing, I begin with *The Virgin Martyr* and *The Prophetess*, ending the chapter by considering how understanding these gendered conversional depictions can help us to a better appreciation of women in *Henry VIII*.

Sibyls, Prophetesses, and Martyrs, Oh My!

The figures of the prophetess and the female martyr continually overlapped within Christian history. *The Wonders of the Female World* (1682), for example, organized accounts of both under the theme of "religious women," likely given the many similarities between the

embodied divine power, political motivations, and rhetorical use of both figures.[24] The prophetess and martyr were each public religio-political figures who saw themselves speaking truth to power in ways that provoked strong responses from government or religious authorities. And, indeed, many female prophetesses, like the apocryphal Perpetua or Elizabeth Barton in the sixteenth century, were martyred for their respective religious causes, just as martyrs who underwent extreme torture were believed to experience bodily transcendence. The prophetess and the female martyr were also important, influential figures within both early Christian and Reformation politics, used by historiographers to provide witness to God's power or to serve as exemplars of ideal Christian behavior and sacrifice. In performing their divine acts, the prophetess and the martyr each relied upon embodied power. Gail Corrington Streete suggests that for the martyr, "the body serves as a visible symbol of the power of God…working through the limits of fragile mortal flesh."[25] Yet, the prophetess, too, uses her body as a literal channel for the word of God in order to testify and reveal God's interest in and influence upon world events, especially when practicing asceticism, entering an ecstatic trance, or painfully undergoing seizures or spasms.

The power—literal, symbolic, and rhetorical—of the prophetess and the female martyr was intimately tied to their embodied womanhood, amplified by the already pervasive belief in the feminine occult that characterized depictions of women throughout classical and Christian history. As Crawford and King explain, it is not that there were no male prophets and martyrs operating in either the primitive church or Reformation England, but that the acts of prophecy and martyrdom were themselves gendered, dependent on the concept of the feminized,

---

[24]Anonymous, *The Wonders of the Female World, Or a General History of Women* (London, 1682), 145.

[25]Gail Corrington Streete, *Redeemed Bodies: Women Martyrs in Early Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 12.

penetrable body. Prophecy, King claims, was understood as "penetration of a person by the Spirit."[26] Women, as discussed across this dissertation, were understood to be more easily penetrable than men. This was not only because traditional understandings of heteronormative sex acts understood women as the penetrable partner, but because women's humoral physiology, their coldness and wetness, were believed to leave them permeable and open to a host of occult forces. Thus, prophesizing did not break Paul's command to forbid women from speaking in church, George Fox argued, because it was not the woman speaking at all. Rather, it was "the Spirit of God or Christ in the Females speaking" after he had entered the female body.[27] Because of her combined sexual and humoral porosity, the female prophetess was understood to be able to receive God into her body more easily and naturally than men. The frenzied spilling of words that often accompanied these ecstatic trances was then positioned as an extension of the "incontinence" of the female body and female speech.[28] This liminal space of spiritual ecstasy that allowed God to use women as a vessel, achieved by female prophetesses in their trances and martyrs during their torture, was believed to be more easily accessible to women because they were already understood as "threshold creatures."[29]

---

[26]Karen L. King, "Prophetic Power and Women's Authority: The Case of the *Gospel of Mary* (Magdalene)," in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millenia of Christianity*, eds. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 21-41, esp. 27.

[27]George Fox, *Concerning Sons and Daughters, and Prophetesses Speaking and Prophecying, in the Law and the Gospel and Concerning Womens Learning in Silence and also Concerning Womens Not Speaking in the Church* (London, 1661), 3.

[28]Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, 83; Malay, *Prophecy and Sibylline Imagery*, 78.

[29]Streete, *Redeemed Bodies*, 12.

Additionally, because of women's social position, they made, as Edith Wilks Dolnikowski observes, substantially more "compelling figures."[30] Women's marginality and second-class status in early modern society made them strong candidates for the scriptural notion that the "last shall be first," as writers rationalized that women were chosen by God not in spite of but *because* of their perceived weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Defenses of prophetesses and martyrs also relied upon appeals that asserted women's natural religiosity and divinity, as discussed in Chapter Two. The preacher William Leigh, for example, used the story of the biblical prophetess Anna to model for his congregation how to "love the church." [31] Throughout his sermon, Leigh sees the conversional potential in the figure of the prophetess—she not only epitomizes ideal Christian behavior but also provides proof of godly miracles and godly presence on the earthly plane. This public testifying necessary to acts of prophecy and martyrdom was more sensational and striking when performed by a woman, who was so moved with holy conviction that she left the safety and comfort of the private, domestic sphere. Dolnikowski notes that the female martyr's sacrifice was considered more meaningful "because they were forced out of their conventional roles within the family to be public witnesses to the faith of Christ." Taking on "greater personal risk," women were "even more powerful model[s] for Christian behavior[s], both for the laity and for the clergy."[32] What was significant for a man was amplified when enacted by a delicate, vulnerable woman, and writers like Foxe highlighted women's feminine gentleness to further vilify their persecutors, hoping the sympathy inspired by

---

[30]Edith Wilks Dolnikowski, "Feminine Exemplars for Reform: Women's Voices in John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*," in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millenia of Christianity*, eds. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 199-211, esp. 203.

[31]Leigh, *The First Step, Towards Heaven*, 87.

[32]Dolnikowski, "Feminine Exemplars," 203.

these female victims would convert more to the cause. Yet even as these figures had the potential to convert spectators or readers through their sacrifice, they were also more compelling because they invited a heightened and sexualized voyeuristic pleasure for those watching and reading about these acts. Streete reminds us that these women's bodies were "literally 'exposed' to the public gaze."[33] Ecstatic trances and convulsions provided external signs similar to orgasm, and the accounts of the executions of martyrs overwhelmingly emphasized the female attributes of the naked body (such as the breasts) and the ways that body was being desacralized and penetrated.

Thus, while their embodied womanhood rendered women more captivating and believable vessels for God, it also left them exposed to a host of antifeminine critiques. The conflicting discourses of the witch and the sacred woman – as described in Chapters One and Two – are woven together in debates about these two politicized figures. In 1646, an anonymous tract speaking out against women prophetesses argued that they were "Syrens," who would lead men astray by claiming divine knowledge. The writer claims these women work for the "Prince of darknesse" in order to "disturb the whole Fabrick of the Creation," using their magical influence with "Kings, Princes and great mens Courts and houses" to "abuse Religion, raise and foment Schismes and Errours in the Church."[34] The tract betrays an anxiety about the potential global religio-political ramifications of the prophetess's power. Rather than seeing this power as supernaturally divine, the writer imbues these women with the sexualized, bewitching abilities of the siren, imagining an audience of malleable men not unlike the antitheatricalists' vision of the playgoer who drinks from Circe's cup. Under the diabolic influence of the witchy prophetess,

---

[33]Streete, *Redeemed Bodies*, 12.

[34]Anonymous, *A Spirit Moving in the Women-Preachers: Or, Certaine Quæres, Vented and Put Forth Unto this Affronted, Brazen-Faced, Strange, New Feminine Brood* (London, 1646), 2-5.

these men then allow her to destroy religious harmony by leading them to make disastrous public policy decisions regarding national religious laws and doctrine.

The prophetess, in particular, faced accusations of demonic possession and witchcraft. Jean Bodin claimed that the Sibyls were actually "young witches" who gained otherworldly knowledge when "the Devil entered the body."[35] As I noted in my discussion of the Oracle of Delphi in Chapter Three, critics of the Oracle's power claimed the Devil entered her body through the vagina, sexualizing and perverting this seemingly miraculous power. Early modern prophetesses faced similar charges where writers would describe otherworldly sounds emerging from their abdomens, insinuating that the prophecy was produced by their satanically contaminated wombs. Describing the prophetess in trance, the writer I.H. declared that, "Yet of all *WHORES* there is no *WHORE* to a holy *WHORE*," as she "turns up the white of her eye, and the black of her tail when she falls flat on her back, according as the spirit moves her…she can cover her lust with religion."[36] I.H. elides this moment of trance with sexual intercourse, the woman's upturned eyes meant to signify sexual pleasure as the spirit moves within her like a lover. Positing that "religion" is simply a guise to allow her to act upon "lust," I.H. provides one vivid example of how writers undermined women's religious authority by insinuating their sexual licentiousness and impropriety. The virgin martyr has less sacral power, for example, when the audience must question if she was really a virgin at all.

Yet, despite these longstanding attempts to subvert the potential of these figures, the Sibyls and biblical prophetesses were an integral means of legitimizing the early church. As Jessica Malay describes, the well-known authority of the Sibyls in Greek and Roman

---

[35]Bodin, *Demon-mania*, 107.

[36]I.H., *A Strange Wonder or a Wonder in a Woman* (London, 1642), qtd. in Mack, *Visionary Women*, 30.

mythologies and politics meant that early Christians "recogniz[ed] in the Sibyls powerful figures through which their own religious beliefs could be substantiated."[37] Prominent Christian writers such as the Apostle Paul, Lactantius, Constantine, Augustine of Hippo, and Thomas Aquinas all drew upon the Sibyls—and on prophetic acts more generally—as "potent tool[s]" for "defending and promoting Christianity."[38] The Sibyls thus introduced an archetype of the authoritative female prophetess that could be followed by other biblical women such as Deborah, Miriam, and Anna. Karen King also cites the Corinthian prophetesses and even Mary Magdalene's reported visionary moments as examples of women's influence within the primitive church.[39] Equally important to the establishment of early Christian identity were the legendary sacrifices of martyrs such as Katherine of Alexandria, Perpetua, Thecla, or Ursula that directly challenged the authority of the Roman Empire.[40] Streete notes that in the battle between the Roman government and rebel Christians, martyrs rendered their exceedingly violent executions, meant to convey governmental authority, "futile in the face of their belief and triumph of the Kingdom of God," showcasing instead the victory of "the good heavenly empire, soon to be instantiated."[41] In their intense suffering, martyrs reenacted Christ's sacrifice for humankind in ways that "enshrined" them as "cultural ideals."[42]

---

[37]Malay, *Prophecy and Sibylline Imagery*, 16-17.

[38]Malay, 27.

[39]King, "Prophetic Power," 21-23.

[40]See Karen A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997) for a list of the most popular female martyrs.

[41]Streete, *Redeemed Bodies*, 14.

[42]Streete, 13.

The Reformation heralded a new age of martyrs and prophetesses whose bodies and legacies became battlegrounds for the political project of religious conversion in England. Elizabeth Barton, the so-called Holy Maid of Kent, attempted to use her prophetic powers to keep Henry VIII from divorcing Katherine of Aragon. In 1525, after nearly dying from a serious illness, Barton began to show signs of prophetic, visionary power. "She spake frankly againste the corruption of manners and evill life," William Lambarde records, "She exhorted repaire to the Churche, hearing of Masse, confession to Priestes, prayer to our *Lady* and Sainctes, and to be short, made in all pointes, confession and confirmation of the Popish Créede and Catechisme."[43] Her strong Catholic beliefs emboldened her to "ste[p] into" Henry VIII's "Great Matter," prophesizing to the king that if he proceeded with "the seid divorce and maried another, he shuld not be Kynge of this Realme by the space of one moneth after, And in the reputacion of God…shuld not be kynge one day nor one houre."[44] Watt notes that Barton went so far as to threaten Archbishop Warham and Cardinal Wolsey with "divine punishment" if they supported the king, and told Pope Clement VII that "God would plague him if he failed to rule in favour of Katherine of Aragon."[45] Eventually Barton claimed foreknowledge of Wolsey's fall from grace, Henry's excommunication, and his secret marriage to Anne Boleyn. As I will discuss in greater detail in my section on *Henry VIII*, whether factually accurate or not, Henry's—and thus England's—doctrinal allegiances were mapped onto his marital state in the early modern imagination. Remaining with Katherine meant a victory for Catholicism; divorce and a

---

[43]William Lambarde, *A Perambulation of Kent Conteining the Description, Hystorie, and Customes of that Shyre* (London, 1576), 150.

[44]Lambarde, 153; *The Statutes of the Realm*, vol 3 (London: Dawsons of the Pall Mall, 1817), 446.

[45]Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval & Early Modern England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 69.

remarriage to Anne indicated a turn to reform. In trying so hard to prevent divorce, Barton entered the public political sphere and leveraged her divine power to attempt to stop the rise of English Protestantism and Henry's personal and national conversion. By claiming that God would no longer recognize Henry as king, Barton issued an incredible challenge to Henry's authority as a divinely ordained monarch and proclaimed that God would only support England as a Catholic nation. Even if Barton was ultimately unsuccessful in swaying the king, the government feared Barton's influence, lamenting her "mervelous fame," as they claimed that she "put in the heddes of a greate nombre of the subjects of the Realme" that God was "displeased" with Henry.[46] Barton's public execution was designed to send a powerful message to those that opposed the king's marriage and conversion—as Watt reminds us, Barton was publicly hanged on 20 April 1534, the very day that "the citizens of London were required to make the Oath of Succession."[47]

A decade later, on 16 July 1546, Anne Askew was burned at the stake for heresy after withstanding a month of torture. Her story was taken up by the Protestant martyrologists John Bale and John Foxe, whose works were self-conscious attempts at fashioning English *historia sacra* that emphasized women's contributions as prophetesses and martyrs. Foxe presents Askew as a "singular example of Christen constancie," one of the greatest martyrs for the Protestant cause.[48] Similarly, Bale uses Askew's death as evidence that the conservative government who persecuted her are the "bloudye remanunte of the Antechrist," her death part of a larger battle

[46]*Statutes*, 446; 448.

[47]Watt, *Secretaries of God*, 76.

[48]Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, 733.

between good and evil, just like the original Christian martyrs of the primitive Church.[49] As Megan Hickerson describes, it is exactly this echo of early Christianity that Protestant writers and martyrs found so seductive about this new age of martyrdom.[50] Bale makes this connection explicit: addressing his Christian readers, he opens by proclaiming

> IN the prymatyve churche, as the horryble persecucyons increased, manye dylygent wryters collected the godlye answers and tryumphant sufferynges of the martyrs, as necessarye examples of Christen constancye to be followed…No lesse necessarye is that offyce now, though fewe meen attempt it, nor no lesse profytable to the christen commonwelth than it was in those terryble dayes.[51]

Even as early Reformation and Marian martyrs consciously performed identical acts to their early Christians counterparts, Bale sees himself as connected to the primitive martyrologists, providing an important service for the Christian commonwealth. These stories are "necessarye examples" both in their capacity to demonstrate ideal Christian sacrifice but also in their potential to convert spectators and readers. Bale reports, for example, that "a great nombre at the burnynge of these martyrs, upon the syght of thys open experyment, afferme them to be [Christ's] faythfull members…manye a Christen hart have rysen and wyll ryse from the pope to Christe through the occasyon of [Askew's] consumynge in the fyre."[52] While Elizabeth Barton

---

[49]Anne Askew, *The First Examinacion of Anne Askewe Latelye Martired in Smythfelde, by the Romyshe Popes Upholders, Wyth the Elucydacyon of Johan Bale* (London, Printed by Nicholas Hill, 1547), sig. A3v.

[50]Megan L. Hickerson, *Making Women Martyrs in Tudor England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 12.

[51]John Bale, *The Lattre Examinacyon of Anne Askewe Latelye Martyred in Smythfelde, by the Wycked Synagoge of Antichrist, with the Elucydacyon of Johan Bale* (Wesel, 1547), 1-2.

[52]Bale, *The Lattre Examinacyon*, 67-68.

tried to directly stop England's conversion, using prophecy to attempt to frighten political figures and create public outcry against Henry, Askew's conversional potential lies in the affective spectacle of her martyrdom. Bale sees this event as a means to convert spectators from "the pope to Christe," or Catholicism to Protestantism, because of its impact on the "hart," an impact magnified by the visual spectacle of Askew's feminine body bearing the marks of brutal acts of violence.

While the reign of James I saw less prophet and martyr activity, Charles I's marriage to the Catholic Queen Henrietta Maria and perceived Catholic sympathies again brought women into the public sphere. Lady Eleanor Davies, for example, a well-known, somewhat infamous prophetess who published over seventy tracts during Charles's reign, insinuated herself with the royal family, even consulting on the Queen's pregnancy.[53] In 1625, she published *A Warning to the Dragon and All His Angels*, a warning to the King against papal influence. Situating herself as a reincarnation of the prophet Daniel—her maiden name Eleanor Audelie became the anagram "Reveale o Daniel"—Davies used the Book of Daniel to create a treatise on international religious politics. She presents her prophetic writing as "a salve to annoint and open the eyes of the blinde, to bring them that sit in darkenesse a light, to leade them out of the Prison-house…to stirre them uppe."[54] For Davies, then, prophetic writings have strong conversional potential; they provide "a true looking-glasse" that can turn hearts back toward God and true religion.[55] Davies faced opposition to her prophetic writings from both her first and second husband and other religious and governmental authority figures—she was fined, imprisoned in the Tower, and sent

[53]Watt, *Secretaries of God*, 121.

[54] Eleanor Davies, *A warning to the dragon and all his angels* (London, 1625), sig. A4.

[55]Davies, *A Warning to the Dragon*, sig. A4v.

to Bedlam, her womanhood leaving her vulnerable to accusations of hysteria. Davies was not alone in either placing herself in a prophetic legacy or in her defamation—the prophetess Anne Hempstall, operating with a small group of five other women in 1641, told her "Beloved sisters" that she had a dream vision in which the biblical prophetess Anna appeared to her, telling her "that I should imitate godly *Anna,* by preaching unto you, as shee prophesied to others."[56] Hempstall sought legitimacy in setting herself up as another iteration of Anna; however, she faced similar gendered critiques, and one pamphlet writer suggested that "Bedlam or Bridewell would be two convenient places for [her]."[57]

While martyrs and prophetesses were politically expedient symbols for minority causes, the prophetess could also be deployed to legitimize monarchical religio-political authority. Even as monarchs and their governments feared and persecuted these figures, they also understood how to leverage their rhetorical power to suit their own goals. Malay notes that the Sibyls played an important role in Anne Boleyn's coronation procession—one pageant included three Sibyls and a scroll that read, "Queen Anne whan thou shalt beare a newe son of the kynges bloode there shalbe a golden worlde unto thy people."[58] The sibylline imagery implied that Anne was divinely heralded monarch, which later impacted her daughter Elizabeth's own accession to the throne. While Anne never had a "son," this pseudo-prophecy was used to suggest that Elizabeth was the predicted "sun" who would bring a golden age.[59] Elizabeth's own famous virginity further linked

---

[56]Anonymous, *A Discoverie of Six Women Preachers, in Middlesex, Kent, Cambridgshire, and Salisbury* (London, 1641), 2.

[57]*A Discoverie of Six Women Preachers*, 5.

[58]Anonymous, "The Noble Tryumphaunt Coronacyon of Queen Anne Wyfe Unto The Moost Noble Kynge Henry the viii" (London, 1533), n.p,; qtd. in Malay, *Prophecy and Sibylline Imagery*, 48.

[59]Malay, *Prophecy and Sibylline Imagery*, 48-50.

her to the Sibyls, and writers suggested that Elizabeth was herself sibylline, a sacred figure with immense religious and political power. In 1585, for example, the poet Richard Edward claimed that "Here Cuma is, here Sibill reigns, on Delphos seate to sit," positioning Elizabeth explicitly as a reincarnation of the Sibyls.[60] Even as James I denounced prophetic acts in *Daemonologie*, he and the other Stuart monarchs similarly employed the prophetess to help ease the anxiety produced by Elizabeth's lack of heir, reprinting prophecies that suggested the union of England and Scotland had been proclaimed by the sibyls at various points throughout early British history.

The prophetess and the martyr, then, were extremely useful figures for anyone attempting to construct an English *historia sacra.* Their well-known connections to ancient Rome and the creation of the early Church helped writers to situate the Reformation as a return to the true church, giving this brave new post-Reformation world a sense of weight and historicity. Even as both figures provoked a range of reactions and anxieties, they were tools for both minority and dominant causes, a means to present one's actions and beliefs as divinely ordained or to conjure sympathy with the hope of converting spectators or readers. The divinely empowered woman thus became an extremely potent figure, crucial to England's real-time fashioning of its own conversion narrative. Turning now to our theatrical case-studies, I explore how the early modern theatre participated in this larger historiographical project.

"Ris[ing] Up in Reverence": Rebelling Against Rome in *The Virgin Martyr*

Philip Massinger and Thomas Dekker's *The Virgin Martyr*, first staged at the Red Bull Theater in 1620, combines the legends of St. Dorothea and St. Agnes to create a tragicomic

[60]Richard Edwards, "An Epitaph upon the Death of Sir Edward Saunders Knight," *The Paradise of Daintie Devises* (London, 1585) sig. C2v; qtd. in Malay, *Prophecy and Sibylline Imagery*, 63.

drama about Dorothea of Caesarea,[61] a virgin martyr of the Diocletian persecutions. The play sets Dorothea against the Roman governor Sapritius, his zealous enforcer Theophilus, and the emperor Dioclesian [*sic*] himself, bringing to life the battle between the pagan Roman government and the early Christians with their "new found religion" (1.1.30). This fight comes to represent the larger conflict between good and evil, embodied in the supernatural entities of Angelo, Dorothea's angelic attendant, and Harpax, Theophilus's demonic secretary. The main plot is driven by a failed romance: Antoninus, the son of the governor, is chosen to marry Dioclesian's daughter, Artemia, but he is helplessly in love with Dorothea, who is herself above such earthly desires. When he rejects Artemia's offer, she and Theophilus spy on him and discover Dorothea. They imprison her, attempt to convert her, try to have her raped and beaten, and finally, when all else fails, publicly behead her. Protected by God, however, Dorothea feels no pain and bears no wounds, and she ascends to become a Queen of Heaven.

The Virgin Martyr appears to have been quite popular in the period. The title page claims it was "divers times publickely Acted with great Applause," and the play was revised in 1624 and printed in quarto in 1622, 1631, 1651, and 1661.[62] However, it has only recently garnered any sustained critical interest, overwhelmingly centered around the play's explicit religious content. How do we reconcile that a play about a Catholic saint was staged—and well received—in 1620s Protestant London? For most, the best way to make sense of the play has been to situate it as a topical allegory or piece of religio-political propaganda, akin to Thomas Middleton's *A*

[61]Likely sources for *The Virgin Martyr* include some mixture of Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, other Catholic and Protestant martyrologies, *The Golden Legend* (trans. Caxton), and *Flos Sanctorum*. See Julia Gasper, "The Sources of *The Virgin Martyr*," *The Review of English Studies* 42, no. 165 (1991): 17-31.

[62]Bowers, *Dramatic Works*, 366; Larry S. Champion, "'Disaster With So Many Joys': Structure and Perspective in Massinger and Dekker's *The Virgin Martyr*," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 1 (1984): 199-209, esp. 200.

Game at Chess (1624). Louise George Clubb, for example, claims that the play is an important example of Counter-Reformation drama in England, while Alfred Thomas sees it as a discreet nod to Catholic playgoers that "aligns the persecution of the early Christians during the reign of Diocletian with the oppression of Catholics in early modern England."[63]

Yet such a strong Catholic message, Julia Gasper counters, hardly coheres with religious censorship laws or Dekker's own vehement anti-Catholic rhetoric in his earlier play *The Whore of Babylon* (1607).[64] Jennifer Waldron instead concludes that the play refashions Dorothea as the quintessential Protestant hero who attacks Roman Catholic idolatry by defacing pagan images onstage.[65] Susannah Brietz Monta presents an even more topical reading, reading the play as the playwrights' reaction to "England's tepid response to continental Protestants' calls for help at the outbreak of the Thirty Years War."[66] Holly Crawford Pickett and Jane Hwang Degenhardt, however, caution against this futile impulse toward authorial intention, pivoting to focus on the cultural politics that undergird the play's representation of religious conversion. While Pickett details the play's engagement with the debate around serial conversions, Degenhardt sees embedded within the play English fears about Islam and forced conversion that appeared in plays throughout the 1620s.[67]

---

[63]Clubb, "The Virgin martyr and the Tragedia sacra," 114-15; Alfred Thomas, *Shakespeare, Catholicism, and the Middle Ages: Maimed Rights* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 149.

[64]Gasper, "The Sources of *The Virgin Martyr*," 17-31.

[65]Jennifer Waldron, *Reformations of the Body*: *Idolatry, Sacrifice, and Early Modern Theatre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 183, 199.

[66]Susannah Brietz Monta, *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 196.

[67]Holly Crawford Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion in Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*," *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 49, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 437-462, esp. 437-48; Jane Hwang Degenhardt, "Catholic Martyrdom in Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martir* and the Threat of 'Turning Turk,'" *ELH* 73, no. 1 (2006): 83-117, esp. 84.

Rather than reading the play as a topical allegory—where certain characters or moments are intended to stand in for contemporary religio-political factions or events—I read *The Virgin Martyr* as an act of historiography, a retelling of an important moment of English *historia sacra*. Like Pickett and Degenhardt, I too find the play's depictions of religious conversion to be its most arresting feature, and I demonstrate how the play's staging of Christian history brings forward a gendered vision of the early church and the mass conversion of Europe. What matters to the play is not whether Dorothea is a Catholic or Protestant hero, but that she is a Christian one during a watershed moment of Christian history. Through the play's insistence that women not only led the charge for the rise of Christianity but were divinely empowered to do so, *The Virgin Martyr* argues for the centrality of the feminine occult, embodied here in the figure of the female martyr, to *historia sacra*. Such a reading problematizes previous critical engagements with Dorothea's martyrdom, like those of Nova Myhill or Tom Fish, that have sought to minimize Dorothea's womanly power. Myhill, for example, undermines Dorothea's sphere of influence, claiming that spectators are encouraged to support the Romans and interpret Dorothea's martyrdom as theatrical rather than divine.[68] Yet Myhill's argument overlooks the play's emphasis on the Romans' malevolence and the explicit proof of Dorothea's power, manifested when Theophilus receives the heavenly fruits and in her final appearance as a Queen of Heaven. On the other hand, while Fish sees Dorothea as incredibly influential, he cannot account for an expression of religious authority that is not masculine. Emphasizing the play's use of martial language, Fish concludes that Dorothea's divine "access to agency and power…[is] framed outside the possibilities of the female sex."[69] However, as I have sought to show

[68]Myhill, "Making Death a Miracle," 27.

[69]Tom Fish, "Bewitching Power: The Virtuosity of Gender in Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*," *Religions* 10, no. 11 (2019), 1-13, esp. 11.

throughout this dissertation, Dorothea is only one of a diverse body of historical and dramatic women whose divine power is catalyzed through their embodied womanhood. Her agency and power are not antithetical to femininity but in fact depend upon it.

From *The Virgin Martyr*'s opening lines, the play sets up the conflict between the Romans and the Christians, establishing Rome as a violent, anti-Christian state. The first characters onstage are Theophilus and his evil attendant spirit, Harpax, who discuss the pleasure they find in persecuting Christians. Theophilus gleefully remarks that nothing can "keep these Christians / […] from my reach or punishment," (1.1.18-19), confident that Harpax's demonic magic will never "meete a checke, or fayle" (1.1.23). These lines, meant to emphasize the might of Harpax's power, also foreshadow the hubris of the Romans, as the audience knows that Christianity will eventually triumph. Harpax, consistently juxtaposed against the Christian angel, Angelo, seems designed to evince the popular early modern notion that the Devil sought to subvert the spread of Christianity by promoting the pagan faiths. As his companion, Theophilus is a zealot who seeks to become the "The strongest champion of the Pagan gods, / And rooter out of Christians" (1.1.71-72), and the audience learns he tortured even his own daughters when they had converted to Christianity. This torture of Christians is sanctioned by the emperor himself: in the first scene, Dioclesian arrives in the city to observe the fight against the rising Christian community. When the governor Sapritius tells Dioclesian that "I ever have express'd in my fell hate / Against the Christian sect" (1.1.146-47), Dioclesian agrees that "Thou in this / Walkest hand in hand with me" (1.1.150-51). The explicit appearance of Dioclesian and the discussion of the Roman's torture orients the audience in time and space, as any playgoers familiar with Christian or Roman history would glean from these contextual clues that the play is set right on

the cusp of the Christianization. Thus, Dorothea's appearance in 2.1 takes on a special, historical significance, as audiences are invited to wonder if she will be the tipping point in this final battle.

In contrast to these violent men, Dorothea's divinity, remarked on by all who meet her, manifests outwardly in her charity, beauty, grace, and chastity. The features that make her a beautiful woman are the same that make her a godly one, conflating ideal femininity with ideal godliness. "Beauty and chastity," Antoninus remarks, live "in their full perfections" inside Dorothea, and descriptions that draw attention to "the whiteness" of her "chaste hand" (2.3.19-20) seem designed to amplify her Christian purity and divinity. She seems to be a threshold creature with one foot already in heaven—even before she appears onstage, the audience hears from Antoninus that she is "like a deity" (1.1.4 64), a "goddess" (1.1.469), whose image, imprinted on his heart, protects him in battle. When Dorothea enters in the next scene, she lives up to this heavenly introduction, scolding her reluctantly Christian servants for failing to deliver the goods she sent to the poor. The playwrights establish her as the antithesis of the Roman men who spoke almost exclusively of torture and violence; Dorothea humbly seeks to better Rome. Yet beyond her embodiment of ideal femininity, Angelo also situates her as a religious figure, referring to her as his "most holy Mistress" (2.1.174). Dorothea sees herself that way: describing her first meeting with Angelo, she shares how her bosom was filled "with a holy flame, mounting since higher, / On wings of cherubins, than it did before. (2.1.200-201). Penetrated by an ever-growing "holy flame," Dorothea has access to a range of divine abilities, including the power to engender conversion in even the most ardent of pagans.

The audience first witnesses her abilities when Theophilus sends his daughters, Caliste and Christeta, to turn Dorothea to the pagan faith. Because Dorothea has become a symbol of burgeoning Christianity in the city, he imagines that her conversion would be a great triumph for

the Roman cause. However, by attacking the depravity of the pagan gods and the idolatry of their faith, Dorothea instead reduces the women to tears as they cry out in shame and despair. Moved and convinced by what Dorothea has said, both women reconvert to Christianity. Their weeping functions as a visible sign of their repentance, as Dorothea celebrates:

> Oh, 'tis a heavenly shower! celestial balm
> To cure your wounded conscience! let it fall,
> Fall thick upon it; and, when that is spent,
> I'll help it with another of my tears:
> And may your true repentance prove the child
> Of my true sorrow, never mother had
> A birth so happy! (3.1.192-198)

The tears the women shed are "heavenly" and "celestial," a spiritual curative that becomes a kind of *communitas* when Dorothea joins in with her own tears to "help." Crucially, their tears are also a watery "shower" associated humorally with feminine porosity. The women weeping together connects their performance of Christianity with an embodied, performative womanhood, a literal outpouring of femininity on their cheeks. The relationship between this conversion moment and their womanhood is further emphasized when Dorothea situates herself as a "mother" to their new Christian souls. Caliste and Christeta's conversions are the result of her metaphorical labors, yet Dorothea's choice of words also recalls the recognized role of the mother in shaping the spiritual nature of children.

This scene seems to encapsulate the anxiety, first explored in Chapter One, that women left unsupervised in close proximity will convert one another. The incontinence associated with women's watery leaking becomes a verbal incontinence as well—a flood of conversional words

matched by a shower of watery tears. Theophilus had earlier remarked on the power of "womanish tears" (1.1.59)—now, we see that power in action. However, rather than turning Caliste and Christeta toward satanic witchcraft, Dorothea reharnesses that same potential for holy purposes, bringing the women into the Christian fold. Their newfound collectivity is emphasized by Dorothea herself when she warns them to

> take heed, sisters,
> That, or through weakness, threats, or mild persuasions,
> Though of a father, you fall not into
> A second and a worse apostasy. (3.1.205-208)

Her familiar use of "sisters" perhaps most obviously gestures toward the creation of a kind of female religious order. But it also echoes the "satanical sisterhoods" and language of sorority mimicked throughout witchcraft literature in which women secretly conspired together to overturn patriarchal order. The women indeed revolt against Roman patriarchal structures, as Dorothea requests the women oppose and turn against their father and emperor. The subversion of patriarchy is sanctioned in this instance, however, because it is aligned with the project of Christianity—women's rebellion can be celebrated because it is necessary for *historia sacra* and the triumph of Christ. In *The London Prodigal* and *The Tamer Tamed*, women could disobey their husbands in order to morally correct them; here, Dorothea, Caliste, and Christeta seek to spiritually transform an entire masculine empire. Theophilus's daughters, along with Dorothea, publicly reject the pagan faith with great aplomb, spitting on and desecrating Jupiter's image. Unfortunately, their sisterhood is short lived. Crying out against his "dear daughters, / Again bewitch'd" (3.2.81-82), Theophilus murders them on the spot. In his insistence that the women

are "bewitch'd," Theophilus voices a longstanding antifeminine rebuttal that seeks to undermine female spiritual authority by denouncing it as evil witchcraft.

Indeed, Dorothea's divine and conversional powers are continually denounced as witchcraft by the Roman authorities. She is slandered as a "lying sorceress" (2.3.91), "damn'd enchantress" (3.2.67), "lamia" (4.1.181),[70] and "witch" (4.1.185) at different points throughout the play. But this anxiety about the feminine occult particularly manifests in fear about Dorothea's ability to convert Antoninus, eliding her erotic power over him with her spiritual influence. Sapritius, for example, claims that

> She's a witch,
> A sorceress, Theophilus; my son
> Is charm'd by her enchanting eyes; and, like
> An image made of wax, her beams of beauty
> Melt him to nothing: all my hopes in him,
> And all his gotten honours, find their grave
> In his strange dotage on her. (3.1.2-10)

We might first note that Dorothea's spiritual influence is again verbalized through a feminized liquid metaphor: she makes Antoninus "melt," so that his imagined Christian conversion is marked by another performance of watery, embodied femininity. Sapritius's concerns resonate with anxieties surrounding the potential conversional power of the supernatural woman and her ability to completely overtake the agency of men, turning them into malleable liquid that Dorothea can then reshape. Yet, even as the play engages with this fear that women will convert men through erotic temptations, Antoninus's eagerness to convert to Christianity for Dorothea

[70]In classical mythology lamiae were monstrous she-demons, but the word also became associated with witches and hysterical women through Johann Weyer's *De praestigiis daemonum* (1563).

recuperates, or at the least offers a positive alternative to, this anxiety. Instead of a man being turned toward the Devil or another heretical religion, Dorothea illustrates that these erotic temptations can also be an instrumental part of the Christian conversion mission. The blending of the erotic and the spiritual continues when Artemia's torture of Dorothea originates in a heady mixture of sexual jealousy and religious conflict, as Antoninus previously spurned Artemia for Dorothea. "I'll change those smiles to shrieks," she tells the crowd, "Give the fool what she's proud of, martyrdom" (2.3.143-44). Dorothea's martyrdom thus becomes connected to her womanhood and her sexuality, born not just from her religious convictions but from Artemia's anger over her sexual connection with Antoninus. However, while Antoninus's conversion is personal for Sapritius and Artemia, for Harpax and Theophilus the gravest danger comes from its potential to spread like a contagion throughout the city:

HARP. Dorothea hates your gods,
And, if she once blast Antoninus' soul,
Making it foul like hers, Oh! the example—
THEO. Eats through Cæsarea's heart like liquid poison. (2.3.57-65)

It is the "example" that Dorothea sets, rather than her conversion of Antoninus as an individual, that Theophilus and Harpax see as the most threatening. The example is a "poison" that affects the "heart," recalling the martyrologists belief that hearing the stories of martyrs, and the examples that they set, can have a conversional impact on large groups of people—here, it is the whole of Caesarea.

Dorothea's greatest conversional achievement indeed comes as a result of her martyrdom. When Theophilus demands that Dorothea be raped, her would-be assailants refuse, and even as she is beaten, the blows have no effect and her skin "is not scar'd" (4.1.107). Her face,

Theophilus laments, “Has more bewitching beauty then before / Prowd whore” (4.2.95-96). Dorothea’s sacrifices and sufferings in the name of God only heighten her ideal femininity, cementing the connections between her Christian faith, her martyrdom, and her embodied womanhood. “With her dies,” Antoninus claims, “The abstract of all sweetnesse that’s in woman” (4.3.6-7). Even as she comes to the scaffold, “her innocence” appears “like / to Heaven” (4.3.33-34). The sight of her on the scaffold makes Antoninus doubts the greatness of his gods, and he “feele[s] a holy fire / That yeelds a comfortable heate within me,” pronouncing himself to be “quite altered from the thing I was” (4.3.160-62). In this moment, then, *The Virgin Martyr* demonstrates for its audience the conversional power of the female martyrs’ sacrifice. Dorothea alludes to this in her death speech:

> Hereafter when my story shall be read,
> As they were present now, the hearers shall
> Say this of *Dorothea* with wet eyes,
> She liv’d a virgin, and a virgin dies. (4.3.176-79)

In a direct appeal to the playgoers who now hear Dorothea’s story, she not only emphasizes her virginity—thus connecting her womanhood to this act—but also suggests those who witness it may find themselves with “wet eyes.” The “wet eyes” of spectators harken back to the tears of Caliste and Christeta that signified their conversions, implying that perhaps Dorothea’s story—and *The Virgin Martyr* itself—have a real-time conversional potential. Theophilus tries to ward against this. Refusing to allow her death to stand as “a miracle” (4.3.190), he commands that “her body / Be cast forth with contempt in some high way, / And be to Vultures and to Dogs a prey” (4.3.192-94) in an attempt to desacralize her virgin body.

Yet in the final act it is Theophilus who finds himself most affected by Dorothea's martyrdom. Sitting in his study pondering the "violence of zeale" he intends to unleash next on "Great Britain" (5.1.19-20) after his successful defeat of the "Christian Slut" (5.1.40), Angelo appears and presents Theophilus with a basket of divine fruits and flowers, a sign from Dorothea that heaven is real. The experience causes Theophilus to "look…back / One my black Tyrannies" (5.1.168-69) with shame, denouncing Harpax and asking Angelo to "Teach me what I must do" (5.1.171). Even posthumously, Dorothea exerts her conversional abilities over Theophilus and effectively saves Great Britain from Theophilus's planned invasion. He dies a martyr after freeing all the imprisoned Christians, a "solider in the Christian warres" (5.2.233). Before his death, in a final conversation with Dioclesian, Theophilus eulogizes Dorothea by imagining her place in history. Because her story "is so full / Of excellence and wonder" (5.2.101-102), he imagines that her legacy will endure, of a piece with other "holy relickes" (5.2.113). In a moment of Christian historiography, Theophilus claims Dorothea will "rise up in reverence" (5.2.108), citing her as an important figure in whom "history will / find a second urne" (5.2.113-14). Over the course of the play, *The Virgin Martyr* makes a powerful case for Dorothea's importance to *historia sacra*, recovering and even embellishing her contributions to the early Christian cause in ways that situate her as one of the founders of Christianity.

"I'll be of your faith too": Domesticating Diocletian in *The Prophetess*

Massinger returned to the figure of Diocletian in 1622, the same year that *The Virgin Martyr* was first published, with the tragicomedy *The Prophetess*. This time, however, in a collaboration with John Fletcher, Massinger mapped the infamous Emperor's rise, rule, and abdication onto his relationship with the fictional Drusilla, the niece of the titular prophetess. Similar to *The Winter's Tale*, the play makes the political personal, domesticizing a national

crisis of succession by showing its interconnectedness to the private, romantic lives of major political players. Even though the play enjoyed popularity in the early modern period—it was revived in 1629 and later adapted into a musical by Thomas Betterton and Henry Purcell—it has since languished in obscurity. A brief summary, therefore, will prove useful.

Delphia, the prophetess, intercedes in matters both national and domestic—she works to fashion not only the future of Rome, but her niece, Drusilla's, happiness. Her prophecy to the young Diocletian (called Diocles)—that he will become emperor when he kills a "mighty boar" (1.3, 28)—comes with a vow: he must marry Drusilla, who adores him. Diocles and Maximinian, here styled as his nephew, grow frustrated; interpreting the prophecy literally, they've killed countless boars across the countryside to no avail. The true boar, however, is Volutius Aper (*aper* is Latin for boar), who has assassinated the emperor Numerian. His siblings, the emperor Charinus and his sister Aurelia, decide that whoever avenges their brother's death will become a co-ruler of the Empire. Diocles discovers the true meaning of the prophecy and kills Aper, becoming emperor. In response, the beautiful Aurelia offers her hand in marriage. He agrees, and, in a moment of great bombastic ego, forswears his promise to Delphia. She responds in a series of supernatural attacks that leave Diocles in no doubt of her power. Humbled and converted, he marries Drusilla, abdicates, and happily retires to the countryside, naming Maximinian his successor. Maximinian has consistently doubted and derided Delphia's divine power throughout the play; however, when he attempts to secure his hold on the emperorship by assassinating Diocles, Delphia literally and metaphorically brings him to his knees, engendering in him a moral and spiritual conversion.

The very small body of scholarship of *The Prophetess* centers on Delphia's spectacular powers. Much like many critical interpretations of Shakespeare's Paulina, Delphia is continually

related to male archetypes of power. Gordan McMullan, for example, calls Delphia a "curiously feminized Prospero," but suggests that, perhaps unlike Prospero, the audience would be unable to sympathize with Delphia's character.[71] Robert Y. Turner similarly sees her as off-putting because of the magnitude of her power, characterizing it as "relentless" and "oppressive," and he interprets her as a pseudo-Roman tyrant.[72] Molly Hand, even as she acknowledges Delphia as a crucial example of a working woman, falls back into the idea of Delphia as a "magus" who "is meant to out-Prospero Prospero."[73] Considering the play as a Roman history, Domenico Lovascio sees her as a "'masculine' woman…who manages to determine the political trajectory of the male-dominated Roman political world."[74] In this impulse to contextualize Delphia through masculine classical or magical archetypes, these readings betray an inability to account for a woman character that is extremely powerful, political influential, morally neutral, and, crucially, feminine.

Instead, I take my cue from Lucy Munro, who interprets Delphia as a reworking of Paulina herself, noting that *The Prophetess* was performed "in the midst of a run of revivals and projected revivals of *The Winter's Tale*."[75] As Munro observes, it is actually very likely that the

---

[71]Gordon McMullan, *The Politics of Unease in the Plays of John Fletcher* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 183-85.

[72]Robert Y. Turner, "Responses to Tyranny in John Fletcher's Plays," *Medieval & Renaissance Drama* 4 (1989): 123-141, esp. 137.

[73]Molly Hand, "'You take no labor': Women Workers of Magic in Early Modern England," in *Working Subjects in Early Modern English Drama*, eds. Michelle Dowd and Natasha Korda (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 161-176, esp. 175.

[74]Domenico Lovascio, "Bawds, Wives, and Foreigners: The Question of Female Agency in the Roman Plays of the Fletcher Canon," in *Roman Women in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, ed. Domenico Lovascio (Berlin: Medieval Institute Press, 2020), 165-184, esp. 175.

[75]Lucy Munro, *Shakespeare in the Theatre: The King's Men* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 140.

same boy actor simultaneously played both Paulina and Delphia.[76] However, while Munro reads both women as extensions of witches and magi on the stage, I contextualize Delphia—like my reading of Paulina in Chapter Three—as the title of the play asks us to, as a divinely empowered prophetess. Emphasizing how this play relies upon the mythology of the prophetess and her divine powers provides a new avenue through which we can understand Delphia that does not negate her embodied womanhood, but, like Dorothea, sees it as vital to her expressions of power and influence. Even as the play refrains from the kind of explicit religious content at stake in *The Virgin Martyr*, the legacy of Diocletian, infamous in and out of the theatre as a Christian persecutor, haunts the play, especially as the plot of *The Virgin Martyr*, and its own characterization of Diocletian, would have been fresh in playgoers' minds. Delphia's reshaping of the Roman political system and moral guiding of Diocles presents an alt-version of *historia sacra* in which a woman singlehandedly tames, defangs, and domesticates the great Diocletian and Maximinian.

From its opening scene, *The Prophetess* reminds the audience that the history of the Roman Empire is entangled with English history. As Charinus notes, Aper, a would-be usurper, "has under him / The flower of all the empire, and the strength, / The Britain…cohorts" (1.1, 25). In situating the British as the "flower" of the Roman Empire and its strength, *The Prophetess* markets itself as historicizing a moment relevant to the lives of its English audience. Diocles, the audience is told, made a name for himself "in the late Britain wars" (2.2, 31). The Chorus later refers to Diocles as "our Dioclesian" (4.1, 38), the "our" bringing the audience into the fold, making him theirs, suggesting they own him as a historical figure in some way. Furthermore, Diocles refers to Delphia as a "holy druid" (1.3, 27), a reference to the historical legacy of

[76]Munro, *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, 140.

Diocletian. In the biographical collection *Historia Augusta* (ca. 4th century), a likely source for *The Prophetess*, Flavius Vopiscus shares a "story my grandfather related to me, having heard it from Diocletian himself" about the "Druidess" who prophesied to Diocletian about his future as emperor and thus shaped his actions.[77] This anecdote is particularly compelling for several reasons: Vopiscus—and writers like Fletcher and Massinger who draw upon this text—make a claim for historical veracity by noting that this story originates directly from Diocletian himself. Even more importantly, this reference to Delphia's real-life antecedent as a Druidess signals that she may have been a Briton Celt, the common meaning of that term in antiquity.[78] The play suggests, then, that Diocletian was not only tamed by a woman, but specifically a British woman, instituting Delphia as an important figure within early English *historia sacra*.

Rather than being solely a learned mage, Delphia's powers are endowed with religious significance, and she is treated as a religious figure. Diocles calls her a "woman noted for her faith, that piety, / Beloved of heaven" (1.3, 27), who is "holy" and "inspired with prophetic fire" (1.3, 27). She herself is also careful to note that her power comes directly from the gods. "I am a poor weak woman," she tells Diocles, "to me no worship" (1.3, 28), asking him to redirect his reverence. In her insistence that she is a "weak woman," Delphia places her power within a feminized tradition in which it is women's weakness that provides them with better access to the divine. Even as her name, Delphia, situates her in a long line of female prophetesses that originated with the Delphic oracle and sibyls, it also, as I noted in Chapter Three, draws attention to her as a woman, with *delphi* meaning womb. Through her woman's body, she works as an agent to bring out the gods' will—which coincidentally aligns with her own—warning Diocles

---

[77]Vopiscus, "Cams, Carinus, Numerian," in *Scriptores Historiae Augustae,* trans. David Magie, 3 vols, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 436-39.

[78]"Druid, n. (and adj.)". OED Online. March 2022. Oxford University Press.

that “Cheerful and grateful takers the gods love, / And such as wait their pleasures with full hopes; / The doubtful and distrustful man Heaven frowns at” (1.3, 28) when he shows signs of impatience. Delphia foreshadows Diocles’s emotional arc for the audience: when he accepts what fate has in store for him, the empire and Drusilla, he receives the rewards of divine love, but when he fails to believe and trust in the gods, he is punished. Delphia’s divine powers are proven early in the play when Maximinian tries to shoot her with an arrow to prove to Diocles that she is a fraud, but his arm suddenly goes numb, and he is unable to harm her. Questioning why “wild and foolish men / Should dare to oppose the power of destiny” (1.3, 28), Delphia locates their disobedience in a lack of faith in the gods. “Poor doubtful people!” she decries, “I pity your weak faiths” (1.3, 28). In response to this show of power, Diocles tells Maximinian to

> DIO. Pray, Maximinian, pray.
>
> MAX. I’ll pray and work too.
>
> DIO. I’ll to the market-place, and read the offer;
>
> And, now I have found the boar——
>
> DELPHIA. Find your own faith too,
>
> And remember what you have vow’d. (1.3, 29)

For any of Diocles’s political aims to be successful he needs to “find [his] faith,” a phrase that structures Diocles’s plot arc as one both religious and political. The conversional structure of the story is made explicit when Maximinian tells Diocles that “If she can turn this destiny, / I’ll be of your faith too” (1.3, 27). With Delphia and the divine powers she embodies defined as a “faith,” both Diocles’s and Maximinian’s doubts and movements against her become apostatic crises of conversion, and their returns into her fold celebrated and positioned in the text as moral and religious conversions.

Yet, even as Diocles initially praises Delphia as holy, she faces similar gendered attacks on her power by Maximinian, and, later, Diocles himself. From the beginning, Maximinian doubts that Delphia has any real power, denouncing her as a "juggler" (1.3, 27) and her prophecies as "old wives' dreams" (1.3, 27). He despises having to hunt for Delphia while "she sits farting at us, / And blowing out her prophecies at both ends!" (1.3, 27). In addition to the obvious scatological humor of his complaint, her prophecies coming out "both ends" recalls the claim that prophetic vapors entered and exited through the vagina, a remark used to undermine female prophetesses in both antiquity and early modern England. Even in this first scene, Maximinian becomes the voice of a bevy of traditional antifeminine rhetorics. First, he suggests Delphia has no power, then he connects any power that she has to excrement, and finally, he claims that her power comes from the devil himself:

> Old women will lie monstrously, so will the devil,
> Or else he has had much wrong; upon my knowledge
> Old women are malicious, so is he;
> They are proud, and covetous, revengeful, lecherous,
> All which are excellent attributes o' th' devil:
> They would at least seem holy, so would be;
> And, to veil o'er these villainies, they would prophesy (1.3, 27)

In his lengthy rant, Maximinian rehearses some of the most popular misogynistic slander that appeared in both anti-prophetess writings and demonological treatises. Rather than being an oracle of the gods, Maximinian argues that Delphia works for the Devil, only pretending to prophesize in order to cover her villainy. Later, when Diocles opposes Delphia, he similarly falls

back on this rhetoric, denouncing "[her] witchcrafts" and calling her an "old doting Devil" (3.3, 37).

In spite of these gendered attacks, the divine implications of Delphia's power are amplified by the way other characters within the play make sense of its manifestations. At various moments, Delphia hides in the sky among the clouds—in a chariot pulled by dragons, no less—and her reactions are interpreted by other characters as divine signs. Delphia's great shaping power over religio-national politics, for example, becomes clear in the scene when Diocles kills Aper. Delphia helps to frame this as a divinely fated moment by calling music from the spheres:

> DIO. Ha! in the air?
>
> ALL. Miraculous!
>
> MAX. This shews the gods approve
>
> The person and the act. (2.3, 31-32)

In underscoring this moment as "miraculous" and a signifier of divine approval, the gathered crowd deciphers this heavenly music as a sign that Diocles has acted according to the gods' will, rendering Aper as a wrongful usurper and Diocles as a divinely sanctioned vengeance seeker. In this moment, Delphia cements Diocles's future as emperor and elevates the social and political position of her chosen candidate, assuming he will abide by his vow and marry Drusilla. When he publicly decides to marry Aurelia, then, Delphia responds in a similar manner, only this time calling down thunder and lightning to stand in for divine disapproval:

> CHAR. Prodigious!
>
> MAX. How soon the day's o'ercast!

FLAM. The signs are fatal;

Juno smiles not upon this match, and shews too

She has her thunder. (2.3, 32)

From the "miraculous" to the "prodigious," Delphia again, like Elizabeth Barton, "steps into" manners of political marriage under the auspices of enforcing divine will.[79] Only unlike Barton, Delphia is successful: the wedding between Aurelia and Diocles is postponed out of fear of invoking the gods' displeasure.

Delphia's performance of divine signifiers again blends the personal, political, and spiritual. Does she do this to ensure the future of Rome? Because it is the gods' will? Because she loves Drusilla? Or, is it anger at being disobeyed? In leaving her motivations ambiguous, the play suggests that it is perhaps a combination of all four, so that, within the play, Delphia's will and the gods' will become conflated. Much like with historical prophetesses, however, the audience has only her word that her power is holy and representative of the gods' vision for Rome. They, like Diocles and Maximinian, are asked to awaken their faith in the feminine supernatural, trust Delphia, and believe it is all in service of a happy end. In contrast to McMullan and Turner, who assert that audiences would have been totally unable to conceive of—let alone trust—the positive depiction of a holy supernatural woman, I suggest that belief in the real power of female prophetesses, Delphia's status as a British woman, and her control over Diocletian, a notorious British enemy, may have allowed audiences to respond to Delphia more favorably than scholars have considered. While her powers are certainly immense and totalizing, the playwrights present her as a figure of *historia sacra*, a necessary means to safely remove Diocles from the political field. In doing so, the play invites the audience to interpret her power

[79]Lambarde, *A Perambulation of Kent*, 153.

as holy and miraculous, a means of national good, instead of solely frightening and anxiety-producing.

In a trope reminiscent of plays such as *The Tamer Tamed*, *The London Prodigal*, and even *The Winter's Tale*, Diocles's fate is tied to the way he treats his should-be wife, Drusilla. After Delphia ensures that Diocles is made emperor, he refuses to honor his vow to marry Drusilla, believing her now to be beneath him. His embraces, he claims, "are for queens and princesses / For ladies of high mark" not this "cheap common sweetness" (3.1, 34). "Wouldst have me love this thing," he asks Delphia, referring to Drusilla as an object, "that is not worthy…?" (3.1, 34). Insulted, Delphia gestures toward Drusilla, warning that "Here stands thy destiny; / Thy fate here follows" (3.1, 34). In this moment, Drusilla becomes the physical embodiment of Diocles's future and a sign of his spiritual allegiances. Denouncing Diocles as a "proud man" (3.1, 34) that "hast full need of blessing" (3.1, 34), Delphia suggests that everything she has done in the play—including the arranged marriage to Drusilla—has been to keep Diocles on his fated path. "But why did I all this?" she remarks to him, "To keep thy honesty, / Thy vow, and faith" (3.1, 34). When he still refuses to marry Drusilla, calling his previous vow "monstrous" (3.1, 34), Delphia later counters:

> I told thee once, "This is thy fate, this woman;
> And as thou usest her, so thou shalt prosper."
> It is not in thy power to turn this destiny,
> Nor stop the torrent of those miseries
> (If thou neglect'st her still) shall fall upon thee.
> Sigh that thou art dishonest, false of faith,

> Proud, and dost think no power can cross thy pleasures;
>
> Thou wilt find a fate above thee. (3.3, 37)

In Delphia's invocation that "as thou usest her, so thou shalt prosper," *The Prophetess* repeats a theme that I have traced across this dissertation: the wife as a sign of a husband's faith. In *The Prophetess*, choosing Drusilla signifies that Diocles trusts and honors the gods' plan for him, while picking Aurelia indicates that he is "dishonest," "false of faith," and "proud," believing that he knows better than fate itself. This scene, then, becomes an apostatic moment for Diocles in which he turns away from female spiritual authority. In this show of great hubris, Diocles most represents the infamous emperor of the chronicles, a man who believes himself above heavenly will. "I am an emperor" (3.1, 34) he vents to Delphia, and he declares he will "die a dog" (3.3, 37) before he marries Drusilla and gives in Delphia's commands. Delphia remarks that he has the potential to be "as great in evil as in empire" (3.1, 34). Like Leontes, Diocles ignores the warnings of a prophetic oracle, misinterpreting his political power as the equivalent of divine power; Delphia, like Paulina, warns of the dire consequences. The gods may not turn away from Diocles for ten thousand years of perpetual winter (*WT* 3.2.211), but "a torrent of…miseries" will be visited upon him.

Delphia immediately makes good on her word. First, she causes Aurelia to fall in love with Maximinian and spurn Diocles, interceding in his domestic romantic life. Then, she performs a political coup, working with the Persians in a dumb show sequence to kidnap Charinus, Aurelia, and Maximinian. After the Persians easily defeat Diocles with Delphia's magical assistance, Diocles realizes the consequences of his actions, crying "I have broke my faith, / And the gods fight against me" (4.2, 38). By situating his actions as an act of apostasy—"brok[en]…faith"—Diocles recognizes Delphia as a vehicle for divine displeasure—her actions

against him are the same as the "gods fight[ing] against [him]." In a moment of self-reflection, Diocles experiences a conversion in which he rededicates himself to his faith, and, thus, to Delphia:

> There is something chides me,
> And sharply tells me, that my breach of faith
> To Delphia and Drusilla is the ground
> Of my misfortunes: And I must remember
> While I was loved, and in great Delphia's grace,
> She was as my good angel, and bound Fortune
> To prosper my designs: I must appease her.
> Let others pay their knees, their vows, their prayers,
> To weak imagined powers; she is my all,
> And thus I do invoke her. (4.2, 39)

Conflating his romantic "breach of faith" to Drusilla with his larger "broken faith" to the gods, Diocles again reiterates how heterosexual romantic relationships were intertwined with godliness and spiritual devotion, a trope that I explored in detail throughout Chapter Two. But where Drusilla's sweet virtue, tears, and pleas were not enough to turn Diocles, Delphia's seeming divinity is. Diocles denounces the "weak imagined powers" of other religions, invoking Delphia as his "all." Kneeling in reverence, Diocles continues his prayer to her:

> Thou more than woman! and, though thou vouchsafest
> To grace the earth with thy celestial steps,
> And taste this grosser air, thy heavenly spirit
> Hath free access to all the secret counsels

> Which a full senate of the gods determine
> When they consider man; the brass-leaved book
> Of fate lies open to thee […]
> look upon thy creature,
> And, as thou twice hast pleased to appear
> To reprehend my falsehood, now vouchsafe
> To see my low submission! (4.2, 39)

Diocles's speech draws upon the same discourses of sacred womanhood we saw in Chapter Two and with Dorothea, as he emphasizes Delphia's celestiality. She is "more than woman," with a "heavenly spirit" who "hath free access to all the secret counsels" of the gods. In his suggestion that she accesses the "brass-leaved book of fate," Diocles positions her not as a rogue supernatural magus or witch, but a divine agent that works to bring about the gods' plans for men and nation. Situating himself as "thy creature" who kneels in "low submission," Diocles recognizes and accepts the feminine occult power she embodies and turns back toward the gods she represents. Acknowledging Delphia as the god's "oracle" (4.2, 39), he bids "farewell" to "pride and pomp" in order to keep his "faith untainted" (4.6, 42). Diocles abdicates, marries Drusilla, and retires to the countryside. It is a conversion moment engendered wholly by the divine feminine occult that has massive ramifications for the Roman empire, a moment of *historia sacra* that emphasizes women's central role.

But there is still another Roman emperor who must be converted. Maximinian, the real doubter of the play, takes Diocles's place and is immediately castigated as poor leader whose "empire groans / Under [his] tyranny" (5.2, 43). Paranoid, Maximinian and Aurelia come to the farm to assassinate Diocles, unable to believe that he would willingly give up his status. Delphia

intervenes in the assassination attempt, making the earth quake and a hand holding a bolt appear in the sky:

> Do ye stand amazed? Look o'er thy head, Maximinian,
> Look, to thy terror, what overhangs thee;
> Nay, it will nail thee dead: Look how it threatens thee!
> "The bolt for vengeance on ungrateful wretches;
> The bolt of innocent blood:" Read those hot characters,
> And spell the will of Heaven. Nay, lovely lady,
> You must take part too, as spur to Ambition.
> Are you humble? Now speak; my part is ended.
> Does all your glory shake? (5.3, 45-46)

Inspiring fear and awe in the gathered crowd, Delphia claims to "spell the will of Heaven" in an attempt to "humble" both Maximinian and Aurelia. Her words and demonstration produce an immediate effect: they both quickly kneel and apologize to Diocles, entreating, "Below your feet we lay our lives; be merciful! / Begin you, Heaven will follow" (5.3, 46). Cowed, Maximinian continues:

> We are sorry for our sins. Take from us, sir,
> That glorious weight that made us swell, that poison'd us;
> That mass of majesty I labour'd under,
> (Too heavy and too mighty for my manage)
> That my poor innocent days may turn again,
> And my mind, pure, may purge me of these curses. (5.3, 46)

Situating the empire and its political power as "poison," Maximinian turns repentant, desiring to "purge" his mind to again become "pure." Drawing here again on the recognizable vocabulary of conversion, the play asserts that the divine feminine occult can engender spiritual conversions. However, because these characters are real historical figures, these moments signify more than just individual, personal conversions. The potential impact of seeing Diocles and Maximinian, immortalized as scourges of Christianity in England and throughout the empire, brought to their knees by divinely empowered women like Dorothea and Delphia should not be underestimated. Yet the religio-political dimensions of these plays can only be truly understood if we consider *The Virgin Martyr* and *The Prophetess* not just as a tragicomedies or tragedies, but as Christian history plays. Then, Dorothea and Delphia's actions are not only significant because they are supernaturally powerful women, but because the play asserts that they were instrumental in this critical moment of early *historia sacra*.

"God shall be truly known": Necessary Sacrifice in *Henry VIII*

Flashing forward to the English Reformation, popular imagination again portrayed women as key agents of religious conversion. Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon's divorce and Henry's subsequent remarriage to Anne Boleyn embodied the break with Rome, the embrace of Protestant reform, and the birth of the Church of England. Even after she was set aside, Katherine remained a powerful icon for Catholics and conservatives uncomfortable with these major structural changes. Katherine served as the allegory for the Catholic plight, the unendingly loyal wife who even on her deathbed thought only of "the health and safeguard of [Henry's]

soul," praying that God would pardon him for his spiritual waywardness.[80] Keeping Henry married to Katherine came to signify keeping England, at least nominally, Catholic.

At the same time, Protestant writers heralded Anne as the primary agent of reform and the dominant cause of Henry's conversion. John Foxe's *Rerum in ecclesia gestarum* (1559) claimed that "[t]he entire British nation is indebted to her…for the restoration of piety [and] the Church," and *Actes and Monuments* immortalized her as the "open comforter and aider of al the professors of Christes gospel."[81] In her position as Henry's consort, even before their official marriage, Anne was seen to hold immense spiritual influence over him. Foxe wrote that it was "by [her] godly meanes and moste vertuous councell, the kynges minde was dailye inclined better and better."[82] Like Foxe, John Aylmer, the one-time Bishop of London, situated Anne as God's savior for England. As "the chief, first, and only cause of banyshing the beast of Rome," Aylmer saw Anne as the spark, the "croppe and roote" which brought England toward the true religion.[83] Akin to one of his visionaries, God "endewed" Anne with the unique wisdom and mind to accomplish this "grea[t] feate."[84] But it is not only Anne's intelligence that was God-given for the purposes of fostering this change. Aylmer argues that Anne and Henry's sexual relationship was key in bringing Henry to their cause. "If God had not gyven Quene Anne favour

---

[80]Katherine of Aragon, "Katherine of Aragon, formerly Queen of England, to Henry VIII, 7 January 1536," in *Letters of the Queens of England*, ed. Anne Crawford (Phoenix Mill: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1992), 179.

[81]John Foxe, *Rerum in ecclesia gestarum* (Basle, I559), sig. I45, translated in Thomas S. Freeman, "Research, Rumor, and Propaganda: Anne Boleyn in Foxes' 'Book of Martyrs'," *The Historical Journal* 38, no. 4 (Dec. 1995): 797-819, 799; Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, 564.

[82]Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, 508.

[83]John Aylmer, *An Harborowe For Faithful and Trewe Subjectes* (London, 1559), sig. Cv.

[84]Aylmer, *An Harborowe*, sig. Cv.

in the sight of the kynge," Aylmer writes that the English Reformation would never have taken hold.[85] On both sides of the "Great Matter," it was Katherine and Anne, not Henry, who were depicted as responsible for England's spiritual wellness and became synonymous with England's national doctrinal identity.[86]

Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*, which dramatizes these events, is haunted by the omnipresence of the feminine occult and its spiritual persuasiveness. Within the play, the "saintlike" Katherine (2.4.154) and "spleeny Lutheran" (3.2.130) Anne are neither villainous nor marginalized but ever-present spiritual forces enacting their influence "in' th' bosom of / Our hard-ruled king" (3.2.131-32).[87] Yet, making sense of the play's women characters has long proven challenging, leaving scholars unsure of what to make of these seemingly contradictory religious representations. How can any play staging "The Great Matter" present both Katherine and Anne positively? The play cannot be pure Protestant historiography because of its sympathetic portrayal of Katherine of Aragon, nor can it be "part of a conscious Catholicization

[85]Aylmer, *An Harborowe*, sig. Cv.

[86]Yet, even as Queen, Anne was not safe from the same kind of gendered attacks launched against any spiritually authoritative woman. Detractors who wanted to cast Anne's influence over Henry as a source of evil associated Anne with witchcraft, suggesting she bewitched and entrapped the king. When he wanted to end his marriage with Anne, Henry himself played into these rumors. According to Eustace Chapuys, Charles V's English Ambassador, Henry confessed to his councilors that he had been "seduced and forced into his second marriage by means of sortileges and charmes," and that "God…had well shown his displeasure at it by denying him male children." Suddenly, Anne, once the liberator of the English nation, was now the reason why God punished Henry. Eustace Chapuys writes about this in his letter to the Emperor dated Jan. 29, 1536, printed in *Calendar of Letters, Despatches, and State Papers, Relating to the Negotiations Between England and Spain, Preserved in the Archives at Simancas, Vienna, Brussels, and Elsewhere*, vol 5 part 2, ed. Pascual de Gayangos (London, 1888), 28.

[87]All references come from William Shakespeare and John Fletcher, *King Henry VIII (All is True)*, ed. Gordon McMullan (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2000). Parenthetical citations refer to act, scene, and line number.

of…history," as Amy Appleford argues it is,[88] because the play strongly celebrates Protestant figures like Elizabeth, Cranmer, and even Henry himself.

To better make sense of the play's women, and thus its investment in chronicling recent religious history, we may need to change our perspective. Because of the overwhelming tendency in both early modern and contemporary popular culture to juxtapose Katherine and Anne, it is natural that we expect them to be presented as enemies within the play. As Appleford claims, Anne is Katherine's "*de facto* antagonist," and she reads them against each other, as is traditional in scholarship on the play.[89] But what if, instead of searching for a female antagonist within the play, we instead considered its central women characters—Katherine, Anne, and Elizabeth—as each divinely-fated, working together to bring about a specific moment in Christian history? All three women are presented as divine and necessary for *historia sacra*. Thus, rather than demonizing Katherine, Shakespeare and Fletcher's play honors her, diverting from Holinshed to present her as a symbolic martyr and necessary sacrifice, while Anne's embodied womanhood becomes essential in her ability to bear a child, and Elizabeth is prophesied to bring about a golden age. The play's concluding lines about "the merciful construction of good women" (5.4.10), then, can be opened up to signify all three women

[88]Amy Appleford, "Shakespeare's Katherine of Aragon: Last Medieval Queen, First Recusant Martyr," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 40, no. 1 (2010): 149-72, esp. 152.

[89]For more comparisons of Katherine and Anne see, Linda Micheli, "'Sit By Us': Visual Imagery and the Two Queens in *Henry VIII*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1987): 452–66; Kim H. Noling, "Grubbing Up the Stock: Dramatizing Queens in *Henry VIII*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (1988): 291-306; Susannah Brietz Monta, "'Thou fall'st a blessed martyr': Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* and the Polemics of Conscience," *English Literary Renaissance* 30 (2000): 262-83; Susan Frye, "Queens and the Structure of History in *Henry VIII*," in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works*, vol. 4, eds. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), 427-44.

characters, each of whom had their unique role to play in order for England to receive "a thousand thousand blessings" (5.4.19).

Akin to the prophetess and the martyr, Katherine of Aragon becomes a religio-political female figure who speaks truth to power, directly challenging the policies and decisions of Cardinal Wolsey and her husband throughout the play. Even the Roman church itself does not escape her critiques, as she observes that the cardinals seem to display "cardinal sins and hollow hearts" (3.1.104), denouncing them for their corruption. The frequent appeals to Katherine's saintliness and piety are most explicitly manifested in a dream vision in which she receives the palm and crown of the martyr.[90] In a spectacular dumb show, Katherine rejoices and "holdeth up her hands to heaven" (4.2.82.15) as white-clad figures in golden vizards celebrate, "invite [her] to a banquet," and "cast [a] thousand beams upon [her]" (4.2.88-89). It is a moment of poetic invention and the manifestation of the divine supernatural that Shakespeare and Fletcher add to a plot otherwise largely drawn from Holinshed. It serves within the narrative of the play to cement not only Katherine's piety but to validate her suffering and sacrifice. Katherine gets a happy end in Heaven, rewarded for her virtues, but England gets a happy end too, as Katherine's death marches us ever forward toward Elizabeth's reign.

Even though Anne Bullen is more of a mediatory figure within the play, her body becomes necessary to transition England from Katherine to Elizabeth. The play embeds within her a kind of divine beauty, an echo of the Protestant belief that God himself made Anne so appealing in order to tempt the king. In the moment of their first meeting, Henry is overcome by Anne, remarking on her beauty and the fairness of her hand (1.4.97-98). Later, the Chamberlain observes that "Beauty and honor in her are so mingled / That they have caught the King" (2.1.91-

[90]A lengthier description of the martyrological significance of these items is found in Appleford, "Shakespeare's Katherine of Aragon," 151.

92). Anne's beauty is spoken of in similar terms to Dorothea's—not only does the whiteness of her hand, the "fairest" Henry has ever seen, symbolize her purity, but her beauty, the play implies, is at least partially responsible for Henry's conversion. During her coronation procession, the crowd remarks that she is "an angel" (4.1.54), further situating her as another divine woman, not antagonistic to Katherine, but of a piece with her. Even Wolsey, who dislikes her, admits that she is "virtuous" and "well-deserving" (3.2.129-30), noting her "fine visage" (3.2.117). As we have seen in other plays, beauty has the potential to be castigated as bewitching, but that is not the case in *Henry VIII*. Anne is no more vilified for her persuasive looks than Katherine is for her sharp tongue. Indeed, Anne's beauty is vital for Christian history because it is only through that feature of her embodied womanhood that she becomes pregnant with Elizabeth.

In the play's final scene, Elizabeth's baptism, her ritualistic entrance into the Christian community, morphs into a prophetic vision for the future of England and an explicit moment of real-time historiography. The infant Elizabeth is a sacred being. "Holy and heavenly thoughts," Cramner claims, "still counsel her" (5.4.29), and heaven itself still "move[s] about her" (5.4.17). It is through Elizabeth, the play suggests, that "God shall be truly known" (5.4.36). Elizabeth thus becomes a kind of prophetic or sibylline creature herself, a vessel through which God's will can be enacted on the earthly plane. Cranmer argues that it is vital that she remains "a virgin / A most unspotted lily," repeating twice that "she must" (5.4.59-61). This emphasis on her virginity again recalls the virgin sibyls and martyrs, emphasizing that her female body plays a central role in the ways through which Elizabeth will help England know God. Cranmer continues that Elizabeth's death will bring yet another "starlike" (5.4.46) monarch, James I, who will "make new nations" (5.4.52). In its final moments, the play connects English nation-building and

imperialism to the actions of the play's three women, achievements only accessible through the feminine occult.

Each of these women—Dorothea, Delphia, Katherine, Anne, and Elizabeth—is divinely heralded and their characterization in the play is dependent upon the feminine occult. As I demonstrated across this chapter, opening up our definition of history plays to include those invested in Christian history presents new, exciting examples of more agential female characters. It also asks that we bring this understanding of the holy potential of the feminine occult with us as we return to, and reevaluate, familiar texts, challenging the assumption that women's supernatural power or influence must *de facto* be understood as frightening or unsympathetic, though they sometimes were. On the early modern stage, women and their supernatural womanhood were not antithetical to English history-making but in fact essential to it.

CONCLUSION

Over the four chapters of this dissertation, I have argued that the early modern theatre was a key player in the ongoing debates about women's power and place within the conversion process. In Chapter One, I looked at *The Witch of Edmonton* and *The Late Lancashire Witches* to show how a newfound interest in stage witches brought forward questions about women's vulnerability to satanic conversions and circulated prescriptive antifeminine ideas about female spirituality. Chapters Two, Three, and Four investigated how the public stage also provided the public with an alternative avenue for making sense of women's powers of conversion that situated them as holy, divinely bestowed, and necessary to safeguard the spirit of the English nation. In Chapter Two, I used *The London Prodigal* and *The Tamer Tamed* to demonstrate how city comedy promoted the idea that wives had the ability to reform their husbands. Chapter Three turned to Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Winter's Tale* to study how these representations of the conversion process emphasized the agency of the conversional subject. And, finally, in Chapter Four, I drew together *The Virgin Martyr*, *The Prophetess*, and *Henry VIII* to explore how the theatre used the figures of the prophetess and female martyr to feminize *historia sacra*.

My reading of these plays reveals how the construct of the supernatural woman could be both vilified and recuperated by the early modern theatre. While this theorization of women and conversion offers new ways to approach representations of women's power within the early modern dramatic canon, it also reveals a masculinist fantasy of female cooperation. By depicting white Christian women voluntarily upholding and refashioning patriarchal structures, plays such as the ones discussed in this dissertation overwhelmingly present women as allies rather than adversaries of Christian patriarchy. This construct of the supernatural woman—white, English,

and celestial—could be appropriated within colonial discourses to suggest godly approval for a wide range of conversion projects at home and abroad. Even in a play like Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, for example, Miranda is described as a "cherubim" whose smile "infused with fortitude from heaven" saved Prospero's spirit when they were abandoned at sea (1.2.181-83). It is Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda, we learn, that provides one of the main justifications for Caliban's subjugation and enslavement. White women and white femininity are one of the beating hearts of Christian conversional theology, and, through women's believed occult relationship with God, can be leveraged to demonstrate divine approval for nation and empire building.

In 1642, the public theatres closed, and when Charles II reopened them in 1660, women entered the theatrical public sphere as actresses and playwrights and used their voices to create new female archetypes. England was itself still haunted by the prospect of conversion—James II's infamous conversion to Catholicism was bad enough, but then his Catholic wife, Mary of Modena, gave birth to a son in 1688, threatening England with a Catholic dynasty. Later that month, seven English nobles sent a letter to William of Orange inviting him to invade England. The Restoration and eighteenth-century theatre remained invested in questions about women and conversion, albeit in new ways. Discourse about interfaith conversion was channeled into depictions of Christian women in the Middle and Far East, part of a rising trend of Orientalism.[1] The idea of spiritual conversion came to undergird reformed rake stories, a narrative premise that

[1]See, for example, Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel, and the Ottoman Harem* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004); Bridget Orr, *Empire on the English Stage, 1660-1714* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Işil Şahin Gülter, *The Ottoman Turks in English Heroic Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019). For a look at how white women writers specifically engaged orientalism for their own benefit, see Samara Anne Cahill, *Intelligent Souls?: Feminist Orientalism in Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2019).

remains extremely popular in romance fiction today.[2] Over the centuries, these tropes lost their overtly religious meanings but have maintained their investment in the idea that women can engender whole-character transformations in the men they love.

These discourses about women and conversion have never fully dissipated. Early modern gender politics—and especially theories of womanhood—continue to be deeply embedded into conversional theology in ways that are still felt in Western society today. The minor Twitter celebrity Lori Alexander, otherwise known as The Transformed Wife, offers one such example. In her "About Me" section, Alexander claims that after "23 years of a difficult marriage," God transformed her "into the godly woman that He has called me to be." In what is perhaps meant to be a parallel to Augustine, Alexander claims that her conversion came from a book—a moment in which she realized she needed to turn away from a life of vice and recommit to her husband. Following this conversion, Alexander felt called to take up Titus 2:3-5, saying that she "found [her] ministry" in the idea that "older women teach younger women" to be good wives to their husbands.[3] Through her website, blog, two published books, and over 8,000 tweets, Alexander situates herself as a convert who preaches "biblical womanhood," a concept that roughly aligns with right-wing conversative Christianity and promotes male superiority, traditional gender roles, and women's duty as a "helpmeet" for her husband and spiritual counselor for her children.[4] With 16,000 followers on twitter, Alexander has provoked

---

[2]Popular critics and writers of mass-market historical romance have noted how the reformation of the rake occurs through the power of the virginal heroine's body, in a trope commonly colloquially known as the "magical vagina." The moral conversion of the rake thus remains inextricably bound to a kind of supernatural womanhood.

[3]Lori Alexander, "About Me," The Transformed Wife, last updated 2022, https://thetransformedwife.com/about-2/.

[4]For example, Alexander regularly speaks out against trans rights, marriage equality, abortion, birth control, vaccines, and premarital sex.

significant controversy and established a modest network of supporters. "We love the ancient role of women!" Alexander tweeted on 2 May 2022, "It's not a myth but reality for us."[5] This "ancient role of women" that Alexander revels in feels uncannily derived from early modern discourses about women and conversion. Women "NEED godly, older women…to teach them the doctrine of biblical womanhood," she proclaims, "Step up older women, and do the ministry God has given to you!"[6] Such a ministry recalls not only the argument I have made across this dissertation, but also the work of Helen Smith and Claire Canavan, who demonstrate that historical women in early modern England were "easy converts, but also exemplary converters."[7] Instead of William Perkins's fear that "the more women, the more witches," Alexander imagines an alternative: the more women, the more transformed wives.

In fact, Alexander's ideology is quite similar to Perkins's. In another early modern echo, Alexander often relies upon the witch as the example of the bad wife and woman. As she tweets on 8 February 2021, "The fact that so many women are becoming witches and falling for witchcraft is a prime example of how easily women can be deceived," reiterating a notion of satanic conversion that feels drawn from the pages of a demonological treatise.[8] Alexander tends to uphold early modern gender theory, proudly declaring on 20 November 2021 that "I'm

---

[5]Lori Alexander (@godlywoman), Twitter, May 2, 2022, 1:33pm, https://twitter.com/godlywomanhood/status/1521181173463928832.

[6]Lori Alexander (@godlywomanhood), Twitter, March 5, 2022, 9:25am, https://twitter.com/godlywomanhood/status/1500115409990606851.

[7]Claire Canavan and Helen Smith, "'The needle may convert more than the pen': women and the work of conversion in early modern England," in *Conversions*, 105-122, esp. 109-113.

[8]Lori Alexander (@godlywomanhood), Twitter, February 8, 2022, 10:02am, https://twitter.com/godlywomanhood/status/1358793435524722695.

absolutely a 'weaker vessel.'"[9] Like any good demonologist, Alexander positions women's weakness as vulnerability, suggesting this is "all the more reason for young women to be *extremely* wise and careful."[10] Unsurprisingly, witchcraft for Alexander is essentially synonymous with women's independence:

> It's tragic how many women are into witchcraft these days, but this is what feminism leads to. Feminism rejects God and His will completely and leads women on Satan's path instead. It's a dangerous path to be on, women. Forsake it and turn to Christ instead! His ways are good.[11]

Conflating feminism with witchcraft, Alexander sees these women as apostates who have rejected God in favor of Satan. Employing the conversional vocabulary of "turning," she asks women to "turn to Christ." However, these feminist witches are most terrifying for Alexander because they, like Mistress Generous in *The Late Lancashire Witches*, have the potential to contaminate their husbands and children. Sharing a personal anecdote from a man who supposedly reached out to her, Alexander writes:

---

[9]Lori Alexander (@godlywomanhood), Twitter, November 20, 2021, 4:19pm, https://twitter.com/godlywomanhood/status/1462168736811552771.

[10]Lori Alexander (@godlywomanhood), Twitter, November 20, 2021, 5:10pm, https://twitter.com/godlywomanhood/status/1462181506521055235.

[11]Lori Alexander (@godlywomanhood), Twitter, October 15, 2020, 4:51pm, https://twitter.com/godlywomanhood/status/1316844162327617538. Similarly, she tweeted on 29 September 2021 that "Feminism has turned many women into witches playing with witchcraft. If you're not worshipping God, you're worshipping Satan. If you turn from God's ways, you've turned to Satan's ways. Feminism is a slippery slope that leads to hell. Repent and believe in Jesus Christ!"

> He married an unbeliever. She divorced him. They both have the children part time. She's into witchcraft. He's always trying to combat the lies they learn from her with truth. It's tough. Do NOT marry an unbeliever![12]

In her first two staccato sentences, Alexander connects this couple's divorce to the wife's lack of spirituality. Yet by situating the wife as a woman who is "into witchcraft," Alexander renders her more than just an "unbeliever;" given her earlier tweets, this woman is meant to be interpreted as a satanic apostate. This, Alexander argues, has had a deep impact on the couple's children's spiritual education. By citing "the lies they learn from her," she harkens back to one of the most foundational components of witchcraft lore: that witchcraft passes through the matrilineal line from mother to child. Throughout Alexander's body of writing, she time and again voices sentiments that bear a shockingly marked resemblance to those that feature across this dissertation.

Does the Transformed Wife espouse dominant gender ideology or even speak for most Christian women? No. But she does reveal that the distance between the ideas of womanhood discussed in this dissertation and our modern society is often smaller than we are comfortable admitting. The construct of the supernatural woman, her perceived duty to her husband and family, and her constant potential for satanic conversion are not artifacts of the past but remain deeply entrenched within pockets of Christian theology. With the resurgence of right-wing conservative and evangelical politics in the United States, these discourses have once again begun to enter the public consciousness and have the potential to inform public policy. For example, Justice Samuel Alito's leaked draft for the overturning of Roe v. Wade in May 2022 calls upon the authority of Matthew Hale, a Chief Justice of England who argued for the

---

[12]Lori Alexander (@godlywomanhood), Twitter, August 5, 2021, 5:22pm, https://twitter.com/godlywomanhood/status/1423394004457099269.

existence of witches in 1671 and executed two women for witchcraft. The representation of women in popular media and national discourse—from the early modern playhouse to the romance novel to the tweets of the Transformed Wife—continues to shape cultural perceptions of women and thus exerts real-world influence over women's rights.

At the same time, however, women's conversional powers have been instrumental to political social movements, especially Western feminist coalition. In the last century, for example, women have overwhelmingly reclaimed the figure of the witch as a rallying symbol for rebellion against the patriarchy. And, like early modern prophetesses and martyrs, feminist activists—from the nineteenth century to the #MeToo movement—have come forward into the public sphere, putting their bodies on the line to speak truth to power, albeit in more secular contexts. These public acts have shaped the modern Western world, from women's suffrage to demands for restorative justice against high-profile sexual abusers. Just as classical and early modern martyrologists claimed, women's acts of testimony have had a conversional impact on witnesses, fostering intellectual, moral, and ethical transformations in all kinds of people. Those conversions have then brought people into new political communities determined to create a more equitable future. Women have always been and will continue to be immensely powerful agents of social and political change, capable of enacting their wills upon the world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Ales, Alexander. "Elizabeth: September 1559, 1–5." In *Calendar of State Papers Foreign, Elizabeth, Volume 1: 1558–1559*, edited by Joseph Stevenson, 524-542. London, 1863.

Anger, Jane. *Jane Anger Her Protection for Women to Defend them Against the Scandalous Reportes of a Late Surfeiting Lover, and all Otherlike Venerians that Complaine so to Bee Overcloyed with Womens Kindnesse.* London, 1589.

The Apprehension and Confession of Three Notorious Witches. Arreigned and by Justice Condemned and Executed at Chelmes-Forde, in the Countye of Essex. London, 1589.

Askew, Anne. *The First Examinacion of Anne Askewe Latelye Martired in Smythfelde, by the Romyshe Popes Upholders, Wyth the Elucydacyon of Johan Bale*. London, 1547.

Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions by Saint Augustine*, translated by Maria Boulding. New York: New City Press, 1997.

Aylmer, John. *An Harborowe For Faithful and Trewe Subjectes* […]. London, 1559.

Bale, John. *The Lattre Examinacyon of Anne Askewe Latelye Martyred in Smythfelde, by the Wycked Synagoge of Antichrist, with the Elucydacyon of Johan Bale*. Wesel, 1547.

Beard, Thomas. *The Theatre of God's Judgements* […]. London, 1648.

Boccaccio, Giovanni. *The Antient, True, and Admirable History of Patient Grisel a Poore Mans Daughter in France: Shewing, how Maides, by Her Example, in their Good Behaviour may Marrie Rich Husbands: And Likewise, Wives by their Patience and Obedience may Gaine Much Glorie* […]. London, 1619.

Bodin, Jean. *De la démonomanie des sorciers* […]. Paris, 1580. Translated by Randy A. Scott as *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995.

Braithwaite, Richard. *The English Gentlewoman, Drawne Out to the Full Body Expressing, what Habilliments Doe Best Attire Her, what Ornaments Doe Best Adorne Her, what Complements Doe Best Accomplish Her* […]. London, 1631.

Broughton, Richard. *The Ecclesiasticall Historie of Great Britaine Deduced by Ages* […]. Dovai, 1633.

Brome, Richard, and Thomas Heywood. *The Late Lancashire Witches*, edited by Gabriel Egan as *The Witches of Lancashire*. London: Globe Quartos, 2002.

Bruno, Giovanni Michele. *The Necessarie, Fit, and Convenient Education of a Yong Gentlewoman Written both in French and Italian, and Translated into English by W. P.* […]. London, 1598.

Calendar of Letters, Despatches, and State Papers, Relating to the Negotiations Between England and Spain, Preserved in the Archives at Simancas, Vienna, Brussels, and Elsewhere, vol 5, no. 2, edited Pascual de Gayangos. London, 1888.

Clapham, John. *The Historie of Great Britannie Declaring the Successe of Times and Affaires in that Island, from the Romans First Entrance* […]. London, 1606.

The Court of Good Counsell Wherein is Set Downe the True Rules, how a Man should Choose a Good Wife from a Bad, and a Woman a Good Husband from a Bad. London, 1607.

Crashaw, William. *The Sermon Preached at the Crosse, Feb. Xiiii. 1607.* London, 1608.

Darcie, Abraham. *The Honour of Ladies, Or, A True Description of their Noble Perfections* […]. London, 1622.

Davenport, John. *The Witches of Huntingdon, their Examinations and Confessions; Exactly Taken by His Majesties Justices of Peace for that County* […]. London, 1646.

Davies, Eleanor. *A warning to the dragon and all his angels*. London, 1625.

A Discoverie of Six Women Preachers, in Middlesex, Kent, Cambridgshire, and Salisbury […]. London, 1641.

Eachard, John. *The Axe, Against Sin and Error; and the Truth Conquering* […]. London, 1646.

Edwards, Richard. "An Epitaph upon the Death of Sir Edward Saunders Knight." *The Paradise of Daintie Devises*. London, 1585.

The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches at Chensforde in the Countie of Essex […]. London, 1566.

Fletcher, John. *The Tamer Tamed*, edited by Lucy Munro. London: Methuen Drama, 2010.

Fletcher, John, and Philip Massinger. *The Prophetess*, edited by Paul Ellison. London, 1647. http://people.exeter.ac.uk/pellison/BF/prophess/frameset.htm

Fox, George. *Concerning Sons and Daughters, and Prophetesses Speaking and Prophecying, in the Law and the Gospel and Concerning Womens Learning in Silence and also Concerning Womens Not Speaking in the Church* […]. London, 1661.

Foxe, John. *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* or *TAMO* (1563 edition). Sheffield: The Digital Humanities Institute, 2011. https://www.dhi.ac.uk/foxe/.

Foxe, John. *Rerum in ecclesia gestarum* […]. Basle, 1559.

Gataker, Thomas. *A Good Wife Gods Gift and, a Wife Indeed. Two Mariage Sermons. by Thomas Gataker B. of D. and Pastor of Rotherhith*. London, 1623.

Gibson, Anthony. *A Womans Woorth, Defended Against all the Men in the World Prooving them to be More Perfect, Excellent, and Absolute in all Vertuous Actions, then any Man of what Qualitie Soever. Written by One that Hath Heard Much, Seene Much, but Knowes a Great Deale More*. London, 1599.

Gifford, George. *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes in which is Laide Open how Craftely the Divell Deceiueth Not Onely the Witches but Many Other and so Leadeth them Awrie into Many Great Errours* […]. London, 1593.

Goodcole, Henry. *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch Late of Edmonton, Her Conviction and Condemnation and Death* […]. London, 1621.

Gosson, Stephen. *Playes Confuted in Five Actions Proving that they are Not to be Suffred in a Christian Common Weale*. London, 1582.

—. *The ephemerides of Phialo devided into three books. […] And a short apologie of the Schoole of abuse, against poets, pipers, players, [et] their excusers*. London, 1579.

—. *The Schoole of Abuse Conteining a Plesaunt Invective Against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Jesters, and such Like Caterpillers of a Co[m]Monwelth* […]. London, 1579.

Gouge, William. *Of Domesticall Duties Eight Treatises* […] London, 1622.

[Greene, John]. *A refutation of the Apology for actors* […]. London, 1615.

Guazzo, Francesco Maria. *Compendium Maleficarum*. Milan, 1608. Edited by Montague Summers, translated by E.A. Ashwin. London: John Rodker, 1929.

Heywood, Thomas. *An Apology for Actors Containing Three Briefe Treatises. 1 their Antiquity. 2 their Ancient Dignity. 3 the True Use of their Quality* […]. London, 1612.

—. *Gynaikeion: Or, Nine Bookes of various History. Concerninge Women Inscribed by Ye Names of Ye Nine Muses* […]. London, 1624.

I.H. *A Strange Wonder or a Wonder in a Woman* […]. London, 1642.

James VI and I, King of Scotland and England. *Daemonologie in Forme of a Dialogue, Divided into Three Bookes* […]. Edinburgh, 1597.

Jonson, Ben. "The Masque of Queens, Celebrated in the House of Fame." In *The Works of Ben Jonson, Which were formerly Printed in Two Volumes, and are now Reprinted in One*, 345-54. London, 1692.

Katherine of Aragon. "Katherine of Aragon, formerly Queen of England, to Henry VIII, 7 January 1536." In *Letters of the Queens of England*, edited by Anne Crawford, 179. Phoenix Mill: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1992.

Kramer, Heinrich, and James Sprenger. *Malleus Maleficarum*. Speyer, 1486. Translated by Christopher S. Mackay as *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the* Malleus Maleficarum. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Lambarde, William. *A Perambulation of Kent Conteining the Description, Hystorie, and Customes of that Shyre* […]. London, 1576.

Leigh, William. *The First Step, Towards Heaven, Or Anna the Prophetesse Sacred Haunt, to the Temple of God. Preached at Standish Church in the Countie of Lancaster* […]. London, 1609.

Leighton, Alexander. *A Shorte Treatise Against Stage-Playes*. Amsterdam, 1625.

Lodge, Thomas. *A Reply to Stephen Gosson's School of Abuse in Defence of Poetry, Musick, and Stage Plays*. London, 1580. Reprinted in *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Source Book*, edited by Tanya Pollard, 37-61. Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

"The London Prodigal." *A Digital Anthology of Early Modern English Drama*. Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library, 2017. https://emed.folger.edu/lonpro.

Magnus, Pseudo-Albert. *De secretis mulierum et virorum*. Leipzeig, 1505.

Marston, John. *The Dutch Courtesan*. London, 1637.

—. *The Wonder of Women; or The Tragedy of Sophonisba*. In *The Works of John Marston*, Vol. 2, edited by A. H. Bullen. London, 1873.

Massinger, Phillip, and Thomas Dekker. *The Virgin Martyr*. In *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, vol. 3, edited by Fredson Bowers, 365-480. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958.

Middleton, Thomas. *The Witch*, edited by Marion O'Connor. In *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, edited by Gary Taylor, et. al, 1124-1164. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007.

Munday, Anthony. *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters* […]. London, 1580.

Nashe, Thomas. *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Divell Describing the Over-Spreading of Vice, and Suppression of Vertue. Pleasantly Interlac't with Variable Delights*. London, 1592.

The Noble Tryumphaunt Coronacyon of Queen Anne Wyfe Unto The Moost Noble Kynge Henry the viii. London, 1533.

Northbrooke, John. *A treatise wherein dicing, dau[n]cing, vaine plaies or enterludes with other idle pastimes, &c. commonly used on the Sabboth day, are reprooved* […]. London, 1579.

Perkins, William. *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft so Farre Forth as it is Revealed in the Scriptures, and Manifest by True Experience* […]. Cambridge, 1608.

Potts, Thomas. *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster With the Arraignement and Triall of Nineteene Notorious Witches, at the Assizes and General Gaole Deliverie, Holden at the Castle of Gaole Deliverie in the Circuit of the North Parts* […]. London, 1613.

Prynne, William. *Histrio-Mastix. the Players Scourge, Or Actors Tragœdie, Divided into Two Parts* […]. London, 1633.

Rainolds, John. *Th'Overthrow of Stage-Playes, by the Way of Controversie Betwixt D. Gager and D. Rainoldes Wherein all the Reasons that can be made for them are Notably Refuted* […]. Middelburg, 1599.

A Rehearsall both Straung and True, of Hainous and Horrible Actes Committed by Elizabeth Stile Alias Rockingham […]. London, 1579.

Rémy, Nicholas. *Daemonolatreiae libri tres*. Lyons, 1595. Edited by Montague Summers and translated by E.A. Ashwin as *Demonolatry*. London: John Rodker, 1930.

Rich, Barnabe. *The Excellency of Good Women the Honour and Estimation that Belongeth Unto them. the Infallible Markes Whereby to Know them* […]. London, 1613.

Roberts, Alexander. *A Treatise of Witchcraft Wherein Sundry Propositions are Laid Downe, Plainely Discovering the Wickednesse of that Damnable Art* […]. London, 1616.

Rowley, William, et. al. *The Witch of Edmonton*, edited by Lucy Munro. London: Bloomsbury Press, 2017.

R.P. *The Second Part of the Booke of Christian Exercise, Appertayning to Resolution. Or a Christian Directory, Guiding all Men Unto their Salvation* […]. London, 1592.

Scot, Reginald. *The Discoverie of Witchcraft Wherein the Lewde Dealing of Witches and Witchmongers is Notablie Detected* […]. London, 1584.

Shakespeare, William. *All's Well That Ends Well*. Edited by Suzanne Gossett. In *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed., edited by Stephen Greenblatt, et. al., 2635-2708. New York: W. W. Norton Company, 2016.

—. *Hamlet*. Edited by Anthony B. Dawson. In *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed., edited by Stephen Greenblatt, et. al., 1751-1854. New York: W. W. Norton Company, 2016

—. *Henry VIII (All is True)*. Edited by Gordon McMullan. Arden Shakespeare, 3rd ser. London: Thomson Learning, 2000.

—. *King Lear*. Edited by Grace Ioppolo. In *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed., edited by Stephen Greenblatt, et. al., 2317-2493. New York: W. W. Norton Company, 2016.

—. *Macbeth*. Edited by Robert S. Miola. In *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed., edited by Stephen Greenblatt, et. al., 2709-2774. New York: W. W. Norton Company, 2016.

—. *The Merchant of Venice*. Edited by Leah S. Marcus. In *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed., edited by Stephen Greenblatt, et. al., 1327-1394. New York: W. W. Norton Company, 2016.

—. *Much Ado About Nothing*. Edited by Sheldon P. Zitner. Oxford World Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

—. *Othello*. Edited by Clare McManus. In *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed., edited by Stephen Greenblatt, et. al., 2073-2158. New York: W. W. Norton Company, 2016.

—. *The Taming of the Shrew*. Edited by Sarah Werner. In *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed., edited by Stephen Greenblatt, et. al., 343-413. New York: W. W. Norton Company, 2016.

—. *The Tempest*. Edited by William H. Sherman. In *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed., edited by Stephen Greenblatt, et. al., 3205-3266. New York: W. W. Norton Company, 2016.

—. *The Winter's Tale*. Edited by Stephen Orgel. Oxford World Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Shirley, James. *The Example*. London, 1637.

Sidney, Philip. "Apology for Poetry." In *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*, edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones, 212-251. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Sowernam, Ester. *Ester Hath Hang'd Haman: Or an Answere to a Lewd Pamphlet, Entituled, the Arraignment of Women with the Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Men, and Husbands* […]. London, 1617.

Speght, Rachel. *A Mouzell for Melastomus, the Cynicall Bayter of, and Foule Mouthed Barker Against Evahs Sex. Or an Apologeticall Answere to that Irreligious and Illiterate Pamphlet made by Jo. Sw.* […]. London, 1616.

A Spirit Moving in the Women-Preachers: Or, Certaine Quæres, Vented and Put Forth Unto this Affronted, Brazen-Faced, Strange, New Feminine Brood. London, 1646.

The Statutes of the Realm. Vol. 3. London: Dawsons of the Pall Mall, 1817.

Ste. B. *Counsel to the Husband: To the Wife Instruction A Short and Pithy Treatise of Severall and Joynt Duties, Belonging Unto Man and Wife, as Counsels to the One, and Instructions to the Other; for their More Perfect Happinesse in this Present Life, and their Eternall Glorie in the Life to Come*. London, 1608.

Stearne, John. *A confirmation and discovery of witchcraft* […]. London, 1648.

Stubbes, Phillip. *The Anatomie of Abuses Contayning a Discoverie, Or Briefe Summarie of such Notable Vices and Imperfections, as Now Raigne in Many Christian Countreyes of the Worlde*. London, 1583.

Swetnam, Joseph. *The Araignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women* […]. London, 1615.

Vopiscus, "Cams, Carinus, Numerian." In *Scriptores Historiae Augustae,* translated by David Magie, 416-453. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Wecker, John Jacob. *Eighteen books of the secrets of art and nature being the summe and substance of naturall philosophy*. London, 1660.

Weyer, Johann. *De praestigiis daemonum et incantationibus ac veneficiis libri sex*, 4th ed. Basel, 1568.

Whitney, Geffrey. *A Choice of Emblemes, and Other Devises*. Leiden, 1586.

Wilson, Thomas. *A Christian Dictionarie, Opening the Signification of the Chiefe Wordes Dispersed Generally Through Holie Scriptures* […]. London, 1612.

Witches Apprehended, Examined and Executed, for Notable Villanies by them Committed both by Land and Water with a Strange and most True Triall how to Know Whether a Woman be a Witch Or Not. London, 1613.

The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, Daughters of Joan Flower Neere Bever Castle: Executed at Lincolne, March 11. 1618 […]. London, 1619.

The Wonders of the Female World, Or a General History of Women. London, 1682.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Adelman, Janet. "Her Father's Blood: Race, Conversion, and Nation in *The Merchant of Venice*." *Representations* 81, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 4–30.

Alfar, Cristina León. *Fantasies of Female Evil: The Dynamics of Gender and Power in Shakespearean Tragedy*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003.

—. *Women and Shakespeare's Cuckoldry Plays: Shifting Narratives of Marital Betrayal*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

Amussen, Susan. "*The Witch of Edmonton:* Witchcraft, Inversion, and Social Criticism." *Early Theatre* 21, no. 2 (2018): 167-180.

Appleford, Amy. "Shakespeare's Katherine of Aragon: Last Medieval Queen, First Recusant Martyr." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 40, no. 1 (2010): 149-72.

Atkinson, David. "Moral Knowledge and the Double Action in the *Witch of Edmonton*." *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 25, no. 2 (1985): 419-439.

Bach, Rebecca Ann. "Manliness Before Individualism: Masculinity, Effeminacy, and Homoerotics in Shakespeare's History Plays." In *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works V. II*, edited by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard, 220-245. Malden: Blackwell, 2003.

Baratta, Luca. "Lancashire: A Land of Witches in Shakespeare's Time." *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, 13, no. 2 (2013): 185–208.

Barish, Jonas. *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.

Barkan, Leonard. "'Living Sculptures': Ovid, Michelangelo, and *The Winter's Tale*." *ELH* 48, no. 4 (Winter 1981): 639-667.

Barker, Roberta. "'An honest dog yet': Performing *The Witch of Edmonton*." *Early Theatre* 12, no. 2 (2009): 163-182.

Barthelemy, Anthony Gerard. *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987.

Bate, Jonathon. "Dying to Live in *Much Ado about Nothing*." In *Surprised by Scenes: Essays in Honour of Professor Yasunari Takahashi*, edited by Yasunari Takada, 69-85. Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1994.

Bates, A.W. *Emblematic Monsters: Unnatural Conceptions and Deformed Births in Early Modern Europe*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005.

Battenhouse, Roy. “Toward Understanding Patriarchy in *Much Ado*.” *Shakespeare Yearbook* 2 (1991): 193–200.

Bayman, Anna. “‘Large Hands, Wide Eares, and Piercing Sights’: The ‘Discoveries’ of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Witch Pamphlets.” *Literature & History* 16, no. 1 (2007): 26-45.

Beauchamp, Gorman. “Shylock’s Conversion.” *Humanitas* 24, no. 1-2 (2011): 55-92.

Beck, Ervin. “Prodigal Son Comedy: The Continuity of a Paradigm in English Drama, 1500-1642.” PhD diss., Indiana University, 1973.

—. “Terence Improved: The Paradigm of the Prodigal Son in English Renaissance Comedy.” *Renaissance Drama* 6 (1973): 107-122.

Beckwith, Sarah. *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016.

Beer, Frances. *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages.* Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1992.

Benkert, Lysbeth Em. “Faith and Redemption in *The Winter’s Tale*.” *Religion and the Arts* 19 (2015): 31-50.

Benson, Sean. *Shakespearean Resurrection: The Art of Almost Raising the Dead*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2009.

Berger, Harry. “Against the Sink-a-Pace: Sexual and Family Politics in *Much Ado about Nothing*.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (1982): 302–13.

Bergeron, David M. “Fletcher’s *The Woman’s Prize*, Transgression, and *Querelle des Femmes*.” *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 8 (1996): 146-64.

Berry, Herbert. “The Globe Bewitched and ‘El Hombre Fiel.’” *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 1 (1984): 211-230.

Bever, Edward. “Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power in the Early Modern Community.” *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 4 (2002): 955-988.

Bolam, Robyn. “Rewriting City Comedy through Time and Cultures: *The Taming of the Shrew* – Padua to London to Padua U.S.” In *Plotting Early Modern London: New Essays on Jacobean City Comedy*, edited by Dieter Mehl, et. al, 195-207. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.

Bovilsky, Lara. “‘A Gentle and No Jew’: Jessica, Portia, and Jewish Identity.” *Renaissance Drama* 38 (2010): 46-76.

—. *Barbarous Play: Race on the English Renaissance Stage*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Bowden, Hugh. *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle: Divination and Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Bowers, Fredson, ed. *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker Vol. 3*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958.

Brereton, Sir William. *Travels in Holland, the United Provinces, England, Scotland, and Ireland, 1634-1635*. Manchester: Chetham Society, 1844.

Breuer, Heidi. *Crafting the Witch: Gendering Magic in Medieval and Early Modern England*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Britton, Dennis Austin. *Becoming Christian: Race, Reformation, and Early Modern Romance*. New York: Fordham UP, 2014.

—. "Re-'Turning' *Othello*: Transformative and Restorative Romance." *ELH* 78, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 27-50.

Brown, Pamela Allen. *Better a Shrew than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.

Brown, Sylvia Monica. *Women, Gender, and Radical Religion in Early Modern Europe*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

Burton, Jonathon. *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005.

Cahill, Samara Anne. *Intelligent Souls?: Feminist Orientalism in Eighteenth-Century English Literature*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2019.

Callaghan, Dympna. "Introduction." In *The Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, edited by Dympna Callaghan, 2nd ed., 1-20. Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2016.

Canavan, Claire, and Helen Smith. "'The needle may convert more than the pen': women and the work of conversion in early modern England." In *Conversions: Gender and Religious Change in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Simon Ditchfield and Helen Smith, 105-122. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019.

Cantor, Paul A. *Shakespeare's Rome: Republic and Empire*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.

Chalk, Darryl, and Mary Floyd-Wilson, eds. *Contagion and the Shakespearean Stage*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Chamberlain, Stephanie. "Rotten Oranges and Other Spoiled Commodities: The Economics of Shame in *Much Ado about Nothing*." *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium* 9 (2010): 1–10.

Champion, Larry S. "'Disaster With So Many Joys': Structure and Perspective in Massinger and Dekker's *The Virgin Martyr*." *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 1 (1984): 199-209.

Chapman, Matthieu. *Anti-Black Racism in Early Modern English Drama: The Other "Other."* New York: Routledge, 2017.

—. "The Appearance of Blacks on the Early Modern Stage: *Love's Labour's Lost*'s African Connections to Court." *Early Theatre* 17, no. 2 (2014): 77-94.

Chappell, Julie, and Kaley Kramer, eds. *Women During the English Reformations: Renegotiating Gender and Religious Identity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Clark, Stuart. "Protestant Witchcraft, Catholic Witchcraft." In *The Witchcraft Reader*, edited by Darren Oldridge, 136-147. London: Routledge, 2002.

—. *Thinking With Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Clegg, Cyndia Susan. "Truth, Lies, and the Law of Slander in *Much Ado about Nothing*." In *The Law in Shakespeare*, edited by Constance Jordan and Karen Cunnignham, 167-88. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Clubb, Louise George. "*The Virgin Martyr* and the *Tragedia sacra*." *Renaissance Drama* 7 (1964): 103-126.

Coffin, Charlotte A. "Theatre and/as Witchcraft: A Reading of *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634)." *Early Theatre* 16, no. 2 (2013): 91-119.

Cohen, Stephen. "'No Assembly but Horn-Beasts': The Politics of Cuckoldry in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies." *Journal For Early Modern Cultural Studies* 4, no. 2 (2004): 5–34.

Coles, Kimberly Anne. *Religion, Reform, and Women's Writing in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Comensoli, Viviana. *"Household Business": Domestic Plays of Early Modern England*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

—. "Witchcraft and Domestic Tragedy in *The Witch of Edmonton*." In *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, edited by J.R. Brink, et. al, 43-60. Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989.

Cook, Carol. "'The Sign and Semblance of Her Honor': Reading Gender Difference in *Much Ado about Nothing*." *PMLA* 101, no. 2 (1986): 186–202.

Cox, John D. *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350-1642*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Crawford, Julie. *Marvelous Protestantism: Monstrous Births in Post-Reformation England*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005.

Crawford, Patricia. *Women and Religion in England 1500-1720*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Crocker, Holly. "The Tamer as Shrewd in John Fletcher's the *Woman's Prize: Or, the Tamer Tam'd*." *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 51, no. 2 (2011): 409-426.

Crosby, Ellen. *The Turning of the Shrew: Conversion as a Literary Methodology*. MA Thesis, McGill University, 2016.

Dadabhoy, Ambereen. "Barbarian Moors: Documenting Racial Formation in Early Modern England." In *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*, edited by Ayanna Thompson, 30-46. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Dawson, Anthony B. "Much Ado about Signifying." *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 22, no. 2 (1982): 210–21.

—. "Witchcraft/Bigamy: Cultural Conflict in *The Witch of Edmonton*." *Renaissance Drama* 20 (1989): 77-98.

Dawson, Anthony, and Paul Yachnin. *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare's England: A Collaborative Debate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Dean, David. "Blasphemy, Swearing, and Bad Behaviour in the *Witch of Edmonton*." *Early Theatre* 21, no. 2 (2018): 151-165.

Degenhardt, Jane Hwang. "Catholic Martyrdom in Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Matir* and the Threat of 'Turning Turk.'" *ELH* 73, no. 1 (2006): 83-117.

—. *Islamic Conversion and Christian Resistance on the Early Modern Stage*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

Del Sapio Garbero, Maria. *Shakespeare's Ruins and the Myth of Rome*. New York: Routledge, 2022.

Delsigne, Jill. "Hermetic Miracles in *The Winter's Tale*." In *Magical Transformations on the Early Modern English Stage*, edited by Lisa Hopkins and Helen Ostovich, 91-109. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2014.

Dewar-Watson, Sarah. "The *Alcestis* and the Statue Scene in *The Winter's Tale*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 73-80.

DeZur, Katheryn. *Gender, Interpretation, and Political Rule in Sidney's* Arcadia. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013.

Diehl, Huston. "'Does Not the Stone Rebuke Me?': The Pauline Rebuke and Paulina's Lawful Magic in *The Winter's Tale*." In *Shakespeare and the Cultures of Performance*, edited by Paul Yachnin and Patricia Badir, 69-82. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2008.

—. *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.

—. "'Strike All That Look upon with Marvel': Theatrical and Theological Wonder in *The Winter's Tale*." In *Rematerializing Shakespeare: Authority and Representation on the Early Modern English Stage*, edited by Bryan Reynolds and William N. West, 19-34. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Dimmock, Matthew. *New Turkes: Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2005.

Ditchfield, Simon, and Helen Smith, eds. *Conversions: Gender and Religious Change in Early Modern Europe*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019.

Dolan, Frances. *Dangerous Familiars*: *Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550-1700*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.

—. "Hermione's Ghost: Catholicism, the Feminine, and the Undead." In *The Impact of Feminism in English Renaissance Studies*, edited by Dympna Callaghan and Gail Kern Paster, 213-237. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Dollimore, Jonathon. *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*. Brighton: The Harvest Press, 1984.

Dolnikowski, Edith Wilks. "Feminine Exemplars for Reform: Women's Voices in John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*." In *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millenia of Christianity*, edited by Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker, 199-211. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

Dursteler, Eric. *Renegade Women: Gender, Identity, and Boundaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011.

Dusinberre, Juliet. *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975.

Ehrenrich, Barbara, and Deirdre English. *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*. New York: Feminist Press, 1973.

Ephraim, Michelle. *Reading the Jewish Woman on the Elizabethan Stage*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008.

Erickson, Peter. *Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Drama*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

—. "Seeing White." *Transition*, no. 67 (1995): 166-185.

Everett, Barbara. "*Much Ado about Nothing:* The Unsociable Comedy." In *English Comedy*, edited by Michael Cordner, et. al, 68-84. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Farrell, Kirby. "Witchcraft and Wonder in *The Winter's Tale*." In *Renaissance Historicisms: Essays in Honor of Arthur F. Kinney*, edited by James Dutcher and Anne Lake, 159-72. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008.

Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004.

Findlay, Alison. "Sexual and spiritual politics in the events of 1633–34 and *The Late Lancashire Witches*." In *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, edited by Robert Poole, 146-163. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.

Fish, Tom. "Bewitching Power: The Virtuosity of Gender in Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*." *Religions* 10, no. 11 (2019): 1-13.

Fissell, Mary E. *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Fleck, Andrew. "The Ambivalent Blush: Figural and Structural Metonymy, Modesty, and *Much Ado about Nothing*." *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews* 19, no. 1 (2006): 16–23.

Floyd-Wilson, Mary. *Occult Knowledge*, *Science, and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Frankenberg, Ruth. *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Freeman, Thomas S. "Research, Rumor, and Propaganda: Anne Boleyn in Foxes' 'Book of Martyrs.'" *The Historical Journal* 38, no. 4 (Dec. 1995): 797-819.

Friedman, Michael. "Male Bonds and Marriage in *All's Well* and *Much Ado*." *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 35, no. 2 (1995): 231–49.

Frye, Susan. "Queens and the Structure of History in *Henry VIII*." In *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works*, vol. 4, edited by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard, 427-44. Malden: Blackwell, 2003.

Fryer, Peter. *Staying Power: The history of black people in Britain*. London: Pluto Press, 1984.

Garner, Shirley Nelson. "Male Bonding and the Myth of Women's Deception in Shakespeare's Plays." In *Shakespeare's Personality*, edited by Norman Holland, et. al, 135-50. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

Garrett, Julia. "Dramatizing Deviance: Sociological Theory and the *Witch of Edmonton*." *Criticism* 49, no. 3 (2007): 327-375.

—. "Witchcraft and Sexual Knowledge in Early Modern England." *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2013): 32-72.

Gasper, Julia. "The Sources of *The Virgin Martyr*." *The Review of English Studies* 42, no. 165 (1991): 17-31.

Geddes, Sean. "The Fortunes of Fame in *Much Ado About Nothing*." *The Review of English Studies* 70, no. 293 (2019): 54–73.

Ginzburg, Carlo. "The Witches' Sabbath: Popular Cult or Inquisitorial Stereotype?" In *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Steven L. Kaplan, 39-51. Berlin: Mouton, 1984.

Girard, René. "The Crime and Conversion of Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*." *Religion and Literature* 22, no. 2-3 (1990): 193-219.

Gleckman, Jason. *Shakespeare and Protestant Poetics*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

—. *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Grinnell, Richard. "Witchcraft, Race, and the Rhetoric of Barbarism in *Othello* and *1 Henry IV*." *Upstart Crow* 24 (2004): 72-80.

—. "The Witch, the Transvestite, and the Actor: Destabilizing Gender and the Renaissance Stage." *Studies in the Humanities* 23, no. 2 (1996): 163–84.

Guenther, Genevieve. *Magical Imaginations: Instrumental Aesthetics in the English Renaissance*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012.

Gülter, Işil Şahin. *The Ottoman Turks in English Heroic Plays*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019.

Gurr, Andrew. *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642*, 4th ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Hackett, Helen. "Anne Boleyn's Legacy to Elizabeth I: Neoclassicism and the Iconography of Protestant Queenship." In *Queens Matter in Early Modern Studies*, ed. Anne Riehl Bertolet, 157-180. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

Hall, Kim. "Beauty and the Beast of Whiteness: Teaching Race and Gender." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (1996): 461-475.

—. "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? Colonisation and Miscegenation in *The Merchant of Venice*." *Renaissance Drama* 23 (1992): 87-111.

—. *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Hamlin, Hannibal. *The Bible in Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Hand, Molly. "'You take no labor': Women Workers of Magic in Early Modern England." In *Working Subjects in Early Modern English Drama*, edited by Michelle Dowd and Natasha Korda, 161-76. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011.

Haslem, Lori. "Tongue-Tied Women and Embarrassed Men in *Much Ado about Nothing* and *The Winter's Tale*." *Shakespeare Yearbook* 7 (1996): 381–401.

Hawkes, David. "Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in the Antitheatrical Controversy." *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 39, no. 2 (Spring, 1999): 255-273.

Hays, Janice. "Those 'Soft and Delicate Desires': *Much Ado* and the Distrust of Women." In *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, edited by Carolyn Lenz, et. al, 79-99. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980.

Hazlitt, William. *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, 3rd ed. London: John Temple-man, 1838.

Heng, Geraldine. *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Hester, Marianne. *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches: A Study of the Dynamics of Male Domination*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Hickerson, Megan L. *Making Women Martyrs in Tudor England*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Hirsch, Brett D. "Hornpipes and Disordered Dancing in *The Late Lancashire Witches*: A Reel Crux?" *Early Theatre* 16, no. 1 (2013): 139-49.

—. "Thomas Heywood and the Werewolves: Sources for the *Witches of Lancashire*." *Notes and Queries* 53, no. 4 (2006): 531–33.

—. "'What are these Faces?': Interpreting Bearded Women in *Macbeth*." In *Renaissance Poetry and Drama in Context: Essays for Christopher Wortham*, edited by Andrew Lynch, and Anne Scott, 91-113. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.

Hirschfield, Heather. "Collaborating Across Generations: Thomas Heywood, Richard Brome, and the production of *The Late Lancashire Witches*." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30, no. 2 (2000): 339-74.

—. "'We All Expect a Gentle Answer, Jew': *The Merchant of Venice* and the Psychotheology of Conversion." *ELH* 73, no. 1 (2006): 61–81.

Hoenselaars, Ton. "Shakespeare's English History Plays." In *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, edited by Margreta De Grazia and Stanley Wells, 137-52. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Holderness, Graham. "*Much Ado about Nothing*: Men without Women." In *Critical Essays on Much Ado about Nothing*, edited by Linda Cookson and Brian Loughrey, 74-87. Harlow: Longman, 1989.

Hopkins, Lisa. *The Female Hero in English Renaissance Tragedy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

Horbury, Ezra. “Performing Repentance: (In)sincerity in Prodigal Son Drama and the *Henry IV*s.” *Renaissance Studies* 32, no. 4 (2017): 583-601.

—. *Prodigality in Early Modern Drama*. Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2019.

Howard, Jean. *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Howard, Jean, and Phyllis Rackin. *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare’s English Histories*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Hull, Suzanne. *Chaste, Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640*. San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982.

Hunt, Maurice. “Syncretistic Religion in Shakespeare’s Late Romances.” *South Central Review* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 57-79.

Jensen, Ejner. “‘Knowing Aforehand’: Audience Preparation and the Comedies of Shakespeare.” In *Acting Funny: Comic Theory and Practice in Shakespeare’s Plays*, edited by Frances Teague, 72-84. London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994.

Jensenw, Freya Cox. *Reading the Roman Republic in Early Modern England*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

Jensen, Gary F. *The Path of the Devil: Early Modern Witch Hunts*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.

Jensen, Phebe. “Singing Psalms to Horn-Pipes: Festivity, Iconoclasm, and Catholicism in *The Winter’s Tale*.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 279–306.

Johnson, Sarah. “‘A spirit to resist’ and Female Eloquence in *The Tamer Tamed*.” *Shakespeare* 7, no. 4 (2011): 310-324.

—. “Female Bodies, Speech, and Silence in the *Witch of Edmonton*.” *Early Theatre* 12, no. 1 (2009): 69-91.

—. *Staging Women and the Soul-Body Dynamic in Early Modern England*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014.

Johnstone, Nathan. *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Kahn, Coppélia. *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds and Women*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Kaplan, M. Lindsay. “Jessica’s Mother: Medieval Constructions of Jewish Race and Gender in *The Merchant of Venice*.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2007): 1–30.

Karim-Cooper, Farah. “The Materials of Race: Staging the Black and White Binary in the Early Modern Theatre.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*, edited by Ayanna Thomson, 17-29. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Kelemen Erick Rodney. "Early English Performances of the Prodigal Son Parable: Text, Audience, Conversion." PhD diss., University of Delaware, 1998.

Kelly, Joan. "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" In *Women, History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly*, 19–50. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Kennedy, Gwynne. *Just Anger: Representing Women's Anger in Early Modern England*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000.

Kenny, Amy. *Humoral Wombs on the Shakespearean Stage*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Kindt, Julia. *Revisiting Delphi: Religion and Storytelling in Ancient Greece*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

King, Ros. "Plays, Playing, and Make-Believe: Thinking and Feeling in Shakespearean Drama." In *Embodied Cognition and Shakespeare's Theatre: The Early Modern Body-Mind*, edited by Laurie Johnson, et. al, 27-45. London: Routledge, 2014.

King, Karen L. "Prophetic Power and Women's Authority: The Case of the *Gospel of Mary* (Magdalene)." In *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millenia of Christianity*, edited by Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker, 21-41. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

Klaits, Joseph. *Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.

Knapp, Jeffrey. *Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theater in Renaissance England*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Knapper, Daniel. "Thunderings, Not Words: Aspects of Pauline Style in Pericles and the *Winter's Tale*." *Shakespeare Studies* 47 (2019): 169-204.

Korell, Hannah. "The Devil You Know: Anti-Black Racism and the Mythologies of English Witchcraft." *Shakespeare Studies* (forthcoming 2023).

—. "Enter a Black Dog: Witchcraft as Racecraft in *The Witch of Edmonton*." *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* (forthcoming).

Kurland, Stuart M. "'We Need No More of Your Advice': Political Realism in *The Winter's Tale*." *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 31, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 365–386.

Kurtz, Martha A. "Rethinking Gender and Genre in the History Play." *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 36, no. 2 (1996): 267-287.

Larner, Christina. *Enemies of God: The Witch hunt in Scotland*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983.

—. "Was Witch hunting Women-Hunting? (1994)." In *The Witchcraft Reader*, edited by Darren Oldridge, 253-256. London: Routledge, 2002.

Lawrence, Robert, ed. *Jacobean and Caroline Comedies*. London: Dent, 1973.

Leigh, Lori. *Shakespeare and the Embodied Heroine: Staging Female Characters in the Late Play and Early Adaptations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Leinwand, Theodore B. *The City Staged: Jacobean Comedy, 1603-1613*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986.

—. "'This gulph of marriage': Jacobean city wives and Jacobean city comedy." *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 10, no. 3 (1984): 245-260.

Levack, Brian. *The Witch hunt in Early Modern Europe*. New York: Pearson, 1987.

Levine, Nina S. *Women's Matters: Politics, Gender, and Nation in Shakespeare's Early History Plays*. Newark: University of Delware Press, 1998.

Lewis, Reina. *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel, and the Ottoman Harem*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004.

Lidh, Todd. "John Fletcher's Taming of Shakespeare: *The Tamer Tam'd*." *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium* 4 (2004): 58-71.

Lee, Huey-Ling. "Women, Household Stuff and the Making of a Gentleman in John Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize, or The Tamer Tamed*." **戲劇研究** (2008): 237-258.

Longfellow, Erica. *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Loomba, Ania. *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Lovascio, Domenico. "Bawds, Wives, and Foreigners: The Question of Female Agency in the Roman Plays of the Fletcher Canon." In *Roman Women in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, edited by Domenico Lovascio, 165-84. Berlin: Medieval Institute Press, 2020.

Lowe, Kate. "The stereotyping of black Africans in Renaissance Europe." In *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, edited by. T.F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe, 17-47. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Lupton, Julia Reinhard. "Othello Circumsised." In *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology*, 103-24. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Luttfring, Sara D. *Bodies, Speech, and Reproductive Knowledge in Early Modern England.* London: Routledge, 2015.

Lyon, Katherine. "Male Bonds in *Much Ado about Nothing* and *Othello*." *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium* 2 (2002): 161–73.

Ma, Hilda H. "The Medicalization of 'Midnight Hags': Perverting Post-Menopausal and Political Motherhood in Macbeth." In *Staging the Superstitions of Early Modern Europe*, edited by Verena Theile and Andrew D. McCarthy, 147-68. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013.

MacFarlane, Alan. *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional Study.* London: Routledge, 1970.

MacFarlane Alan, and Christina Larner. *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1984.

Mack, Phyllis. *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Maillet, Gregory. "'Fidelity to the word': Lonerganian Conversion through Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Dante's *Purgatorio*." *Religion and the Arts* 10 (2006): 219-43.

Malay, Jessica. *Prophecy and Sibylline Imagery in the Renaissance: Shakespeare's Sibyls*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Manzanas, Ana María. "Conversion Narratives: *Othello* and Other Black Characters in Shakespeare's and Lope de Vega's Plays." *Sederi* 7 (1996): 231–36.

Martin, Randall. "Henry Goodcole, Visitor of Newgate: Crime, Conversion, and Patronage." *The Seventeenth Century* 20, no. 2 (2005): 153-184.

Maurer, Margaret. "Constering Bianca: *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Woman's Prize, or the Tamer Tamed*." *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 14 (2001): 186-06.

McEachern, Claire. "Fathering Herself: A Source Study of Shakespeare's Feminism." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (1988): 269–90.

McInnis, David, and Matthew Steggle. "Introduction: Nothing Will Come of Nothing? Or, What can we Learn from Plays that Don't Exist?" In *Lost Plays in Shakespeare's England*, edited by David McInnis and Matthew Steggle, 1-16. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

McMullan, Gordon. *The Politics of Unease in the Plays of John Fletcher*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994.

Mebane, John S. *Renaissance Magic & The Return of the Golden Age: The Occult Tradition & Marlowe, Johnson, & Shakespeare*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992.

Mehl, Dieter. "*The London Prodigal* as Jacobean City Comedy." In *Plotting Early Modern London: New Essays on Jacobean City Comedy*, edited by Dieter Mehl, et. al, 165-76. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.

Micheli, Linda. "'Sit By Us': Visual Imagery and the Two Queens in *Henry VIII*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1987): 452–66.

Mikesell, Margaret Lael. "'Love Wrought These Miracles': Marriage and Genre in *The Taming of the Shrew*." *Renaissance Drama* 20 (1989): 141-167.

Millar, Charlotte-Rose. *Witchcraft, the Devil and Emotions in Early Modern England*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

Miller, Joyce. "Men in Black: Appearances of the Devil in Early Modern Scottish Witchcraft Discourse." In *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland*, edited by Julian Goodare, et al., 144-65. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Minear, Erin. "Ghost Stories and Living Monuments: Bringing Wonders to Life in *The Winter's Tale*." In *Enchantment and Dis-enchantment in Shakespeare and Early Modern Drama: Wonder, the Sacred, and the Supernatural*, edited by Nandini Das and Nick Davis, 170-84. New York: Routledge, 2017.

Miola, Robert S. "Shakespeare's Ancient Rome: Difference and Identity." In *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*, edited by Michael Hattaway, 193-213. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

—. *Shakespeare's Rome.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Monta, Susannah Brietz. *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

—. "'Thou fall'st a blessed martyr': Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* and the Polemics of Conscience." *English Literary Renaissance* 30, no. 2 (2000): 262-83.

Montgomery, Marianne. "Wife, Whore, and/or Dutchwoman: Shifting Female Roles in *The London Prodigal*." *Early Modern Literary Studies* 27 (2017): 1-11.

Montrose, Louis. *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Mullaney, Stephen. *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988.

Munro, Lucy. *Shakespeare in the Theatre: The King's Men*. London: Bloomsbury, 2020.

Myhill, Nova. "Making Death a Miracle: Audience and the Genres of Martyrdom in Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*." *Early Theatre* 7, no. 2 (2004): 9-31.

—. "Spectatorship in/of *Much Ado about Nothing*." *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 39, no. 2 (1999): 291–311.

Neely, Carol Thomas. *Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare's Plays*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1983.

Nicol, David. "Interrogating the Devil: Social and Demonic Pressure in the *Witch of Edmonton*." *Comparative Drama* 38, no. 4 (2005): 425-45.

Noling, Kim H. "Grubbing Up the Stock: Dramatizing Queens in *Henry VIII*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (1988): 291-306.

Oates, Rosamund. "Elizabethan Histories of English Christian Origins." In *Sacred History: Uses of the Christian Past in the Renaissance*, edited by Katherine Van Liere, et. al, 165-85. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

O'Connell, Michael. *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Oldridge, Darren. *The Devil in Early Modern England*. Stroud: Sutton, 2000.

Orr, Bridget. *Empire on the English Stage, 1660-1714*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Ossa-Richardson, *The Devil's Tabernacle: The Pagan Oracles in Early Modern Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Ostovich, Helen. "*The Late Lancashire Witches:* Critical Introduction." *Richard Brome Online*. Royal Holloway: University of London, 2010. https://www.dhi.ac.uk/brome/viewOriginal.jsp?play=LW&type=CRIT.

Panek, Jennifer. "Community, Credit, and the Prodigal Husband on the Early Modern Stage." *ELH* 80, no. 1 (2013): 61-92.

Park, Katharine. *Secrets of Woman: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection*. New York: Zone Books, 2006.

Paster, Gail Kern. *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Pearson, Meg. "*The Late Lancashire Witches*: The Girls Next Door." *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 3, no. 1 (2014): 147–67.

—. "Vision on Trial in *The Late Lancashire Witches*." In *Staging the Superstitions of Early Modern Europe*, edited by Verena Theile and Andrew D McCarthy, 107-27. Farnham: Ashgate Pub, 2013.

Pearson, D'Orsay W. "Witchcraft in *The Winter's Tale:* Paulina as 'Alcahueta y vn Poquito Hechizera.'" *Shakespeare Studies* 12 (1979): 195-213.

Pellegrini, Ann. "Closing Ranks, Keeping Company: Marriage Plots and the Will to Be Single in *Much Ado About Nothing*." In *Shakesqueer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, edited by Madhavi Menon, 245-53. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

Perletti, Greta. "'A Thing like Death': Medical Representations of Female Bodies in Shakespeare's Plays." *Gender Studies* 12, no. 1 (2013): 93–111.

Peters, Christine. *Patterns of Piety: Women, Gender, and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Peterson, Kaara. “Shakespearean Revivifications: Early Modern Undead.” *Shakespeare Studies* 32 (2004): 240–66.

Petzold, Jochen. “Subverting the Master Discourse? The Power of Women’s Words in Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* and Fletcher’s *The Woman’s Prize, or The Tamer Tamed*.” *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 31 (2006): 157-70.

Pickett, Holly Crawford. “Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion in Dekker and Massinger’s *The Virgin Martyr*.” *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 49, no. 2 (2009): 437-62.

Pollard, Tanya. *Shakespeare’s Theatre: A Sourcebook*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

Priest, Dale G. “‘Here’s a Dish I Love Not!’: Patriarchy, Misogyny, and Men’s Sexual Fears in *Much Ado about Nothing*.” *Publications of the Mississippi Philological Association* (1997): 99–103.

—. “Katherina’s Conversion in *The Taming of the Shrew*: A Theological Heuristic.” *Renascence* 47, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 31-40.

Pudney, Eric. *Scepticism and Belief in English Witchcraft Drama, 1538-1681*. Lund: Lund University Press, 2019.

Purkiss, Diane. “Charming Witches: The ‘Old Religion’ and the Pendle Trial.” *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 3, no. 1 (2014): 13–31.

—. *The English Civil War: A People’s History*. London: Harper, 2006.

—. *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Questier, Michael. *Conversion, Politics, and Religion in England, 1580-1625*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Questier, Michael, and Peter Lake. *The Antichrist’s Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

Rackin, Phyllis. *Shakespeare and Women*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

—. “Women’s Roles in the Elizabethan History Plays.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare’s History Plays*, edited by Michael Hattaway, 71-86. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Reiff, Raychel Haugrud. “The Unsung ‘Hero’ in *Much Ado about Nothing*.” *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium* 4 (2004): 139–49.

Reynolds, Bryan. “The Devil’s House, ‘or Worse’: Transversal Power and Antitheatrical Discourse in Early Modern England.” *Theatre Journal* 49, no. 2 (May 1997): 143–67.

Robbins, Jill. *Prodigal Son/Elder Brother: Interpretation and Alterity in Augustine, Petrarch, Kafka, Levinas*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Roberts, Jeanne Addison. "The Crone in English Renaissance Drama." *Medieval and Renaissance Drama* 15 (2003): 116-37.

Roper, Lyndal. *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in early modern Europe*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Rosenfield, Kirstie Gulick. "Nursing Nothing: Witchcraft and Female Sexuality in *The Winter's Tale*." *Mosaic* 35, no. 1 (2002): 95–112.

Rowlands, Alison. "Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe." In *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, edited by Brian Levack, 449-67. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Rycroft, Eleanor. "Voicing Women, 'Community' Drama, and *The Late Lancashire Witches*." *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 3, no. 1 (2014): 168–89.

Saylor, Sara. "'Almost a Miracle': Penitence in *The Winter's Tale*." In *Enchantment and Dis-Enchantment in Shakespeare and Early Modern Drama: Wonder, the Sacred, and the Supernatural*, edited by Nandini Das and Nick Davis, 153-69. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Sexton, Joyce. *The Slandered Woman in Shakespeare*. Victoria: University of Victoria, 1978.

Scheff, Thomas. "Gender Wars: Emotions in *Much Ado about Nothing*." *Sociological Perspectives* 36 (1993): 149–66.

Schiffer, James. "Macbeth and the Bearded Women." In *Another Country: Feminist Perspectives on Renaissance Drama*, edited by Dorothea Kehler and Susan Baker, 205-17. Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 1991.

Schulenburg, Jane Tibbetts. *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Scott, Michael. *Delphi: A History of the Center of the Ancient World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Sharpe, James. "Introduction: the Lancashire witches in historical context." In *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, edited by Robert Poole, 1-18. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.

—. *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.

Shapiro, James. *Shakespeare and the Jews*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Shell, Alison. *Shakespeare and Religion*. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2010.

Shinn, Abigail. *Conversion Narratives in Early Modern England: Tales of Turning*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Shoulson, Jeffrey S. *Fictions of Conversion: Jews, Christians, and Cultures of Change in Early Modern England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.

Sicher, Efraim. "Daughteronomy: Conversion and Exchange in Early Modern England." In *The Jew's Daughter: A Cultural History of a Conversion Narrative*, 91-124. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017.

Singh, Jyotsna. "Renaissance Antitheatricality, Antifeminism, and Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*." *Renaissance Drama* 20 (January 1989): 99–121.

Smith, Helen. "Grace and Conversion." In *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Religion*, edited by Hannibal Hamlin, 84-100. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

—. "Metaphor, Cure, and Conversion in Early Modern England." *Renaissance Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (2014): 473–502.

Smith, Ian. "White Skin, Black Masks: Racial Cross-Dressing on the Early Modern Stage." *Renaissance Drama* 32 (2002): 33-67.

Smith, Molly Easo. "John Fletcher's Response to the Gender Debate: *The Woman's Prize* and *The Taming of the Shrew*." *Papers on Language and Literature* 31, no. 1 (1995): 38-60.

Stegner, Paul D. "Masculine and Feminine Penitence in *The Winter's Tale*." *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature* 66, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 189–202.

Stavreva, Kirilka. *Words Like Daggers: Violent Female Speech in Early Modern England*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015.

Stelling, Lieke. "'For Christian Shame': Othello's Fall and the Early Modern Conversion Play." *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 25, no. 1 (2016): 19-31.

—. *Religious Conversion in Early Modern English Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

Stjerna, Kirsi Irmeli. *Women and the Reformation*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2009.

Stock, Angela, and Anne-Julia Zwierlein. "Introduction: 'Our Scene is London…'." In *Plotting Early Modern London: New Essays on Jacobean City Comedy*, edited by Dieter Mehl, et. al, 1-24. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.

Streete, Gail Corrington. *Redeemed Bodies: Women Martyrs in Early Christianity*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

Stymeist, David. "'Must I be . . . made a common sink?': Witchcraft and the Theatre in *The Witch of Edmonton*." *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 25, no. 2 (2001): 33-53.

Suzuki, Mihoko. "Gender, Class, and the Ideology of Comic Form: *Much Ado about Nothing* and *Twelfth Night*." In *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, edited by Dympna C. Callaghan, 121-43. Malden: Blackwell, 2000.

Thomas, Alfred. *Shakespeare, Catholicism, and the Middle Ages: Maimed Rights*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Thomas, Keith. *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- And Seventeenth-Century England*. London: Penguin Books, 1971.

Thompson, J.B. "'The Only Love-Gods'?: The Manipulation of Feeling in *Much Ado about Nothing*." *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 5 (1992): 33–42.

Tiffany, Grace. "Anti-Theatricalism and Revolutionary Desire in *Hamlet* (Or, the Play without the Play)." *Upstart Crow* 15 (1995): 61–74.

Tigner, Amy. "*The Winter's Tale*: Gardens and the Marvels of Transformation." *English Literary Renaissance* 36, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 114–34.

Tippens, Darryl. "Shakespeare and the Prodigal Son Tradition." *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 14 (1988): 57-77.

Tokson, Elliot H. *The Popular Image of the Black Man in English Drama, 1550-1688*. Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1982.

Tonge, Mildred. "The Lancashire Witches: 1612 and 1634;" *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* 83 (1932): 153-177.

Trevor-Roper, Hugh. "The European Witch-craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries." In *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century: Religion, The Reformation, and Social Change*, 83-177. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.

Turner, Robert Y. "Responses to Tyranny in John Fletcher's Plays." *Medieval & Renaissance Drama* 4 (1989): 123-141.

Vanita, Ruth. "Mariological Memory in *The Winter's Tale* and *Henry VIII*." *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 40, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 311–37.

Vaughan, Virginia Mason. *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Vitkus, Daniel. *Turning Turk: English Theatre and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

—. "Turning Turk in *Othello*: The Conversion and Damnation of the Moor." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 145-176.

Waite, Gary K. *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Waldron, Jennifer. “Gaping upon Plays: Shakespeare, Gosson, and the Reformation of Vision.” *Critical Matrix* 12, no. 1–2 (2001): 44-77.

—. “Of Stones and Stony Hearts: Desdemona, Hermione, and Post-Reformation Theater.” In *The Indistinct Human in Renaissance Literature*, edited by Jean E. Feerick and Vin Nardizzi, 205-27. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

—. *Reformations of the Body*: *Idolatry, Sacrifice, and Early Modern Theatre*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Walsham, Alexandra. “Reformation Legacies.” In *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Reformation*, ed. Peter Marshall, 227-268. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Watt, Diane. *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval & Early Modern England*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997.

Williams, Mary. “Much Ado about Chastity in *Much Ado about Nothing*.” *Renaissance Papers 1984* (1984): 37–45.

Williamson, Elizabeth. “Things Newly Performed: The Resurrection Tradition in Shakespeare’s Plays.” In *Shakespeare and Religious Change*, edited by Kenneth J. E. Graham and Philip D. Collington, 110-32. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Williamson, Marilyn. “Doubling, Women’s Anger, and Genre.” *Women’s Studies* 9 (1982): 107–19.

—. *The Patriarchy of Shakespeare’s Comedies*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986.

Willis, Deborah. *Malevolent Nurture: Witch hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.

—. “The Witch-Family in Elizabethan and Jacobean Print Culture.” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2013): 4-31.

Winstead, Karen A. *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.

Wittek, Stephen. “Conversional Thinking and the London Stage.” In *Performing Conversion: Cities, Theatres and Early Modern Transformations*, edited by José R. Jouve Martin and Stephen Wittek, 87-110. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021.

Wooten, David. “*The Tamer Tamed*, or None Shall Have Prizes: ‘Equality’ in Shakespeare’s England.” In *Gender and Power in Shrew-Taming Narratives, 1500-1700*, edited by David Wooten and Graham Holderness, 206-25. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Wymer, Rowland. “A Performance History of the *Witch of Edmonton*.” *Early Modern Literary Studies* 17, no. 2 (2014): 1-23.

Yachnin, Paul. “Conversional Economies: Thomas Middleton’s *Chaste Maid in Cheapside*.” In *Performing Conversion: Cities, Theatre and Transformations*, edited by José R. Jouve Martín and Stephen Wittek, 154-71. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021.

—. “Shylock, Conversion, Toleration.” In *Imagining Religious Toleration: A Literary History of an Idea, 1600-1830*, edited by Alison Conway and David Alvarez, 18-34. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019.

—. *Stage-Wrights: Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, and the Making of Theatrical Value*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997.

Yates, Francis. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.

—. *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*. Abingdon: Routledge, 1979.

Young, Alan R. *The English Prodigal Son Plays: A Theatrical Fashion of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Salzburg; Institut für Anglistik and Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1979.