

OF GRACE AND GROSS BODIES: FALSTAFF,  
OLDCASTLE, AND THE FIRES OF REFORM

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This dissertation recovers Shakespeare's Sir John Falstaff as a politically radical character, linked to Jack Cade and the plebian revolutionaries of 2 Henry VI, and to 16<sup>th</sup>-century radical-egalitarian movements including Anabaptism and the "Family of Love." Working from the earliest texts dealing with Sir John Oldcastle, Falstaff's historical precedent, this work explores the radical potential of reform beginning with the work of the late-14<sup>th</sup>-century Oxford theologian John Wyclif. Thought to have inspired the 1381 Peasants' Rebellion, Wyclif's writings on dominion were directed at the organized church, but had social implications that Wyclif himself was unwilling to confront. Burned in 1417 for the combined crimes of heresy and treason, the historical Oldcastle either was or was not involved with an abortive rising against Henry V, and this work argues that the instability between Oldcastle as loyal Lancastrian subject and social revolutionary characterizes all subsequent representations of Oldcastle, from John Bale's prototype martyrology to Shakespeare's histories.

Historically locating the appropriation of Oldcastle as the prototype Protestant martyr in a time of widespread destruction of traditional holy images, this work examines the works of the controversialists John Bale and John Foxe, with their accompanying woodcut illustrations, to argue for a continuity between the logic of reformed martyrdom

and that of Protestant iconoclasm in a shared notion of ordeal and confession. In these polemical works, the testimony of the martyr on his pyre is valorized while the icon is revealed by fire or hammer to be mere matter. Working from Slavoj Žižek's claim that political identity is often founded on the fetishistic disavowal of a shared guilt, this work argues that the two parts of Henry IV, in their insistent metadramatic reminders of Oldcastle's treason and execution, function to disturb the audience's interpellation as subjects of Tudor-Protestant power. This is done in order to put the audience in the position of choosing between two modes of social life, represented by the essential kingship of Henry V on one hand, and on the other by the frightening social hybridity and radical utopianism of Falstaff.

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## PREFACE

This work treads on hallowed ground, in an area where other fine workers have labored for many years. If I have had the audacity to caper where giants have trod, it is because I have had encouragement and support beyond my deserving. The English Department of the University of Pittsburgh has been more than generous, offering me both the Mellon and the Barbara Nietzsche Tobias Fellowships during the writing of this dissertation. When it comes to my teachers and advisors, I must make special mention of Richard Tobias, my teacher and friend of many years. I can think of no one who has had a greater influence on my notion of what an intellectual could be. That I was the first graduate student to receive the fellowship that Tob inaugurated in his wife's name is my most cherished academic honor.

My committee have looked on my labors with patience and consideration. My Chairperson, John Twynning, is someone who has always understood my work, and with whom I have shared such a long and fruitful exchange that I'm happy to finally be able to show him what I've seen with his eyes. I think the project might have run aground were it not for the incisive critical feedback provided by Kellie Robertson, which shaped my sense of how a document like a dissertation might work. Janelle Greenberg and Jim Knapp, in distinct ways, were the intellectual conscience of the committee, insisting that the most daring claims must be grounded in responsible intellectual work. Even with the benefit of hindsight, I could not have chosen a better committee.

When approaching the broader intellectual context of this work, I remember Tob telling me how fortunate I was in the circle of friends I have found in graduate school. Tanya Reyes has been a great source of strength to me, and in many ways is the graduate student whose perspective on the institution is most like my own. The "three musketeers" – Malkiel Choseed, Jeff Hole, and Chris Warnick – shaped the culture of the graduate program and my own experience of it. Their friendship has been of tremendous value to me. This dissertation has benefited in countless ways from my conversations with Jeff Hole, an intellectual who almost intuitively understood the work I was trying to do. I remain convinced that Jeff's work and my own, different though they may be in some ways, are a part of the same intellectual project. When it comes to friends from whose support I have benefited during the writing of this dissertation, I must mention Maggie Rehm, David Evans, Marin Cogan, and Josh Fennel.

My greatest debt is to my family. My brother Tony has always been in my corner. I would never have had the wherewithal to return to school and re-invent myself as a professional intellectual were it not for the encouragement of my wife, Betsy. A person of no small accomplishment in her own right, I know of no one who better embodies the quality of generosity of spirit. I write these words on our daughter Samantha's eighth birthday. Sam is a wellspring of creativity and energy, a force to be reckoned with. If I have completed this work, it is, in part, because one ought to imagine big things and see them through. I dedicate this work to my wife and daughter. . . and don't worry, Sam; you don't have to write a dissertation if you don't want to.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The argument that unifies this work is that, beginning in his own lifetime, the various representations of the Lollard knight Sir John Oldcastle always straddle the critical cultural fault line between “the felt center of cultural power”<sup>1</sup> as it is constituted at given historical moments and the threat to that power from radical social forces that challenge it, be it the Lollard heresy, the unlettered commons, or the radical Anabaptist movement in Protestantism. The corollary of this is the way in which Oldcastle in his textual and dramatic productions continues to function as a *collective* figure in distinct modes: the exemplar or representative of a movement or social group, or the surreptitious agency behind seemingly collective action. The fact that Oldcastle is recovered in the service of a sixteenth-century Protestant orthodoxy cannot stabilize his radical potential.

Oldcastle as a historical actor is implicated in the most frightening potential of the vulgar mob. The religious movement of Lollardy, understood by the traditional church as heresy, shared with the Protestantism that was to follow an enhanced notion of the layperson as an agent of her own religiosity, even her relationship with God. Agency is implied by the Greek root of the term “heresy,” *haeresis* or choice. The scope of choice that the teachings of Wyclif appeared to offer threatened both ecclesiastical and secular power. The problem of Oldcastle’s presence or absence at St. Giles’ Fields during what has become known as “Oldcastle’s Rebellion” is the problem of the relationship between oppositional social movements and our predisposition to locate their actions in “leaders.” This work argues that Oldcastle’s radicalism in his complicity

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<sup>1</sup> This phrase is from Allon White, Carnival, Hysteria, and Writing (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 122.

with the events at St. Giles' Fields (if such it was) is fundamental to understanding his sixteenth-century appropriation, when the history of Lollard militancy is conflated with that of the Peasants' Rebellion, the Cade Rebellion, and contemporary popular unrest in that period.

This dissertation argues that the appropriation of Oldcastle as the prototype Protestant martyr must be understood in the context of sixteenth-century English iconoclasm. It argues that the logic of the image breakers is intimately related to the logic of Protestant martyr narrative: tested to destruction, the body of the martyr as witness to the word becomes a text, amenable to the stabilizing influence of other texts. The palpable religious icon is, in many instances of English iconoclasm, another sort of body to which a duplicitous agency is attributed. Burnt or broken, it reveals that the traditions and history in which it is embedded, its "aura" to employ Benjamin's term,<sup>2</sup> inhere in crude substance with no uncanny properties. In examining theatrical spectacle through the *dramatis persona*, this work reveals various modes of theatrical representation, some of which endorse iconoclastic or anti-theatrical discourses, and others that recuperate sight as a legitimate way of apprehending the moral world.

In reading Shakespeare's second Lancastrian cycle, this dissertation explores the relationship between body, religion and nation in a reading informed by the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, but working at its foundation from a close reading of the play texts, revealing a consistent tropology of quasi-religious national bodies. The body of Sir John Falstaff is revealed as a threatening hybrid, connected through Falstaff's claim to a "vocation" to two other class-suspect, religiously-inspired Lancastrian opponents: Jack Cade and Joan de Pucelle (Shakespeare's dramatization of Joan of Arc). Eschewing the sort of reductive categorizing that has by turns produced Falstaff as a "grotesque Puritan," Hal as either "Calvinist" or "Catholic," this work uncovers a drama that functions through techniques akin to defamiliarization, undoing

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 220-2.

sixteenth-century historicisms to reveal a dramatic world in which the Lancastrian heir and the fat knight struggle over the question of which social world is endorsed by God and scripture: one categorized by moral surveillance under the aegis of the sovereign, or an alternative egalitarian utopia figured dramatically as a kingdom of thieves.

At stake in these readings is the recovery of the radical possibility of social change on the cusp of the early-modern period. In its reading of the “popular,” of the social and political agency of the people, this work uncovers in its early-modern texts an anti-popular discourse at odds with both liberal and radical notions of popular government. Constructed against these is a radical alternative delegitimized and viewed through the categories of the power that rejects it as theft, anarchy, and antinomianism. Framed by the founding crime of the deposition and murder of a king, the Henry plays ask that the audience accept certain crimes at the highest level to shield the polity from the utter dissolution of property and social hierarchy.

It is not the aim of this work to provide a totalizing account of any of its texts. In many instances, and particularly in the reading of Shakespeare’s dramatic works, this dissertation aims at what Alan Sinfield has called “dissident reading.”<sup>3</sup> Rather than valorizing the dominant or normative positions of the text, this work seeks to recover the those voices that the text puts forward in order to contain, undermine, or delegitimize them. Such critical or theoretical apparatus as is mobilized in this effort is not intended to reduce the works in question to an articulation of some privileged model (whether Marxist, Lacanian, rhetorical, or what have you), but in an attempt to reveal censored meaning.

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<sup>3</sup> Alan Sinfield, Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

Chapter One recovers the dialectic through which Lollardy and the Lancastrian dynasty arrived at the antipathy made tangible in the burning of Sir John Oldcastle for the crimes of heresy and treason. The chapter argues that the public representations involved in the Peasants' Rebellion of 1381 and the conflict between Lollards and the traditional church took the form of a dispute over scriptural bodies: the body of Christ, as well as the bodies of Adam and Cain. The community identity of Lollard and orthodox churchman are developed in the public dispute over the political and social significance of these bodies, and in diverging traditions of scriptural interpretation. The investment of the Lancastrian royal dynasty in the practices and sacramental theory of the traditional church is made concrete in the punishment of Oldcastle. Burnt while hanging in chains, Oldcastle's punishment makes manifest the legal identification of heresy and treason.

Chapter two explores two related problems: the appropriation by Protestantism of martyrology, the textual celebration of saints' lives in traditional religion, and the use of woodcut illustrations—often involving the pictorial conventions of condemned “popish” icons—in Protestant texts that are explicitly iconoclastic. Against a certain critical and historical tendency that has located an emergent “public sphere” in the discourses of religious controversy, this study understands that arena as fundamentally polemical and fractious. The representations of Oldcastle are not immune to this polemical struggle, and religious controversialists are forced to continually revise the avatars of this prototypical Lollard martyr. This work argues that the revisions of Oldcastle in his textual and visual representations are an effort to contain the radical potential of reform, the anxiety that sixteenth-century Protestants displace on movements like Anabaptism and the Family of Love.

Chapter three locates the *dramatis persona*, the embodied figure of the stage illusion, in the ferment over images and the theater in Protestant anti-theatrical polemic. It argues that the stage representation is often constituted through iconoclastic categories and the distrust of the visual mode. In Doctor Faustus, the theatrical illusion is both indicted in an iconoclastic register, and recuperated through sanctioned modes of seeing.

In the character of Henry Bolingbroke, we find dramatized a particular historical development in the understanding of juridical agency: in its early acts, the play Richard III is concerned with *trothplight*, the legal notion of producing truth through certain social acts (in this case, juridical combat); in the events leading up to the deposition of Richard II, we are increasingly pushed toward the modern alternative, the concept of *intention*. The complexity of Henry's persona is produced from without through the very opacity of his characterization.

Chapter Four, through a close reading of the opening of 1 Henry IV, reveals the central sacramental trope of the second Lancastrian cycle, the figure of England as the Virgin Mary in the form of the *Vierge Ouvrante*, that informs the incarnational logic of the play. It is here argued that the plays enact an essentialist logic of embodiment. In this chapter, the function of the "chronotope," the insulated island of time in which Sir John Falstaff exists, is explored as it eventually succumbs to the pressures of a modern, "historical" time. The genealogy of Falstaff is revealed through Shakespeare's idiosyncratic use of the term "vocation": one of his closest kin is Jack Cade, leader of a rebellion of the commons in 2 Henry VI that is itself conflated with the Peasants' Rebellion and radical-Protestant notions of social equity. In a religious register, Falstaff reveals a significant affinity for the Catholic Saint Martin of Tours.

In Chapter Five, Sir John Falstaff is placed in his alternate sphere, the world of revolt. In a reading of the Henry plays, the Protestant drama The First Part of Sir John Oldcastle, and contemporary religious and political writings, this chapter situates the dramatic opposition between prince Hal and Falstaff in the anti-popular political discourses of its time. What is revealed is a contest between a “purified” king of essential majesty, and a dissimulating, hybrid plebian-aristocrat. On the question of legitimate sovereignty raised by Henry IV’s usurpation of the throne, this work argues that the Prince recovers the divine sanction lost by his father in a final theft, a new act of what Antonio Negri has called “constituting power”<sup>4</sup> that the audience is encouraged to endorse. The price of this restoration is the disciplining of the radical tendencies of the margin by a new juridical covenant under the eye of King Henry V’s Pauline Christian order.

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<sup>4</sup> Antonio Negri, *Il potere costituente: Saggio sulle alternative del moderno* (Milan: SugarCo, 1992), p 31, quoted in Giorgio Agamben, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 43.

## II. POWER TOO GREAT TO KEEP, OR TO RESIGN : HERESY, UPRISING, AND A NEW POPULISM

Thise cookes, how they stampe, and streyne, and grynde,  
And turnen substaunce into accident,  
To fulfillen al thy likerous talent!

--Chaucer, *The Pardoner's Tale*, 538-540

The problem of the most radical possibilities of religious reform in the area of secular politics begins in the prehistory of English Protestantism. Originally intended as a critique from within the intellectual purview of the church-university system, the writings of John Wyclif would ultimately be deemed heresy for their attack on Papal supremacy, on secular sovereignty, and for their view of the agency of the believer in his own faith and salvation. If, etymologically, the defining quality of heresy is *haeresis*, “taking, choosing, choice,”<sup>1</sup> then the Wycliffite heresy seemed to its detractors to offer choice in its most protean, threatening aspect. While Wyclif in the years of his most important intellectual production was a client of the great magnate John of Gaunt, the movement that endeavored to implement and propagate his teachings found itself increasingly at odds with the Lancastrian sovereign, a dialectic in which each had a part in constituting the other.

The self-understanding of both traditionalist and Wycliffite was mediated through the notion of a set of ancestral bodies, a sort of religious patrimony. Foremost in this pantheon was Christ, whose sacramental body served to cement the divergent interests of different social strata.

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. heresy.

If the body of Christ seemed to endorse both social hierarchy and a God-sanctioned sovereignty, the participants in the Peasants' Rebellion of 1381 could proffer a radical revision: the patrimony of man as the sons of Adam in a sort of primordial egalitarian utopia. The bodies of Christ, Adam and Cain were the site of contests over how social power should vest in a Christian state, the first skirmishes in a struggle over the appropriation of these bodies that would continue through the Reformation. These struggles over sovereignty and social power become, in the Wycliffite moment, problems of biblical exegesis. In the examination of the Lollard cleric William Thorpe by Archbishop Arundel, the site of these arguments is the Epistles of Paul, the locus of the New Testament's most explicit meditation on authority, and a set of texts whose interpretation reveals both Lollard and traditionalist exegetical strategies.

Oldcastle himself is produced by chronicle history as a figure of tremendous personal agency. In his person cohere acts ranging from the authorship of supposedly "Lollard" legislation in parliament to an abortive coup against the reign of Henry V. The "empirical Oldcastle," leaving a surprisingly light imprint on the historical record, is imbued with meaning by his surround: the ferment between Wyclif's followers, the Lollards, and the House of Lancaster, at one time Wyclif's patron. The presence or absence of Oldcastle in the rising at St. Giles' Fields is a point of obscurity at the intersection of Lollard doctrine and sovereign power. Like Thorpe's testimony, it raises the question of whether reform can be limited to the religious realm, or whether its implications are far more radical.

## A. UNRULY BODIES AND THE PEASANTS' REVOLT

If Christ's sacramental body functioned as a source of cohesion in the service of social power as it was constituted in late-fourteenth-century England, so were there radical discourses that sought to trace the patrimony of mankind to other scriptural bodies, often with radical implications. The body of Christ, touchstone of contemporary political theology that it was, had more than a coincidental role in the Peasants' Rebellion of 1381. Wyclif's attack on the theology of incarnation in the Eucharist, coupled to the critique of authority in his work on dominion, associated him in many minds with the radical pretensions and seeming contempt of property relations of the risen commons. Coinciding with the Feast of Corpus Christi in the month of June of 1381, the Peasants' Revolt actively mobilized a sacramental political theology in the service of politically radical ends. As Margaret Aston has argued, "A day appropriated to celebrating the supreme sacrifice of Christ on the cross was. . .a supremely appropriate day to celebrate the freedom thereby purchased equally for all men."<sup>2</sup> Aston points to the irregular religiosity of a leader like John Ball, as well as the rebellion's attack on the temporalities and hierarchy of the English church. As priest and controversialist, Ball could boast a string of excommunications that preceded the height Wyclif's notoriety. In fact, the "vagabond preacher" had been excommunicated by Archbishop Simon Sudbury on several occasions, and in more than one diocese.<sup>3</sup> As Aston suggests, there may be a Eucharistic referent suggestive of the coming Corpus Christi celebration in the documents circulated to rally humble folk to the revolutionary cause:

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<sup>2</sup> Margaret Aston, "*Corpus Christi* and *Corpus Regni*: Heresy and the Peasant's Revolt," *Past and Present*, No. 143 (May, 1994), 19.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, 21-2.

Johan the Mullere hath ygrounde smal, smal, small;  
The Kynges sone of hevene schal paye for al.<sup>4</sup>

If Aston is correct in ascribing here a reference to flour prepared for the communion host, then this is quite an interesting couplet, emphasizing not the intercessory role of the clergyman, but the labor of the miller in preparing the flour for the altar bread, reminiscent of the Lollard John Badby's later claim that a predestinate man could make the body of Christ as well as any priest. While the labor of the cooks who "stampe and streyne" is satirized in Chaucer's eucharistic quibble, here there is an appeal to the solidarity of labor, more explicit in Knighton's chronicle version, "Jake Mylner asketh help to turne hys mylne aright. . ."<sup>5</sup> While Corpus Christi might be employed as symbolic support for the cohesion of the estates, the radicals were more than willing to turn its symbolic force toward less conservative projects. If the spark that ignited the powder keg was struck by an Essex tax collector, any spontaneous quality to the rising must have been coupled with an organizational effort on a prodigious scale, hinted at in Walsingham's account:

To give their plans a greater chance of fulfillment, men of just two villages, who were the originators and prime movers of this evil, began by getting messages sent immediately to every small village, asking all . . . to put aside all excuses and come to meet them, equipped with weapons as best they could. Those who refrained from coming or ignored them or who despised the idea should realize that their goods should be ransacked, their homes burnt or knocked down, their heads cut off.<sup>6</sup>

Though he attributes "madness" and "stupidity" to the authors of the rising, Walsingham's chronicle account reveals the savvy of the leaders, who deploy a homespun counter-discourse to the dominant political theology, who broadcast their call across the region, who employ coercion when persuasion is not effective. Ever arguing against the notion that there was a broadly popular element to these events, Walsingham portrays in his narrative the manipulative efforts of

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<sup>4</sup> Walsingham, Thomas, *Chronicon Angliae*, ed. Thompson, (Rolls Series 64, 1874), p. 322, quoted in Aston, p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> *Chronicon Henrici Knighton*, ed. Lumby (London, HMSO, 1889, 1895), ii, 138-9, quoted in Margaret Aston, "Corpus Christi," p. 27

<sup>6</sup> Walsingham, Thomas. *The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham*, trans. David Preest ed. James G. Clark (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2005), p. 121.

a narrow cabal, and when he is forced to recount events that disrupt this reading—events like the enthusiasm of the Londoners in the sacking and burning of the Savoy—he must fall back once again on categories like “madness,” even though his treatment of those events reveals a remarkable level of organization and even political purpose:

They wanted it to be clear to the people of the whole kingdom that they were not doing this out of greed, and so they ordered a proclamation to be made that no one, on pain of death, should dare to touch anything or keep any of the things found there for their own use.<sup>7</sup>

The slogans of the rising give us a glimpse of subaltern political discourses, rarely recorded in their day. Disappointed by Bishop Thomas Brinton, who did not respond to the rebels’ invitation to preach to their assembly on Corpus Christi day,<sup>8</sup> it was John Ball who addressed them on the day of the feast. The text of his sermon is well-known:

Whan Adam dalf, and Eve span,  
W[h]o was thane a gentilman?<sup>9</sup>

Picking up on the rhetoric of the letters reported in Walsingham and Knighton, Ball emphasizes the solidarity of a laboring humanity. In a subversive way, the body of Christ is displaced by the bodies of Adam and Eve, and even the mild sexual *doubles entendres* evoke an earthy carnality and a plebian tone, the progenitors of working man and woman in the act of that generation.

The couplet’s implication that the heirs of Adam and Eve are being exploited by a parasitic class points to concrete economic motives for the rising of the sort of little interest to Walsingham. The modern historiography of the rising suggests that the revolt was in the long term a response to that Statute of Laborers of 1351 and more immediately a reaction to a poll tax instituted by Gaunt in 1377. The rebels’ animosity toward John of Gaunt is clear:

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<sup>7</sup> *Chronica Maiora*, 123.

<sup>8</sup> *Eulogium Historiarum*, ed. F. S. Haydon, 3 vols. (Rolls Series no. 9 :London, 1858-63), iii, 352, quoted in Aston, “*Corpus Christi*,” p. 16

<sup>9</sup> *Chronicon Angliae*, 321; Walsingham, Thomas, *Historia Anglicana*, ed. Riley, ii, 32.

“ . . .they blocked all the roads used by pilgrims on their way to Canterbury, and stopping all pilgrims, of whatever class, they made them swear an oath: first that thy would stay loyal to king Richard and his commons, and accept no king who was called ‘John’ (this was owing to their dislike of John [of Gaunt], duke of Lancaster. . . .”<sup>10</sup>

The Savoy, one of Gaunt’s residences and perhaps the richest private dwelling in England, was burned, and the rebels abused an effigy dressed in a fine coat from Gaunt’s wardrobe. Gaunt would never rebuild the Savoy, and there may have been a certain wisdom in this.

The account of the death of the death of Archbishop Sudbury at the hands of the Rebels in Walsingham’s *Chronica Maiora* is noteworthy not alone for its treatment of the humility and resignation with which he faced his killers, but also for the manner in which the chronicler carefully situates his death within an orthodox account of God’s grace in which a theology of the body plays a part. Not only is Sudbury’s ham-fisted executioner stricken with blindness and insanity, but

. . .[a] man who had been blind for many years and who for a long time had been supported by alms from the archbishop, on hearing of the death and the cause of it, in faith asked God for his sight to be restored through the archbishop’s merits, and his sight was given back to him. At his grave a man of Dover, who had now been blind for two years and had been instructed in a vision to go to the body, that same night rejoiced that his sight had been restored to him. A pregnant woman who was completely unable to give birth, asked for the archbishop’s help and on that day was delivered of three boys.<sup>11</sup>

Walsingham’s is the only account that details miraculous phenomena associated with the archbishop.<sup>12</sup> In life an affable if unremarkable functionary, in death Sudbury takes on the qualities of a saint (though the plodding Sudbury has not to date been canonized). The intercessory virtue of the fallen bishop is significantly mediated through his *body*, so we learn that a member of the peasant mob, attempting to steal a ring from the dead man’s finger, lost his sight in perfect symmetry with the blind man of Dover whose pilgrimage to Sudbury’s body

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<sup>10</sup> *Chronica Maiora*, p. 121.

<sup>11</sup> *Chronica Maiora*, 127.

<sup>12</sup> James G. Clark in Walsingham, *Chronica Maiora*, n. 127.

restored his own vision. If a critical quality of the sacrament of the Eucharist was the material presence of Christ's body within the bread, so too could other bodies partake of a miraculous potency. This quality of material, fleshly intercession is multiplied by the diffusion of saintly relics, spreading the virtues of such bodies to distant geographic points in a manner congruent with the presence of Christ "seven foot tall in every point of the host." Such bodies are the source of a new profusion, and in this way John Calvin's Treatise of Relics misses the point: it may be perfectly within such an incarnational logic that in death a saint might have in parts what would amount to several bodies. Such a profusion is marked in Walsingham's narrative by the miraculous birth of male triplets, an excess of flesh that leaves no doubt of God's providence or the dead Sudbury's status.

Ball's invocation and revision of sacramental political theology intervened in an important figuration of the social world. In his foundational 1983 article, Mervyn James argues that the increasing importance of the Corpus Christi celebration in late-medieval England is related to an incarnational understanding of the nature of community. Through the religious drama and processions of Corpus Christi, the social body of the community is knit by the presence in its midst of the sacrificial body of Christ:

I . . . argue that the theme of Corpus Christi is society seen in terms of the body; and that the concept of the body provided urban societies with a mythology and a ritual in terms of which the opposites of social wholeness and social differentiation could be both affirmed, and also brought into a creative tension, one with the other.<sup>13</sup>

The body of Christ offered, at least potentially, a negotiation of the tensions produced by class and other divisions. The body of Christ is a social-political metaphor and something extra, the actual flesh of Christ assimilated to the fleshly life of the communicants as a redeemed humanity.

In a similar vein, John Bossy discusses a record in the *Rotuli Parliamentorum* of 1401: "[I]t

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<sup>13</sup> Mervyn James, "Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town," Past and Present, no. 98 (1983), 4.

likened a meeting of parliament to a mass considered as a sacrifice, in that it served to unite the otherwise disparate purposes of king, lords, and commons.”<sup>14</sup>

The promotion of an orthodox doctrine of transubstantiation was part of a general project on the part of the papacy to emphasize and enhance the power of the priesthood. The officiating clergyman was able to perform the miracle of the altar not simply by virtue of office but because this authority had been conveyed to him in an unbroken patrimony originating in Christ’s apostles. An attack on the nature of the sacrament was thus an attack on the patriarchy that legitimated the power of the Pope. This is not to imply that the orthodox position on the sacrament was in any way cynical, and it appears that there was agreement among clergy and laity that the central mystery of the celebration of the mass was a phenomenon of great power. Performed behind a screen that excluded the congregation, the words of the canon were taken to be so potent and sacred that they remained a clerical secret until the 1530s.<sup>15</sup> If the celebration of the mass was an exercise of power in the social and political senses as well as the theological one, this does not mean that the lay communicant was a helpless dupe of that power. The communicant as consumer of Christ’s body is also the consumer of a religious-political ideology and the theological, political and legal discourses through which it is articulated (insofar as she knows or understands them), but such a consumption, as Michel de Certeau has argued, must not be thought of as a passive process.<sup>16</sup> It is reasonable to ask, “What use did late-Medieval communicants make of the sacrament of the altar, considered as a cultural artifact?” Thomas Netter of Walden was inclined to dismiss any agency on the part of lay people in the reception of

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<sup>14</sup> John Bossy, “The Mass as a Social Institution 1200 – 1700,” *Past and Present*, No. 100 (August, 1983), p. 35; *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, 6 vols. (Record Commission, London, 1783) iii, pp. 459-60.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>16</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), especially pp. 34-37.

sacramental theology: “In affairs of faith, skilled spiritual men are said to understand, the rest of the people only simply to believe.”<sup>17</sup>

In fact, an investigation into the reception of eucharistic doctrine reveals a spectrum of uses or modes of consumption. At one end of that spectrum are beliefs that would come to be associated with Lollardy, among them the belief that a layperson could make the body of Christ as well as any priest. On the far side of orthodoxy from the Lollards and their forebears was the extreme veneration of the host that Wyclif decried as an “idolatry” of the Eucharist. As a result of what seemed to Wyclif the false and extra-scriptural doctrine of transubstantiation, there was a heretical tendency shared by lay people and clergy who so revered the Eucharist that “the consecrated host is their God.”<sup>18</sup> A comprehensive study of the reception of Eucharistic teaching and practice would also consider uses like the phenomenon of frequent communion among holy women explored by Caroline Walker Bynum.<sup>19</sup>

When Wyclif sought to situate the Eucharist in his revisionist theology, he tread on dangerous ground not only in terms of abstruse intellectual debate, but also with regard to the great investment by the faithful in a particular understanding of sacramental incarnation. The dominant position in Wyclif scholarship maintains that the understanding of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist developed by Wyclif in the last decades of the fourteenth century is more-or-less consistent, continuous with his general philosophical project.<sup>20</sup> The position of the church on the sacrament of the altar had evolved from a model originally suggested by Aquinas, for whom *transubstantiation* was properly a fundamental change in the substance of the altar bread and

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<sup>17</sup> Margaret Aston, Faith and Fire: Popular and Unpopular Religion: 1350 – 1600 (London: The Hambledon Press, 1993), p. 47.

<sup>18</sup> *De Eucharistia*, 14, in J. I. Catto, “Wyclif and the Cult of the Eucharist,” The Bible in the Medieval World: Essays in Memory of Beryl Smalley (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 275.

<sup>19</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>20</sup> For a different position, see Catto, 270-3.

wine. To account for the evidence of the senses that the bread and wine remain, he appealed to the Aristotelian category of *quantity*. While the bread and wine were no longer present, their sensible qualities or accidents were maintained by their quantity, which survived this miraculous transaction. If there was a sensory deception, it was for the benefit of the communicant, “First of all, because it is not customary, but horrible, for men to eat human flesh, and to drink blood. . . . therefore Christ’s flesh and blood are set before us to be partaken of under the species of those things which are more commonly used by men.”<sup>21</sup> The carnal materiality that transubstantiation attributes to the host raised certain problems. The ramifications of the embodiment of Christ in the Eucharist include a theological question that may amuse moderns, but indicates a real problem for the proponents of the doctrine of transubstantiation: “*Quid mus sumit?*” or “What does the mouse eat?” St. Bonaventure held that the body of Christ was not consumed by the rodent: the bread lacked the *ratio alimenti*, the quality of being food, with regard to the mouse. And yet the bread is consumed by men, with implications that are not satisfied by Bonaventure’s formula.

The nominalist William of Ockham, with a distaste for just such Aristotelian metaphysical baggage as Aquinas’ elusive quantity, joined with John Duns Scotus in a revised understanding of transubstantiation. The sacrament of the altar was by its nature a miracle, and for Ockham God’s power was not to be delimited. The substance of bread and wine were annihilated in transubstantiation, and their accidents or sensible qualities were miraculously maintained, *accidens sine subjecto*. It was against this position that Wyclif constructed his own understanding of the sacrament. The notion that the sacrament might be the place in which God stooped to a sort of deception was not only distasteful, but ran afoul of Wyclif’s understanding of

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part III, q. 75, a. 5.

“real proposition,” the effort to identify *ens* with *veritas*, being with truth. In *De eucharistia*, Wyclif writes,

To talk of accidents without a substance is self-contradictory. Every accident which formally inheres in a substance is nothing other than the truth that the substance is such-and-such in an accidental manner; but there cannot be such a truth without a substance, any more than there can be a creature without God; so there is no such thing as a heap of accidents without a subject which is the consecrated host. . . . Christ is in the host as a sign, otherwise the host would not be a sacrament; but he is not in the signs in a way which means he is not really and truly there according to his whole humanity; and so it is granted that Christ is there not only as in a sign; nor is it inconsistent, but perfectly consistent, that one in the same thing should be both a truth and a figure or a sign.<sup>22</sup>

In fact, “real proposition” requires that truths operate like signs on the most fundamental level.

As Jeremy Catto has observed, it is unlikely in the extreme that it was Wyclif’s intention to debase the sacrament of the altar or to deny the real presence. Rather, by rescuing the bread and wine from the doctrinal errors that misrepresented their nature, he would exalt them, correcting practices that confounded priests and confused the laity.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Wyclif saw the intellectual failure of the clergy in providing an adequate explanation for transubstantiation as an invitation to idolatry on the part of the laity, worshiping the sacrament “as the body of Christ.”<sup>24</sup>

If his work on sacramental incarnation had the potential to undermine a sacramental political theology that endorsed the authority of the church and functioned to harmonize the potentially divergent projects of the three estates, Wyclif’s writings on the origins of civil and ecclesiastical authority in *De civili dominio* and *De dominio divino* could be understood to threaten all established social relations. Wyclif’s work on dominion and property built upon the work of Richard FitzRalph, Archbishop of Armagh, whose *De pauperie salvatoris* touched upon the problem of civil lordship. In FitzRalph’s analysis, temporal dominion was originally

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<sup>22</sup> Anthony Kenny, *Wyclif* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 83-4; Wyclif, *De eucharistia*, J. Loserth, ed., London: Trübner for the Wyclif Society, 1892, 63, 115.

<sup>23</sup> Catto, 273.

<sup>24</sup> Wyclif, *De Apostolica*, 163; Aston, 1993, 58.

assigned to humans by God. This primordial agreement was sundered in the fall, so that dominion in the fallen world was doubly contingent and, importantly, turned upon the question of grace. This marks the point of departure for Wyclif's revision of Fitzralph. Wyclif took the axiom of dominion founded upon grace and sought to articulate it through his own understanding of the nature of the church. The papacy's position on what constitutes the church had been set forth at the time of the Hildebrandine reforms: the Roman church as an institution with the Pope at its head was "at once clerical corporation and the immaculate bride of Christ."<sup>25</sup> Wyclif's ecclesiology expressly rejects this understanding. Sempiternally in the mind of God, Wyclif would argue, is the knowledge of those who will be saved, the *predestinati*, and those who will be damned, the *presciti*. The universal church, for Wyclif, is that company of those predestined for salvation. It is nevertheless impossible to know in this world who belongs to each cadre,

Indeed, nobody can know whether he is himself predestined or not. Without a special revelation no one should assert that he is predestined; and similarly he should not assert that he is a member of the church or for that matter its head. Human office cannot confer grace.<sup>26</sup>

Neither position nor knowledge of predestination can serve us as a basis for dominion. What we can know is if a given person is in grace at the present moment. This clearly applies to Popes just as it does to the humble, so that the authority and legitimacy of the Pope is much circumscribed. The Pope is the head of the Roman church insofar as he keeps Christ's law, but in practical terms he could well be one of those slotted for damnation, and abandons his authority when he falls away from grace. Wyclif insists that we can make a judgment about the conduct of a cleric, and from this determine his relation to God's grace. What mechanism has the authority to correct a Pope if he has strayed? The 1302 decree *Unam Sanctam* had made a strong claim for papal supremacy:

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<sup>25</sup> Howard Kaminsky, "Wyclifism as Ideology of Revolution," *Church History*, Vol. 32, No. 1. (Mar., 1963), 59.

<sup>26</sup> Wyclif, *De Ecclesia*, 5, cited in Anthony Kenny, *Wyclif* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 70.

We are taught by the words of the gospel that in this church and in her power there are two swords, a spiritual one and a temporal one. . . . One sword ought to be put under the power of the other and the temporal authority subject to the spiritual power. . . . Therefore, if the earthly power errs, it shall be judged by the spiritual power, if a lesser spiritual power errs it shall be judged by its superior, but if the supreme spiritual power errs it can be judged only by god not by man...<sup>27</sup>

Wyclif's understanding of dominion left no room for such an argument, and he noted that in claiming such an authority over the temporal realm, the Popes had arrogated to themselves a power that Christ himself had never claimed.<sup>28</sup> Following St. Augustine (ever his touchstone), Wyclif allows that the bishop of Rome might be the vicar of Christ, but the king is the vicar of God.<sup>29</sup> In Wyclif's estimation, as John Thomas McNeil has written,

The King may use force; a priest must humbly minister, and accept the rule of the king. To demand his subjection to the king is not necessarily to deny the superiority of the priest, since grace itself is marked by obedience and obligates to it. As to bad kings, they have not true lordship, though they possess power, and should be obeyed.<sup>30</sup>

It is finally the place of kings to correct erring priests. The above passage fairly explores both the equivocal nature of Wyclif's understanding of dominion and his unwillingness to follow it to its most extreme formulation. If dominion is founded in grace, then this implicates both king and bishop, yet Wyclif ever shies from applying its full force to secular dominion. In other hands, nevertheless, the theory of dominion expressed in *De civili dominio* and *De dominio divino* could be read as a challenge to both ecclesiastical and civil authority. Wyclif seems to have been aware of the potentially incendiary content of his work on dominion. He observed publicly

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<sup>27</sup> Brian Tierney, "Unam Sanctam," *The Crisis of Church and State, 1050 – 1300* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 188-9.

<sup>28</sup> Kaminsky, 60.

<sup>29</sup> John Thomas McNeil, "Some Emphases of Wyclif's Teaching," *The Journal of Religion* Vol. 7, No. 4 (July, 1927), 460.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*, 460.

while lecturing at Oxford that some among his auditors might be attending with the intention of betraying him.<sup>31</sup>

Wyclif's teachings on both the Eucharist and dominion seemed to some a recipe for revolution. For the orthodox chroniclers Walsingham and Knighton, it was certain that Wyclif was to blame for the 1381 uprising. Writing shortly before the first burning of a Lollard heretic, Knighton portrayed John Ball as "preparing the way," as John the Baptist announcing the ministry of his master, with Wyclif's explicit sanction.<sup>32</sup> The *Fasciculi Zizaniorum* makes a similar claim<sup>33</sup> and, like Knighton's account, reads the Peasants' Revolt through subsequent decades of conflict between Lollards and the orthodox church. Anne Hudson sees a possible relationship between the Oxford master and the leaders of the rising, probably in the register of influence rather than complicity.<sup>34</sup> Wyclif's criticism of the rebels is quite mild, and he understands the clergy's drain on the wealth of the kingdom as a prime cause of the uprising, and recommends disendowment, a policy that Wat Tyler may have endorsed.<sup>35</sup>

If Ball wanted an abolition of privilege and class, Wyclif argued that the aberration of civil property should give way to Christian communism: "All the goods of God should be in common."<sup>36</sup> The problem of the relationship of Wyclif's thought to the Peasants' Revolt is not simply the question of his real involvement, but a crucial if difficult problem of the relationship of intellectual production to the social world. A traditional sort of intellectual biography would look to Wyclif's patrimony in theologians like Grosseteste and Augustine; of course, there is a body of such scholarly work on Wyclif. The work of Antonio Gramsci in "*Gli intellettuali e*

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<sup>31</sup> Jeremy Catto, "Wyclif and Wycliffism at Oxford, 1356-1430," *The History of the University of Oxford*, Vol. II, *Late Medieval Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 202, n. 89.

<sup>32</sup> Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 67.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*; *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, 272-4.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, 68-9.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, 69; *Anonimale Chronicle*, 147.

<sup>36</sup> Kenny, 46-7; *De Civili Dominio*, 96.

*l'organizzazione della cultura*”<sup>37</sup> and the complementary work of Georg Lukács in “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat”<sup>38</sup> invite us to see intellectual production, and particularly radical thought, as driven by conflicts within social power. The Peasants’ Revolt reveals how complexly situated was Wyclif in relation to conflicting social forces of his historical moment. The chroniclers Knighton and Walsingham, as we have seen, place Wyclif with John Ball in responsibility for the uprising, yet Wyclif was the pet intellectual of John of Gaunt, a target of the fury of the rioters. Considering the resonance between the thought of Ball and Wyclif, it could be argued that the Oxford theologian was not simply the author of a durable heresy, but himself functioned to elucidate in scholarly terms something of the popular response to dominant social power as it existed in the late fourteenth century. The question raised the resonant anti-authoritarian doctrines in Wyclif’s work and the Peasants’ Uprising is one that would remain relevant for the next few centuries: what is the relationship between religious reformation and civil revolt?

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<sup>37</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura*, ed. by F. Platone. (Turin: Nuovo Universale Einaudi, 1949); Antonio Gramsci, “The Intellectuals”, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. by Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), pp. 3-23.

<sup>38</sup> Georg Lukács, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” *History and Class Consciousness* (Verlag: Berlin, 1968), pp. 83-222.

## B. THE EMPIRICAL OLDCASTLE

Whether as their ally or their opponent, the knight John Oldcastle and the Lancastrian kings cannot be understood without one another. The author of the *Gesta Henrici Quinti* was an orthodox cleric and a passionate supporter of the Lancastrian state and of Thomas Arundel, the exiled and restored Archbishop of Canterbury. The *Gesta*, a chronicle of the early period of the reign of Henry V, sets historical events in a providential framework, drawing significantly on Lancastrian propaganda,<sup>39</sup> and never fails to portray the young king in a flattering light. At the beginning of his chronicle, having spent some hundred words on the young king's coronation, the *Gesta* author moves immediately to Oldcastle, an adversary permitted by God to test the election and its young prince. In a document perhaps intended to justify Henry V's military campaign in France to the Council of Constance, Oldcastle is produced as the quintessential rebel, at once a potential challenge to Lancastrian ascendancy and a guarantee of Henry's legitimacy.

The *Gesta* notwithstanding, for much of his life, Oldcastle was anything but an enemy of Lancaster. Much of what can be said of Oldcastle before the year 1400 consists of rather dry biographical fact. The Oldcastle family is drawn from Almeley, Herefordshire, not far from the Welsh border. A John Oldcastle, grandfather of the renowned Lollard, represented Herefordshire in parliaments held in 1368 and 1372,<sup>40</sup> the latter the year in which commons petitioned that the Chancellor should be a layman rather than a cleric, resulting in the appointment of Sir John Knyvett as Lord Chancellor. It is not established that this earlier Oldcastle supported the petition. Thomas Oldcastle, uncle of the familiar Sir John, sat in the

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<sup>39</sup> Frank Taylor and John S. Roskell, "Introduction," *Gesta Henrici Quinti* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), xxix.

<sup>40</sup> W. T. Waugh, "Sir John Oldcastle," *The English Historical Review*, vol. 20, no. 79 (July, 1905), p. 435; *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, i. 179, 188.

parliaments of 1390 and 1393 and held several offices of some responsibility.<sup>41</sup> He appears to have been quite orthodox in religious orientation, having been charged by the king in 1393 to prevent interference in the trial of a Welsh Lollard, one Walter Brut.<sup>42</sup> Sir John's father, Richard, was the first Oldcastle to be knighted, and at the time of John's birth in the 1370s, the family was rather richer in accomplishment than property, but their fortunes generally on the rise.

Oldcastle emerges on the national scene as a knight in the service of Henry IV's 1400 campaign in Scotland.<sup>43</sup> His actions over the following years show him an enthusiastic supporter of Henry IV's rule. The author of the *Gesta Henrici Quinti* would write, "slaughtering and pillaging the Welsh secured his promotion to knighthood,"<sup>44</sup> piling inaccuracy—Oldcastle was knighted on Henry's expedition in Scotland—on distortion—Oldcastle's service was perfectly consistent with the aims of the crown, though there is a grain of truth in the fact that the Glyn Dŵr rising offered opportunities for royalist knights in the west country. In 1401 he is found among a number of Herefordshire knights charged with bringing Welsh rebels to justice.<sup>45</sup> Over the following years, Oldcastle was in command of castles Hay and Builth, and given responsibility over rebels surrendering in sundry parts of south Wales, and charged with investigating allegations of material support given the rebels from both Herefordshire and Gloucestershire.<sup>46</sup> In 1404, he represented Herefordshire in parliament as knight of the shire.<sup>47</sup> He served as a justice of the peace and later, like his uncle Thomas, as sheriff.<sup>48</sup> Walsingham

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<sup>41</sup> For details of his career, see Waugh, 435.

<sup>42</sup> John A. F. Thomson, "John Oldcastle," *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), v. 41, p. 668. Thomas Oldcastle's will was also decidedly orthodox.

<sup>43</sup> Waugh, p. 436.

<sup>44</sup> *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> Waugh, p. 436.

<sup>46</sup> Thomson, p. 669; Waugh, p. 437.

<sup>47</sup> Waugh, p. 437.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

numbers him among the nobles in the company of the Prince of Wales at the surrender of Aberystwyth in 1407.<sup>49</sup> That he was seen as a loyal supporter of king and prince is demonstrated by royal grants to Oldcastle paid out of the revenues of both Lancaster and Monmouth.<sup>50</sup> In all his affairs, Oldcastle presented the image of a thriving Herefordshire gentleman and servant of the crown.

The metamorphosis from a figure of local to one of national significance was facilitated by Oldcastle's marriage to Joan Cobham,<sup>51</sup> the granddaughter and sole heir of John, Lord Cobham. The Dictionary of National Biography comments, "[I]t is unlikely that [Joan Cobham] would have chosen Oldcastle if he had not been a rising man, who could assist in managing her extensive estates, and who would be acceptable to the society within which she moved."<sup>52</sup> This marriage brought Oldcastle considerable property in Kent, Cooling Castle, a house called Cobham's Inn in London, and a good deal of revenue and influence. This is reflected in Oldcastle's being summoned to parliament in 1409 as a member of the upper house. As Waugh has argued, this probably represented a compromise of sorts between Oldcastle's recognition in his wife's right and the king's inclination to recognize him for his own accomplishments, a move much more politically expedient than simply conferring a barony on a minor Herefordshire knight.<sup>53</sup>

The 1409 parliament was the occasion of one of those happenings which call into question the historical constitution of past events. What is known from the *Rotuli Parliamentorum* is that the commons put forward a proposal that would modify the anti-heresy statute *De haeretico comburendo*, effectively nullifying it. The commons further suggested an

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<sup>49</sup> *Chronica Maiora*, p. 356.

<sup>50</sup> Waugh, n. 437.

<sup>51</sup> It was Oldcastle's third marriage, and Joan's fourth.

<sup>52</sup> Thomson, p. 669.

<sup>53</sup> Waugh, p. 439. It is notable that Joan's fifth husband was not summoned to parliament by Henry V.

appropriation to the crown of certain ecclesiastical revenues: half of the incomes of absentee office holders and of those who had gotten their positions through fraud.<sup>54</sup> Walsingham, uniquely among contemporary chronicle accounts, reports a confiscation scheme of an entirely different magnitude and political import:

In this parliament the parliamentary knights (or, to name them more truly, the ‘minions of Pilate’) with no thought for the good of the kingdom but with malice in their hearts and no time for anything but one crime, proposed despoiling the church of God throughout England.<sup>55</sup>

Walsingham here reproduces a document of significant detail and dubious arithmetic that is in effect an inventory of ecclesiastical temporalities in England and the revenues that could be extracted from them, followed by an explicitly Lollard commentary on the state of the church. What is this document, and what is its provenance? C. L. Kingsford is of the opinion that it is a popular manifesto rather than a piece of legislation.<sup>56</sup> Waugh argues that “a comparison between the chronicle and official records leaves little doubt that Walsingham has been guilty of gross exaggeration, if not of sheer invention.”<sup>57</sup> The details of the disendowment scheme appear to have been drawn from a text describing the anti-clerical projects of the Lollard John Purvey.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, McNiven accepts it as a genuine piece of legislation emerging from “the commons” and reflecting “a great deal of homework” on the part of its authors.<sup>59</sup> J.H. Wylie inclined toward the belief that a scheme resembling that suggested by Walsingham was put forward, and that Oldcastle himself was behind it.<sup>60</sup> The record does not seem to support these speculations, and Walsingham’s suggestion that the commons were dominated by a Lollard

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<sup>54</sup> *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, iii. 645.

<sup>55</sup> *Chronica Maiora*, p. 376.

<sup>56</sup> *Chronicles of London*, ed. C. L. Kingsford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1905), p. 65, cited in Aston 1993, p. 111.

<sup>57</sup> Waugh, p. 440.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> McNiven, p. 192.

<sup>60</sup> J. H. Wylie, *The History of England Under Henry IV* (London, 1898), iii, p. 309.

contingent seems particularly suspicious. Whatever the events of that parliament, Walsingham's account has been accepted by many, and along with it the notion of a significant effort toward a Lollard power-grab. In the chronicle record, Oldcastle gives an aristocratic body and a unitary agency to the acts of the amorphous commons.

### C. LOLLARDS, LANCASTER, AND THE THRONE

Contrary to the construction of these institutions in some Tudor Protestant writings, in late-fourteenth-century England, the English church and state were not easily separable, and native secular social power had a tremendous (but not unlimited) influence in matters of faith. A variety of forces and interests were arrayed around the great magnate John of Gaunt, fourth son of Edward III, Duke of Lancaster and scion of an aristocratic family whose influence stretched from Iberia to Flanders.<sup>61</sup> Gaunt serves as an example of a particularly aristocratic corollary to the lay religious initiative that on the continent was manifested in the *Devotio Moderna*.

Through the 1360s, Gaunt's family was granted significant religious latitude by the Pope, including the right to choose their own confessor, to keep an altar in their household, to receive the sacraments from their chaplain, and so on.<sup>62</sup> This sort of aristocratic license would be exploited by Lollards like Sir John Oldcastle to promote their own religious projects. Gaunt's household clergymen appear to have been unobjectionable, though Anthony Goodman credits

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<sup>61</sup> The genitive "Gaunt" from "Ghent," the city in which he was born.

<sup>62</sup> Anthony Goodman, *John of Gaunt: The Exercise of Princely Power in Fourteenth-Century Europe* (Harlow, Essex: Longman Group, 1992), 244.

Gaunt's patronage of the Carmelites with shaping a distinctive Lancastrian religiosity.<sup>63</sup> This is not to say that all of Gaunt's religious connections were perfectly conventional.

In January of 1377, Gaunt and other lights of the realm including Thomas of Woodstock, Thomas Langley, and Thomas Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, accompanied Prince Richard—Gaunt's own nephew—in a procession featuring over a hundred masked mummers representing both secular and religious figures including papal functionaries, cardinals and the Pope. The mummers representing papal legates wore demoniacal masks, and were dramatized as villains.<sup>64</sup> In parliament that year, Gaunt was a key player in the enactment of a new manner of subsidy, a “poll tax” from which clergy were not exempt. Perhaps in concert with the anticlericalism he demonstrated in both policy and public spectacle, Gaunt continued in his vehement support of Wyclif, whose influence at Oxford was near its apex. In this year, the dissemination Wyclif's *De civili dominio* and related works had stirred the Pope to take measures against the renegade scholastic.

It may be that it was Wyclif's writings on dominion appealed to Gaunt, holding out the possibility of securing some part of the wealth of the church for secular ends. Whatever the reason, he was at first an enthusiastic supporter of the controversial cleric. Early in 1377, Gaunt's public promotion of Wyclif extended to having him deliver a series of sermons in London criticizing clerical wealth.<sup>65</sup> The escalation between the anti-clerical party and such powerful churchmen as London's Bishop Courtenay and Winchester's Bishop Wykeham led to a confrontation in February of that year. Archbishop Sudbury,<sup>66</sup> along with Courtenay, convened a tribunal in London to examine Wyclif's errors. Wyclif arrived in the company of Gaunt, Lord

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<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> V. H. Galbraith, ed., *The Anonimale Chronicle: 1333-1381* (London: Manchester University Press, 1970), 102-3, quoted in Goodman, , 59-60.

<sup>65</sup> Kenny, 53.

<sup>66</sup> Himself a long-time client of Gaunt, Sudbury must have pursued proceedings against Wyclif only reluctantly.

Percy, and a number of his clerical supporters. Gaunt appeared to be prepared to put into practical effect the theory of dominion that Wyclif had come to defend. He encouraged Percy, who was carrying the baton of his office as Marshal of the Realm, to arrest the ecclesiastical panel. Courtenay threatened the lay lords with excommunication. Gaunt is reported to have told the panel that Wyclif “was more worthy of sitting there than any of them.”<sup>67</sup> Gaunt’s party retreated, with certain parting threats.<sup>68</sup> In an intimation of events to come in the following decade, there were demonstrations in London against Gaunt and in defense of their Bishop.<sup>69</sup>

As late as 1382, John of Gaunt appears to have been ignorant about Wyclif’s Eucharistic teaching, and may have become aware of it only when Wyclif’s theological disciples Philip Repington and Nicholas Hereford appealed to him after the Blackfriar’s Council of that year condemned twenty-four of the master’s theses. Initially supporting the Lollard position on the familiar grounds of his inclination toward disendowment and enhanced secular power, Gaunt seems to have been genuinely shocked by the Eucharistic doctrine of Wyclif’s supporters. As historian Anthony Goodman writes, “He called them odious for their opinion on the Eucharist and himself expounded conventional beliefs, forbidding any doctor to answer them, and did this so eloquently himself that the orthodox doctors had nothing to add.”<sup>70</sup>

The position of the heirs of John of Gaunt with regard to religious orthodoxy was not a certain one before the deposition of Richard II. It was reported by Sir William Bagot during his trial before parliament that King Richard himself had once observed that Henry Bolingbroke should never be permitted the throne because he would destroy the church.<sup>71</sup> As it would turn out, the evolving attitude of Lancastrian monarchs to the inheritors of Wyclif’s legacy would be

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<sup>67</sup> *The Anonimale Chronicle* 103-4, quoted in Goodman, 60-1.

<sup>68</sup> Gaunt told Courtenay that he would “drag him from his see by the hair” (Goodman 61).

<sup>69</sup> Kenny, 53.

<sup>70</sup> Goodman, 242.

<sup>71</sup> Chris Given Wilson, *Chronicles of the Revolution: 1397-1400* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1993), p. 17.

a complicated development, conditioned by an astute populism and an unprecedented sense of political spectacle. It is entirely conceivable that Henry, son of John of Gaunt and heir to the duchy of Lancaster, might capture the crown through legal and constitutional means. Instead, in a manner explored with great elegance by workers like Gaillard Lapsley and Paul Strohm, Lancaster became England through a series of subtle and powerful exercises of public political representation backed by the preponderance of military force. The Lancastrian cabal saw the law of England not as a normative code restraining their power, but rather as one of many symbolic resources to be turned to the project of legitimizing Henry's usurpation. While the record of the Lancastrian revolution depends almost exclusively on the *ex parte* reports of chroniclers sympathetic to Henry's accession,<sup>72</sup> Lapsley has revealed a pattern of inconsistencies and outright misrepresentations that give the lie to what had appeared to William Stubbs in his Constitutional History to be an earnest and proper parliamentary exercise anticipating modern constitutionalism.<sup>73</sup>

In the course of pursuing his military campaign, Henry's ouster of his cousin Richard was preceded by a less noted but crucial displacement. While in Chester, Henry was visited by a deputation including representatives of the aldermen of the city of London, who offered him their support and renounced their fealty to Richard. They also brought the no-doubt welcome news that, in storming Westminster abbey in search of the king, they had seized and imprisoned the incumbent Archbishop of Canterbury, Roger Walden.<sup>74</sup> This gave perfect freedom to Thomas Arundel to resume his archbishopric by fiat, a fact that would be crucial in the days to follow. Exiled by Richard in part for his defense of the earl his brother, Arundel had been

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<sup>72</sup> In a manner more than trivially similar to the dependence upon Tudor histories of the accession of Henry VII.

<sup>73</sup> Gaillard Lapsley, "The Parliamentary Title of Henry IV," The English Historical Review, Vol. 49, No. 195 (July, 1934), 423-449; William Stubbs, Constitutional History of England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1874), ii, 533.

<sup>74</sup> The Chronicle of Adam of Usk 1377-1421 ed. Chris Given-Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 61.

chancellor of England, and had a credibility that even Richard himself was bound to respect. The Dieulacres chronicler reports that it was an oath sworn by Arundel on a consecrated host that persuaded Richard to enter into negotiations with Henry: the king's safety assured, Henry sought only his Lancastrian inheritance, and had no intention of deposing him.<sup>75</sup> This portion of the Dieulacres Chronicle is one of the most Ricardian records of the deposition, possibly written by a monk of Chester,<sup>76</sup> and must be understood as such.<sup>77</sup> This accepted, it is not the bare historicity of the act which is most interesting, but its symbolic force, the body of Christ at its intersection with the body of the king, the oath of the greatest prelate of England, possibly forsworn.<sup>78</sup> The rupture of the social world is figured in the breach of an oath sworn on the body of him who is its guarantee.

As important as Arundel's confidential negotiations may have been, they may be the lesser part of his service to Henry's cause when compared to his public acts of September and October 1399. The work of Lapsley has demonstrated how problematic is the Lancastrian claim to parliamentary sanction of Henry's accession. As Walsingham reports, "writs were sent in the name of King Richard to the persons in the land who had a legal obligation to attend parliament, bidding them assemble in London at Westminster on the day after the feast of St. Michael."<sup>79</sup> On the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, an assembly was convened in the great hall at Westminster, where the king's throne stood empty. The assembled estates were presented with a *fait accompli*: the king had resigned to a commission representing the estates of the realm. Archbishop Arundel set the

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<sup>75</sup> Given-Wilson (1993), p. 165; McNiven, 68; The Dieulacres Chronicle, Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, xiv (1930), p. 173.

<sup>76</sup> Given Wilson (1993), p. 10.

<sup>77</sup> The chronicle was continued by a clerk of more prudent Lancastrian sympathies.

<sup>78</sup> Accusations of being forsworn on the host are by no means limited to the Ricardian camp; the clearly Lancastrian "Record and Process of the renunciation of King Richard the Second" reports that, among Richard's other crimes, he swore that he pardoned the duke of Gloucester "for any offenses which he might have been said to have committed against the king's person" "The Record and Process," in Given-Wilson (1993), p. 183.

<sup>79</sup> Walsingham, Chronica Maiora, p. 309.

tone nicely with his sermon on the theme, “*Incumbit nobis ordinare pro regno*”: “It falls upon us to govern on behalf of the king,”<sup>80</sup> The implication, at least, is that the assembly Arundel was addressing had, in this moment of interregnum, the authority to set the nation in order once more. In the pro-Lancastrian chronicles, the event has a ring of optimistic inevitability. In Walsingham’s account, “As it was obvious from these happenings and the opportunity provided by them that the kingdom of England with its appurtenances was now vacant, the aforesaid Henry, duke of Lancaster, hurriedly rose. . .”<sup>81</sup> Adam of Usk is more effusive:

And Thus—why delay?—even though he had self evidently deposed himself, the sentence of deposition, which had been set down in writing, was, with the consent and authority of the whole parliament, clearly, solemnly, and publicly read out. . . The office of king thus vacated, the aforesaid Duke of Lancaster, having been chosen as king with the consent of the whole parliament, was conducted to the throne. . .and promptly enthroned.<sup>82</sup>

One of the fascinating aspects of Usk’s account is the way in which agency is distributed to all parties save one: Richard abdicates voluntarily, “the whole parliament” manages the proceedings and chooses Henry as king, and Henry himself is a sort of passive object of the operation as the archbishops of Canterbury and York conduct him to his throne. The sentence of deposition is “self-evident” even though it is a process executed off-stage, even though Richard had been neither present nor represented by counsel.

In fact, the meeting of the estates summoned under Richard’s name at the end of September to receive the news of his abdication was not a parliament under the law. The irregularity of this session is discussed by Lapsley:

It was not, indeed, recorded as a parliament at all. Nor was it arranged or organized as a parliament. When the estates were convened the throne was vacant, the king was unrepresented, so that the meeting was without a presiding officer, and no opening

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<sup>80</sup> This is my own translation, and I’m willing to entertain alternatives; *ordinare* here has at least the possible valence of “to appoint,” which is germane to this argument.

<sup>81</sup> *Chronica Maiora*, p. 311.

<sup>82</sup> The Chronicle of Adam of Usk, p. 69.

discourse constituting the parliament and explaining the business at hand was delivered. The commons did not retire nor did they choose a speaker. . .<sup>83</sup>

As Lapsley points out, it would be surprising if the extra-legal nature of this meeting and the commission that sought Richard's deposition had escaped Adam of Usk, trained as he was in canon law.<sup>84</sup> Writing a decade after these events, Usk nevertheless recalls an impeccable parliamentary exercise, though, as Lapsley concludes, "The body. . .that raised Henry to the throne could not upon any constitutional theory have been a parliament as Adam. . .calls it."<sup>85</sup> In place of the constitutional problem of replacing a legitimate monarch with his well-heeled cousin, Usk gives us a series of tableaux that emphasize the voluntary nature of Richard's renunciation and a pageant of Henry's popular legitimacy. There is not a hint of the friction between the commission and the imprisoned king that is to be found in "The Manner of King Richard's Renunciation," in which Richard at first refuses to abdicate to the advantage of Henry. As Chris Given-Wilson has written, in contrast to the Lancastrian propagandists, "The picture which the document presents is of a king coerced into (in effect) unconditional resignation"<sup>86</sup>

The position stated by the newly-crowned Henry IV seemed designed to address such anxieties. As Lapsley reports

Henry, speaking in English, thanked the lords spiritual and temporal and all the estates of the land, and disclaimed any intention of pressing the consequence of his now admitted claim to rule by virtue of the reconquest of his inheritance, to the point of expropriation. All interests secured by law and custom were to be respected, except in the case of persons that 'have been against the good purpose and common profit of the realm.'<sup>87</sup>

Claiming his own against the seizure of his inheritance by Richard, Henry could represent himself as the champion of property rights that had been made unsure in Richard's reign. That

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<sup>83</sup> Lapsley, p. 430.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, 436

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, 437.

<sup>86</sup> Chris Given Wilson, "The Manner of King Richard's Renunciation: A 'Lancastrian Narrative'?" *The English Historical Review*, vol. 108, no. 427 (April, 1993), p. 369.

<sup>87</sup> Lapsley, p. 428.

Henry had been party to such policy in the confiscation of the property of the late earl of Arundel was matter best forgotten, and the message conveyed to landed wealth was on the whole a reassuring one, notwithstanding the proviso in the case of those persons who may have injured the “common profit.” In his address to parliament, in his coalition with Archbishop Arundel, the policy asserted by Henry IV at the very inception of his reign excluded the possibility of the sort of disendowment contemplated each in his own way by John of Gaunt and Wyclif.

In ascending the throne, Henry IV revealed a talent for populist political representation unimaginable in the fiery John of Gaunt. At this point, a distinction must be made between these representations and real representative institutions. Henry was able to revive certain “‘elective’ or acclamatory”<sup>88</sup> practices in a new register and on a national scale, disseminated in the writings of pet intellectuals, while avoiding the checks on royal prerogative that had plagued Richard II. As Paul Strohm writes, “. . .his genius was to use power ruthlessly, but to encourage its misrecognition as a participatory exercise. The “participation” of which I speak is by no means to be understood (a la Bishop Stubbs) as precocious parliamentarianism. The participation encouraged by Henry IV’s ceremonies of acclamation and assertions of free election was less parliamentary than ritualistic and spectacular.”<sup>89</sup>

In the notional space evolving between Lancaster and Lollardy was a populist idea, a figuration of the agency of the people. If Lancastrian populism invoked the will of the people to endorse what were not intrinsically acts of political representation, the writings of Wyclif suggested, if only potentially, that every form of sovereignty was ultimately conditional. The lay believer, humble though he might be, was imbued with the agency to judge his social betters, even unto the bishop, perhaps even unto the king. While Lancastrian monarchs might be

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<sup>88</sup> J. W. McKenna, “The Myth of Parliamentary Sovereignty in Late-Medieval England,” *The English Historical Review*, vol. 94, no. 372 (July, 1979), p. 491.

<sup>89</sup> Strohm, 200, p. 42.

inclined to invoke the acclamation of the commons in their public political spectacles, the notion of a dominion founded in grace and judged by all the people was not one with which the new dynasty could be perfectly comfortable.

#### D. FIGURING HERESY: THE WEEDS IN CHRIST’S GARDEN

Like the tropes with which Lollards and the traditional church figured one another, the very label applied to the Lollard heresy was a site of symbolic contention. Coming into English from the Dutch “*lollaerd*” or mumblor—perhaps referring to the mumbling of prayers—the term has an affinity for the Latin “*lollia*,” the tares that grow amongst the wheat in Matthew 13, expressed elsewhere as “*zizania*,” as they appear in the title of Thomas Netter of Walden’s orthodox account of the Lollard heresy, the *Fasciculi Zizanoirum*. The notion that the wellsprings of faith had been polluted was one shared by the author of the Lanterne of Light<sup>90</sup>:

Certes, the wicked man that Crist spekith of hath done this dede. . . *Inimicus homo superseminavit zizania*. That is to seie: “The enemy of God hath sown taries upon the seed” of Jesu Christ. That wicked man is Anticrist, that clowtith his lawis as roten raggis to the clene cloth of Cristis Gospel. . .<sup>91</sup>

In a familiar Lollard position, it is the obscuring of the word of the gospel with the rotten rags of extra-scriptural accretions that is figured by the mixing of the wheat and tares. For the Lanterne author, it is the opponents of the Lollards—and emphatically the upper clergy and the Pope—who are the chaff to be winnowed from the good grain.

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<sup>90</sup> The possession of the Lanterne of Light was considered by Archbishop Chichele sufficient evidence that the London currier John Claydon was a relapsed heretic.

<sup>91</sup> The Lanterne of Light, ed. James M. Dean (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996).

In English religious discourses of the late-fourteenth century, the tainted grain became associated with the sacrifices of Cain and Abel, in a manner examined at length by Margaret Aston:

[B]y a process of association, Cain came to be thought a heretic. Thanks to a fusion accomplished in early exegesis, the passage in Genesis 4 describing the offerings of Cain and Abel became linked with the parable of the sower's wheat and tares in Matthew 13. In fact, Genesis tells of Cain offering fruits of the ground while Abel offered the firstlings of his flock, but they came to be seen in terms of true and false offerers of tithes—Abel rendering his best beast, or sometimes pure wheat; Cain giving wheat mixed with tares. 'Caim cum lolio'; these words were placed over Cain's head in a twelfth-century sculpture that clearly depicts the weeds among the wheat.<sup>92</sup>

Aston is primarily interested in the figure of Cain as he is articulated in Lollard anti-clerical discourses in which "that caitiff cursed Caym" is associated with "Caim's castles": churches understood as the exclusive locus of proper worship, but by extension the wealth and property of the regular clergy. What I would like to emphasize here is the ambivalence of the Cain figure.<sup>93</sup> Wycliff himself put forward "the heresiarch Caym"<sup>94</sup> as the type for all the abuses of the friars and other suspect clerks. What is important here is not the moot question of whether the Lollards or their enemies were of the race of Cain, were lanterns of light or darkness, but that Lollard and orthodox churchman struggled over the same discursive territory, each in their own way. To some clergymen, the Lollard religious texts, theological argumentation in English rather than Latin, must have seemed a profanation of religious language, an unwelcome intrusion of the mundane into the space of the holy.

As an aristocratic representative of Lollardy, Oldcastle stands in an unstable position between aristocratic power and a heresy understood as base and "popular"; between the race of Cain and their betters. His own religious error is an instance of a broader disruption of social

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<sup>92</sup> Aston, 1993, 96.

<sup>93</sup> I'm sure that Aston would acknowledge this as well.

<sup>94</sup> *Tractatus de mandatis divines*, ed. J. Loserth and F. D. Matthew (WS, 1922), 327, quoted in Aston 1993, 98.

hierarchy. This is evident in Hoccleve's "Remonstrance Against Oldcastle,"<sup>95</sup> with its effort to separate its two addressees: there is Oldcastle, the "brother" fallen into error ("The Remonstrance," line 2), and the Lollards who have led him into heresy, and receive the stronger criticism.<sup>96</sup> "Brother" Oldcastle is potentially the Cain figure, but the greater force of the Cain metaphor is displaced on the "cursid caitiffs" who have led him astray (15). The possibility of Oldcastle's redemption is never withdrawn, "if thow the wilt amende. . . Axe him mercy and He wole it thee sende" (73-5). Hoccleve's poem is forced to negotiate an ill-defined landscape, a vernacular religious argument in the defense of orthodoxy, where such arguments in English are the province of the Lollard heresy. Hoccleve is careful to keep the "Remonstrance" in the mode of orthodox argumentation, appealing to the church fathers, and placing an absolute constraint of the agency of the believer:

Lete Holy chirche medle of the doctrine  
 Of Crystes lawes and of his byleeue,  
 And let alle other folk therto enclyne  
 And of our feith noon arguments meeue.  
 For if we mighte our feith by reson preeue,  
 We sholde no meryt of our feith haue.  
 But nowadayes a baillif or a reeue  
 Or man of craft wole in it dote or raue.       (137-44)

The position that Hoccleve takes in his "Remonstrance" is a conservative one and, like many conservative representations, it invokes a historical moment that has passed. It would not have been possible, at this late date, for a layman to take the position, "I believe as holy church believes in this matter." Much had changed since Wyclif, and the church in its investigative

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<sup>95</sup> All citations from the "Remonstrance" from Thomas Hoccleve, "The Remonstrance Against Oldcastle," *Selections From Hoccleve*, ed. M. C. Seymour (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

<sup>96</sup> Ethan Knapp, *The Bureaucratic Muse: Thomas Hoccleve and the Literature of Late Medieval England* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), p. 143.

function had been forced to grant to even the most humble believer an opinion on certain obscure theological matters.<sup>97</sup>

Written after Oldcastle's escape from prison, Hoccleve's poem manages the anxiety produced by Oldcastle's troubling absence by calling him into a rhetorical presence. As Ethan Knapp has argued, "Hoccleve's poem is founded on the trope of *prosopeia*, the trope in which the conjuring of an absent person is meant, literally, to draw a face where there was none."<sup>98</sup> Hoccleve's project is to make the obscure visible, to draw Lollardy out of a "darkness" that he, as the spokesman of Lancastrian orthodoxy, attributes to it. According to Knapp, "paranoia over Lollardy's very murky outlines led Lancastrian propagandists to project the difficulty of surveillance into an ethical charge that Lollards were duplicitous."<sup>99</sup> The furtive qualities ascribed to the Lollards are the antithesis of openness of orthodoxy as exemplified and guaranteed by the Lancastrian king and his rule. Investment in this understanding on the part of the subject of power is the necessary ideological fiction of Lancastrian rule, itself predicated upon calculated political spectacle, on public representations that belie the real operations of power.<sup>100</sup> In Hoccleve and elsewhere, we understand the privilege of social power and its representations to make competing interests and discourses appear clandestine, hidden, the operation of a cunning that shuns the light of day. The repeated tropes of darkness/light and

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<sup>97</sup> "In 1370, it might have seemed far fetched to the point of insanity to suppose that a glover or skinner in the town of Beccles in Suffolk had from reading or hearing texts come to believe 'that no priest hath power to make God's body in the sacrament of the altar, and that after the sacramental words said of a priest a mass there remaineth nothing but only a cake of material bread'. It was unthinkable for two reasons: first, because no clerk in his right mind would speak let alone write of this topic in English; second, because simple laymen did not discuss such theology." Aston 1993, 34-5.

<sup>98</sup> Knapp, p. 146.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>100</sup> Or, according to Strohm, "In each of these [texts of Hoccleve], an inauthentic and less wholesome alternative – whether heresy, effeminate fashion, female practices of reading and introspection, or false speech, is subversive of Lancastrian practice, which is stabilized around ideas of the orthodox, the identity of inner and outer, the refusal of debilitating speculation and misrepresentation in any of its forms. Here held at bay is the embarrassing fact of the Lancastrians as a usurping dynasty, and the extent to which misrepresentation and false display reach a crisis point during their regime." Paul Strohm, England's Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation, 1399 – 1422 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 185.

visibility cleverly play upon the anti-visual tendency in Lollard treatments of the “idolatry” of orthodox worship.

Many orthodox churchmen also shared with the followers of Wyclif the conviction that some who thought themselves Christian had fallen into damnable error. This is not all down to Wyclif’s increasingly polemical relationship with his clerical critics, but was a thread of Christian thought from Augustine through Aquinas. For St. Thomas,

A heretic does not have the habit [i.e., the theological virtue] of faith if he disbelieves even one article; for by one act of the [sacramentally] infused habit [of faith] the contrary is abolished. For the habit of faith also has this efficacy, that by it the believer’s understanding is held back from assenting to things contrary to faith. . .<sup>101</sup>

Arthur Stephen McGrade has examined the late-Medieval category of heresy in its uncomfortable relationship with modern liberal ideas of intellectual pluralism and tolerance. “Heresy” is derived from the Greek ἀρέσεις via the Latin *haeresis*, literally meaning “choice,” with the particular valence of personal choice.<sup>102</sup> To the orthodox, such a choice was both self-deluded and a turning away from the community of faith and the sort of shared, internally consistent understanding of the divine, the sort of shared belief arising from faith to which Aquinas appealed.<sup>103</sup> In positing personal religious agency, the far-flung Lollard heresy is tainted with the ambivalent valuation placed upon the “popular” in late-Medieval political thought.

And yet, it would seem that at least in certain aristocratic circles, the religious ideas expounded and disseminated by Wyclif were not only tolerated but were in some sense the intellectual talk of the day. Whether endorsed or repudiated, these ideas were in active

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<sup>101</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 14, art. 10, ad. 10, ed. Busa, p. 98, quoted in Arthur Stephen McGrade, “The Medieval Idea of Heresy,” *The Medieval Church: Universities, Heresy, and the Religious Life* (Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1999), p. 131; the textual interpolations are McGrade’s.

<sup>102</sup> McGrade, p. 116.

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*, p. 135.

circulation even when the Archbishops of Canterbury sought their condemnation at Oxford. Geoffrey Chaucer, who had traveled to the French court with the Lollard aristocrat Sir Richard Sturry, went so far as to include a highbrow joke about Lollard eucharistic attitudes and the new nomenclature they required in his “Pardoner’s Tale.” Paul Strohm has argued convincingly that this sort of lighthearted play places the date of the first circulation of this writing in the mid 1390s,<sup>104</sup> a period of relative tolerance that ended decisively with the burning of the heretical cleric William Sawtre.

#### E. EXAMINING LOLLARDY

As the very first English heretic burning would demonstrate, the punishment of the Lollard heresy was a not merely an exercise of church power, but was publicly sanctioned by sovereign authority. That an escalation had been taking place among church, state and Lollards could not be denied. An important early skirmish surrounded the relapsed heretical priest William Sawtre, and demonstrated the mortal consequences that heterodoxy could call down by the second year of Henry IV’s reign. In the preceding year, Sawtre had been examined by Henry Depenser, Bishop of Norwich, for a number of heretical positions. Among them, Sawtre had maintained that he would be more inclined to worship the king, or the body of a contrite man than the image of a cross,<sup>105</sup> and that “one is bound rather to worship a man that is predestinate than an angel of God.”<sup>106</sup> His most significant error, to the minds of his examiners, was the characteristic Lollard position that the Eucharist remained material bread after the words of consecration. In any case,

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<sup>104</sup> Paul Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 170.

<sup>105</sup> McNiven, p. 81.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*, p. 82.

Sawtre recanted these heretical positions and submitted himself to the authority of the church. More resilient than prudent, Sawtre quickly returned to preaching his Lollard opinions, with the result that he found himself before an even more strict tribunal: the convocation empanelled by Archbishop Arundel.

Sawtre's approach to this second disciplinary action betrayed depths he had not shown before. Before this panel, he was able to offer a spirited defense that made most of his positions appear, though unconventional, something less than heretical, and, according to McNiven, "displayed a considerable grasp of theological argument."<sup>107</sup> The sticking point was, once again, the question of the Eucharist, and despite some early success in bringing his view in line with orthodoxy, Sawtre's defense began to collapse, his manner growing abrasive to the perception of his inquisitors. Eventually, it was his clearly Lollard opinion that the Eucharist "remained very bread, and the same bread which was before the words were spoken"<sup>108</sup> that led to his condemnation.

This, however, fails to explain why Sawtre would be the first Lollard to face death by burning. McNiven has argued that the punishment of the relatively inconsequential Sawtre was used by the convocation to place pressure on the high-profile Lollard who now came before the tribunal: John Purvey, Wyclif's secretary, likely composer of a Wycliffite Bible, and the most notorious public promoter of the master's work.<sup>109</sup> Whether or not it was the object lesson of Sawtre's burning at Smithfield, Purvey recanted his Wycliffite positions and submitted himself to the authority of the church. Strohm has argued that Sawtre was deemed worthy of exemplary punishment because he was none other than the "Williamus Sautre, clerk" earlier pardoned for his role in the Ricardian Epiphany rising. In Strohm's understanding, Sawtre's errors were a

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<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, p. 89.

useful demonstration of the relationship between heresy and treason, suiting the propaganda interest of Henry's government.<sup>110</sup>

Of special note in this episode is the characteristically Lancastrian legal process that sent Sawtre to his pyre. The English clergy had been asking that the civil authority take on responsibilities in the punishment of heresy since at least 1397, and parliament had acted at last in 1401 with the promulgation of the statute that has become known as *De haeretico comburendo*, "Of the burning of heretics." Besides the legal mechanism for sentencing heretics to death, the new statute placed restrictions on the writing and distribution of religious books and warned of sanctions for anyone associating with heretics.<sup>111</sup> The curious fact is that Sawtre's execution *preceded* the passing of the statute. Sawtre was sentenced to death by royal edict, an exercise of the sovereign exception. The crown took the position that such a sentence was within its power, and was in any case the recognized punishment for heresy, though no one had been so punished in England in time out of mind.<sup>112</sup> The claim that such a punishment was within the royal authority is complicated by the fact that a statute authorizing such powers was even at that moment in the works; the king, with some urgency, was exercising an authority yet to be given to him under the law.<sup>113</sup>

It is around questions of sovereign authority that the Lollard text "The Testimony of William Thorpe" is particularly valuable. While the historical status of Thorpe's arrest and examination has long been in doubt, recent work by Maureen Jurkowski reveals that the received text has its basis at least in historical events.<sup>114</sup> In his interview with Archbishop Arundel,

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<sup>110</sup> Paul Strohm, *England's Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation, 1399 – 1422* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 58-62.

<sup>111</sup> McNiven, p. 93.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 88-9

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>114</sup> Maureen Jurkowski, "The arrest of William Thorpe in Shrewsbury and the anti-Lollard statute of 1406," *Historical Research*, vol. 75, no. 189 (August 2002), pp. 273-295.

Thorpe performs as a sophisticated Lollard with an orthodox clerical education, showing characteristic doctrinal eccentricity in matters of the Eucharist, the swearing of oaths, and the paying of tithes. The exchange between Arundel and Thorpe repeatedly converges on arguments over the Epistles of Paul. This is not surprising, for Paul represents the most explicit biblical treatment of questions of authority and the nature of the church.<sup>115</sup> Two can play at the game of scriptural interpretation, but the exegesis of Lollard and Orthodox cleric diverge significantly on these matters.

Arundel challenges Thorpe on his unsanctioned preaching: “Asketh not St. Paul, ‘How should priests preach, except they be sent?’ But I sent thee never to preach. . .”<sup>116</sup> Predictably, Thorpe is able to respond within the same biblical framework, from Corinthians 3:1:

This sentence approveth Saint Paul, where he speaketh of himself, and of faithful apostles and disciples, saying thus, ‘We need no letters of commendations, as some preachers do,’ which preach for covetousness of temporal goods, and for men’s praising.’<sup>117</sup>

The archbishop appeals to the potentially quite conservative construction of duty to social hierarchy found in Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians: “Saith not St. Paul, that subjects ought to obey their sovereigns, and not only good and virtuous, but also tyrants that are vicious?”<sup>118</sup> Thorpe’s reply leads him into deep waters with respect to his understanding of authority:

. . . [W]here ye say, sir, that Paul biddeth subjects obey their sovereigns, that is sooth, and may not be denied. But there is two manner of sovereigns, virtuous sovereigns and vicious tyrants. Therefore, to these last sovereigns, neither men nor women that be subject serve to obey in two manners. . . . For, as Paul saith after, these sovereigns, to whom subjects owe to obey in following of their manners, work busily in holy studying,

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<sup>115</sup> Rita Copeland also discusses the epistles in the Thorpe’s *Testimony*, but she concentrates on the Epistle to the Hebrews in its relationship to clerical disendowment; “William Thorpe and his Lollard Community: Intellectual Labor and the Representation of Dissent,” *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 199-221.

<sup>116</sup> “The Examination of William Thorpe,” *Select Works of John Bale* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 85. I have used the modernized version in this edition of Bale, having found no problem with that text for the purposes of this work; a text with the original orthography can be found in *Two Wycliffite Texts*, ed. Anne Hudson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>117</sup> Thorpe, p. 87.

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*

how they may withstand and destroy vices, first in themselves, and after all in their subjects, and how they may best plant in them virtues.<sup>119</sup>

Arundel's reading of Ephesians is, strictly speaking, metaphorical: it relies on an elision between social hierarchy in marriage or servitude on one hand, and ecclesiastical authority on the other, the latter an area where Paul is inclined to be far more critical. Witness Paul's Letter to Titus, 1:6, "For a bishop must be blameless, as the Steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry. . ."<sup>120</sup> It is to this tendency in Paul that Thorpe appeals. Thorpe's critical position is as unstable as Arundel's authoritative one: he takes Paul's well-delimited critique of church authority and expounds it in a statement that could as well be about secular power. Thorpe reads Paul as if Paul were Wyclif, and the result is something as potentially volatile as the most radical construction of Wyclif's work on civil dominion.

If, in the testimony of Thorpe, Wycliffites were dangerously equivocal in their position on secular sovereignty, the crown was consolidating an explicit position on the Lollard heresy. Unlike the clerics heretofore examined, John Badby, brought before the convocation in 1410, was a very different sort of heretic: a layman of unorthodox opinion. A Worcestershire craftsman, sometimes described as a "scissors" or tailor,<sup>121</sup> Badby may have had a smattering of education, and would in his travail demonstrate an unexpected rhetorical capacity. The perplexing quality of Badby's heresy was his seemingly unshakeable confidence in his unorthodox beliefs. Examined first by John Peveril, bishop of Worcester, Badby was persistent in his heretical positions, the most significant of which was the rejection of Christ's presence in the altar bread. After a year in prison, his replies to Archbishop Arundel's convocation, before the assembled might of the English church, were just as intransigent. The altar bread was a

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<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Authorized Version.

<sup>121</sup> McNiven, p. 199.

symbol of Christ, in Badby's understanding, and a "John Rayker" in God's grace had the same power as any priest to make it. The notion that the Eucharist was the body of Christ contradicted his understanding of the incarnation, for "if each Host consecrated on the altar was the body of Christ, there must be 20,000 gods in England."<sup>122</sup> In the opinion of his teachers, one who received communion in this way was damned.<sup>123</sup>

Badby's religious opinions were substantially related to Lollard beliefs, but represented the most extreme ones with which the convocation had been confronted. Around the question of the Eucharist, Badby expressed positions that Wyclif would never have acknowledged as his own. Just as alarming to the convocation was the assurance with which this laborer continued to express himself on these matters, rejecting the opportunity to reconcile himself with the organized church. The sort of personal religious agency promoted by Wyclif's disciples had clearly spawned a monster. Badby's error on the Eucharist was symptomatic of his refusal of all just rule. As Gairdner writes, "that a poor tailor's unrefined common sense should have nerved him with courage to die in the conviction that he was right in defiance of the judgments of all the most learned divines is surely a fact that calls for sympathy as well as wonder."<sup>124</sup>

Why should such a fine theological point as the nature of the Eucharist be grounds for civil execution? Strohm argues that the nature of this sacrament is by no means of trivial consequence to Lancastrian legitimacy, citing the Dominican Roger Dymmok:

For if this [Lollard] argument should thrive, all the sacraments of the church, all the oaths of kings, and all political exchange should be completely destroyed. . . . I ask, what sensible change do you see in a boy newly baptized, in a man who has confessed, in a boy or a man who has been confirmed, in consecrated bread, in a man ordained to the priesthood, in marriageable persons betrothed or joined? All receive a new virtue, except the bread, which simply ceases to exist without any kind of sensible change, and is

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<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> Gairdner, p. 68.

transubstantiated into the body of Christ. In what way also is the body of a king changed, when he is newly crowned, or anyone similarly advanced?<sup>125</sup>

In Strohm's understanding, the Lollard critique of the orthodox theory of transubstantiation disrupts a sacramental economy upon which the legitimacy of Lancastrian rule depends.<sup>126</sup> In challenging the efficacy of the properly ordained and licensed priest to enact the fundamental, if unseen, material change in the bread, the new popular heresy undermines the authority of that same hierarchy to transform the duke of Lancaster into the king, the accidents of a revolted subject into the material substance of the sovereign.

In delivering Badby to the secular authorities for punishment, Archbishop Arundel expressed publicly his hope that Badby would not be put to death. McNiven takes the position that Arundel cannot have been sincere, that the handing over of Badby to the lay arm and his subsequent execution have all the earmarks of a well-choreographed production.<sup>127</sup> Badby was conducted to Smithfield, chained to a post and "shut in a cask."<sup>128</sup> Of his execution, Walsingham reports the following episode:

After he had been condemned to burning and shut in the cask at Smithfield, Prince Henry, the king's eldest son, who was then at Smithfield, went up to him and counseled him to abandon his foolishness and submit to Christian teaching. But the worthless rascal ignored the salutary advice of so great a prince and chose rather to be burnt to death than to show reverence for that life-giving sacrament. And so, shut up in his cask, he was attacked by the flames of devouring fire. . . . The prince was moved by his pitiful shrieks, and gave orders for the materials of the fire to be dragged away from him. . . . The man was now almost dead, but the prince comforted him and promised that, if he recanted even now, he should keep his life and obtain pardon and receive three pence daily from the royal treasury for the rest of his life. But the unhappy fellow had recovered his spirits. . . and rejected such a handsome offer. . .<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Roger Dymmok, *Liber Contra XXII Errores*, p. 130, quoted in Strohm, 2000, p. 179

<sup>126</sup> Strohm 1998, pp. 61-62; Strohm 2000, pp. 179-80.

<sup>127</sup> McNiven, p. 208.

<sup>128</sup> *Chronica Maiora*, p. 376.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*

The burning of a heretic in the liminal space of Smithfield, the second such burning of the decade, is an eminently public process. It is entirely likely in one register that Badby had been put forth as an example to those of less-than-certain orthodoxy, that he was the first such example of a universal reference. What may be forgotten—what is consistently elided in the facile rhetoric of “deterrence”—is the way in which the spectacle of punishment is interpellating. It cannot be the case that the spectators of such an event are so without empathy that the “pitiful shrieks” of the man doomed for an obscure doctrinal failure fail to move them. It is the denial of that real horror, the effort to contain that painful recognition that makes the spectator the subject of the Lancastrian ideology that insists upon the necessity of this example. In a similar vein, Slavoj Žižek suggests the example of a soviet communist of the 1930s, completely inhabited by Stalinist ideology, who “knows very well that millions are dying in the camps, yet this knowledge only confirms that the sublime ‘true people’ happily and enthusiastically builds Socialism.”<sup>130</sup>

The Prince’s intervention is potentially disturbing; it disrupts the overdetermined, legitimized functioning of the king’s law in a way that affirms the suffering of the condemned and already partly-burned man. It is here that the “deterrent” or exemplary quality of the execution is not irrelevant. In stopping the process after it has begun, the prince articulates the potentially subversive possibility of identification with condemned Badby. What the prince of Wales offers us is the assimilation of our anxieties about the execution to a perfectly orthodox position. His offer of an annuity to Badby is both a personal and a public move. The prince places himself between the severity of the law (which could be understood as his father’s law)

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<sup>130</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 58. The equivalent in contemporary U. S. politics would be someone who knows that torture and atrocities are committed by our own forces, but asserts that “freedom isn’t free”: that our “democratic” interests necessitate coercion, violence and the violation of just those sorts of fundamental rights we purport to value.

and Badby as representative of the people (the first non-clerical victim of the anti-heresy statute). That Badby declines his offer is not really of great importance.<sup>131</sup> When the flames are applied again, the prince has re-imagined the spectacle for the Smithfield crowd. At a moment when the Prince's party were at odds with both the king and Archbishop Arundel, he was able to stage this act of sophisticated populism in a manner distinctly his own.

The execution of Badby may have been but the first skirmish in a broader battle against lay heresy. In the same year, shortly after Badby's death, Archbishop Arundel contacted the dean of Rochester, informing him that a chaplain sheltered by Oldcastle had been preaching heretical doctrines in Cooling and other places tacitly understood to be under Oldcastle's authority.<sup>132</sup> The interdict briefly enacted against Cooling church was removed temporarily to make possible an aristocratic wedding, and was later suspended entirely,<sup>133</sup> but this was only an overture. In March of 1413, Arundel's convocation summoned John Lay, a chaplain suspected of unorthodox preaching who had celebrated mass with Oldcastle that very morning. Arundel's registrar demanded of Lay his ecclesiastical licenses, but Lay had unaccountably neglected to bring them.<sup>134</sup> The convocation ordered him to return with the necessary documents, and Lay appears to have taken the opportunity provided to skip town.

It is Waslingham's claim that the 1413 convocation had been convened specifically to deal with Oldcastle, "the chief harbourer of Lollards and their main supporter, protector and defender."<sup>135</sup> Decisive action, directed more precisely at Oldcastle himself, would follow quickly upon the death of Henry IV. Ostensibly as part of a general action to discover heretical writings, a Lollard pamphlet was seized from the shop of an illuminator in Paternoster Row. In

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<sup>131</sup> McNiven argues that, at this point, "The Prince was . . . in a potentially embarrassing position," p. 216.

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*, 442.

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*, 446

<sup>135</sup> *Chronica Maiora*, p. 390.

custody, the illuminator unburdened himself of the fact that the book had been entrusted to him by Oldcastle.<sup>136</sup> The actions of the examining clergy reflect the unusual situation in which they found themselves. Representatives of the convocation arranged an interview with the king and Oldcastle at the king's manor at Kennington on June 6<sup>th</sup>. On having some of the heretical passages read to him, the king expressed his disgust at the contents of the pamphlet. Oldcastle agreed that the book was reprehensible, and endorsed the work of the convocation in condemning it, disingenuously claiming that he had only glanced at its contents, an explanation not adequate to explain why he had chosen to have the pages illuminated.<sup>137</sup>

It appears that the king was able, for a time, to deal with the matter while keeping it out of the hands of Arundel's convocation. The chronicles report meetings between Henry and Oldcastle on the matter.<sup>138</sup> Such modern accounts as we have of these meetings are heavily dependent on Bale and other sixteenth-century histories, and are thus rather suspect. What was at stake was significant. There was a tremendous difference between arraigning friendless John Badby and challenging a baron of Oldcastle's stature, a long-time supporter of the house of Lancaster. In fact, the issue at hand traversed the very problem that had occupied Wyclif: what was to be the balance of power between ecclesiastical and secular power? It would appear that, for some decades, a demurrer like that deriving from Oldcastle's claim that he did not know the contents of his Lollard book would be sufficient to shield an aristocratic Wycliffite. That time had passed; ultimately, Henry V ceded authority in the matter to Arundel's convocation.

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<sup>136</sup> Waugh, p. 447.

<sup>137</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> e.g., in Walsingham, "under pressure from the king who wished to recall Sir John to the right path without disgracing him, the matter was postponed for a long time. But When the king had wasted a lot of time to no purpose in trying to bring him back, he told the Achbishop of Canterbury, verbally and in writing, that his labour for Sir John had been in vain," *Chronica Maiora*, p. 390.

Arundel's first attempts to place Oldcastle under the scrutiny of the convocation might be comic were they not played for such obviously high stakes. The archbishop repeatedly tried to serve Oldcastle, while Oldcastle just as persistently evaded service, shutting the gates of Castle Cooling against Arundel's summoner, even when John Butler, usher of the king's chamber, attempted to negotiate between them.<sup>139</sup> Arundel ordered the summons to be posted on the doors of Rochester Cathedral. When Oldcastle failed to appear on the appointed date, Arundel excommunicated him. Then, on September 23, no doubt to the great surprise of many, "as he had been arrested a little while previously by the king's men and lodged in the Tower,"<sup>140</sup> Sir Robert Murley brought Oldcastle before Arundel and the Bishops of London and Winchester at St. Paul's in London.<sup>141</sup>

Oldcastle's examination appears to have begun immediately, with Arundel offering himself as a "channel of grace" to the strayed knight.<sup>142</sup> Oldcastle did not take the opportunity to ask absolution of the Archbishop. Instead, he produced a written statement of his Christian faith. Whatever his motives for setting out in this way, such a vernacular profession of faith could only have had a Lollard ring to the ecclesiastical panel. Oldcastle's effort at circumspection, careful though it must have been, failed to be specific on points that would have been familiar to the Convocation. Archbishop Arundel pressed him to clarify his belief on certain points,

" . . . particularly whether you hold, believe, and affirm that in the sacrament of the altar after the consecration has been properly carried out the bread remains ordinary bread, or whether it does not. . . . Also, whether you hold, believe and affirm that in the sacrament of repentance it is essential that a Christian. . . makes confession of his sins to a priest ordained by the church."<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, p. 435, quoted in Waugh, p. 449.

<sup>140</sup> *Chronica Maiora*, p. 391.

<sup>141</sup> Waugh, pp. 449-451.

<sup>142</sup> *Chronica Maiora*, p. 391.

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*

Oldcastle was unwilling to expand upon his earlier statement, despite Arundel's warning that to remain silent would permit the panel to declare him a heretic. Arundel closed the session by stating the orthodox position on the matters in dispute, and informed Oldcastle that he would be given until the following Monday to consider his response.

In his next interview, Oldcastle appears to have been a victim of his own candor, attempting to answer the questions put to him to the best of his ability. In the three areas on which he was examined—images, auricular confession, and in particular the sacrament of the altar—Oldcastle elucidated Lollard positions. His assertion that “in the sacrament of the altar the body of Christ, which we do not see, is veiled under the actual substance of the actual bread which we do see,”<sup>144</sup> might have satisfied a sixteenth-century Lutheran, but to the panel it was heresy. On images, he showed a characteristically Lollard indifference. What availed in forgiveness of sin was contrition, not the intercession of an ordained minister. Finally, the church of which the panel was representative was the Antichrist in his various organs and members. Apparently committed to a course that could not possibly spare him, Oldcastle told the witnesses present, “These judges of mine who wish to condemn me are leading both you and themselves astray, and are taking you down to hell, so you beware of them.”<sup>145</sup>

Walsingham, on whom this version of the events of that convocation depends, constantly stresses the magnanimity of the archbishop and the intransigence of the accused, but it is interesting to note how the record could be read against this editorial effort. Thus, the chronicler attributes “compassion” to the Archbishop when he asserts the power the tribunal has over the fate of Oldcastle,<sup>146</sup> a power the Archbishop had sought to exercise for some time. The power that now declared him a convicted heretic and excommunicate, and transferred him to the

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<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*, p. 392.

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*, p. 391.

jurisdiction of the secular court. The *Gesta* author attributes to the king's generosity the forty-day reprieve extended to Oldcastle to reconsider his position.<sup>147</sup> Before the forty days had expired, Oldcastle had escaped from the Tower.

## F. INSURRECTION AND EXECUTION

A crucial aspect of the ambivalence of Oldcastle as a historical figure emerges from events which occurred in the early days of January of 1414 on the outskirts of London. Oldcastle's complicity in these events, indeed, what actually occurred are matters of no definitive historical answer, and it is the indeterminacy of these things that would define Oldcastle thereafter. Were we to believe the chronicle records, there could be no doubt; in January of 1414, there was a large-scale uprising in which a great number of persons in armed array sought to overthrow the crown in the interest of Lollardy. In Walsingham's detailed account, "In the very stillness of the night, they came to the fields called St. Giles' fields near London, where it was said that their leader, John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham, was waiting for his supporters."<sup>148</sup> Somehow, forewarned by traitors among the rebels, the young king had anticipated his rebellious subjects, and even as they arrived at their rallying point, they were taken into custody, killed, or fled before they could be captured. The gates of the city were closed fast against those within who would hurry to the aid of the rising.

Any assessment of the events of that January is heavily beholden to sources prejudiced toward the Lancastrian regime, as most workers have recognized. The intended gathering at St.

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<sup>147</sup> *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, p. 7.

<sup>148</sup> *Chronica Maiora*, p. 394.

Giles' Fields appears to have drawn persons from a variety of social positions (although mostly humble folk) and from both within and outside of Lollardy, if only to judge from those tried for both heresy and treason, and those prosecuted for only one of the two.<sup>149</sup> In a similar way, the event gathered participants from as far afield as Bristol to the West and Essex to the East, suggesting an element of long-term planning that supports at least an element of what we find in Walsingham and Usk.<sup>150</sup>

Paul Strohm has expressed considerable skepticism about the Lancastrian account, and has done interesting work with the original documents. At the heart of his critique are the feats of strategic intelligence, planning and logistics demanded of the would-be victims of the rising: “Historians—unable to explain how a rising could both occur and be judged on the same day—have assisted the record by suggesting that the engagement in question actually occurred between the hours of midnight and dawn very early in the morning that day,” a variation on an argument originally put forward by Foxe.<sup>151</sup> Having qualities representative of various narratives of Lancastrian legitimation, the chronicle accounts posit the Lollards as at once a dire threat and as already defeated by the sophistication of the king’s response, where “dazed Lollards fall like stunned birds into the arms of the king’s men.”<sup>152</sup> For Strohm, these accounts have the streamlined contours of a fiction rather than the “messy and unpredictable resistances, cross-currents and delays” we would expect from such a historical situation.

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<sup>149</sup> Waugh, October, 1905, p. 650.

<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*, p. 393; Usk, p. 247.

<sup>151</sup> Strohm, 1998, pp. 69-70; “Seeing this equitation or riding toward Saint Giles field was vpon the Wednesday next agter the feast of Epiphany. . . which was the tenth daye of January, and commission also the same daye charged, the Jewry moreover impaneled the same daye. . . the verdict the same daye presented, how all these can concur together, and all in one day, let the reader after he haue well considered the matter, use his iudgement therin, not only whether it be like, but also whether it be possible,” *Acts and Monuments*, p. 576, quoted in Strohm, 1998, p. 70.

<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*, p. 71.

Of especial note in Strohm's treatment is the tampering he has discovered in the very documents that constituted the "rising" as an event. The modifications he details to the *Coram Rege* Roll—the record of the legal response to these events at the King's Bench—have a single purpose: to associate Oldcastle with an incident at which he can not with certainty be placed. The original state of the document named the Lollard chaplain Walter Blake and the Shropshire knight Sir Roger Acton as the leaders of the rebellion. The visible emendations to the record<sup>153</sup> make Oldcastle the prime mover, and subordinate Blake and Acton to him.<sup>154</sup> For Strohm, Oldcastle's involvement, the nearly impossible choreography of the victors, the very constitution of the event were constructed at the convenience of Henry V's regime.

The events of that January offer us not a comforting certainty, but a continuum in which responsible workers vary, but in which the role of Henry's government in shaping what can be known is apparent to all. The testimony of the accusers of likely heretic William Parchmyner places Oldcastle at the scene of the supposed rising, but Parchmyner denied these accusations.<sup>155</sup> The arrest of several purported Lollard conspirators at the picturesquely-named "sign of the Axe" near Bishopsgate on Twelfth Night<sup>156</sup> may have given authorities the sort of advance warning that Strohm is disinclined to credit, and tend to support Oldcastle's involvement, if not his presence at St. Giles' Fields. For Strohm's imputation of a Lancastrian frame-up, we may in good conscience "deny his major": that someone is framed is not a demonstration of their innocence. As much as Strohm's argument is appealing in a language-foremost sort of way, his desire to exclude Oldcastle from St. Giles' Fields and to defuse the radical potential of that gathering articulates the familiar desire to make such a historical event known, in some roughly

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<sup>153</sup> Strohm dates these to "no earlier than 1 July, 1414," *ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>154</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> Waugh, October, 1905, p. 637. Parchmyner was accused of helping Oldcastle break prison, and of harboring him until the rising. Parchmyner was executed for treason a few days after his arrest.

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*, p. 640.

circumscribed way, if not definitively. Waugh, who accepts that there was some sort of aggressive project afoot on the part of the “Lollard” assembly, by no means uncritically accepts Lancastrian representations of its nature and goals:

Some of the official documents—notably the pardons granted to condemned prisoners— ascribe to the insurgents projects of the most radical kind. . . .The existing order of the state and church was to be destroyed root and branch. The king and his brothers, the higher clergy, and the lay lords were to be slain. . . .Oldcastle was to be made regent, and the kingdom divided into a number of small principalities.<sup>157</sup>

Instead, Waugh suggests that the real goals of the rising may have been far more modest, principally tolerance for Lollardy,<sup>158</sup> which seems to have been central to Lollard parliamentary efforts.

The question of motive was of interest to the chronicle writers. Walsingham argues that many among the purported Lollard rebels were in fact recruited with the promise of wages: “Many people in their ignorance asked the cause for which or concerning which they ought to take up arms, and they were told it did not matter, provided they received handsome payment.”<sup>159</sup> Walsingham also recounts the case of the wealthy Dunstable brewer, William Murley, who had procured golden spurs and two warhorses against Oldcastle’s promise of a knighthood.<sup>160</sup> From the *Chronica Maiora* we have the story of the Lollard conspirators captured and examined by Sir Richard Beauchamp, who reveal a secret cache in which Oldcastle has hidden money, weapons, and a number of banners, including one figuring “a chalice and the host in the shape of a loaf of bread,” and one that depicted “a sort of cross of Christ with scourges, and a spear with nails.”<sup>161</sup> Walsingham’s account, if it be true, would be a damning

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<sup>157</sup> W. T. Waugh, “Sir John Oldcastle, Part II” *The English Historical Review*, vol. 20, no. 80 (October, 1905), pp. 648-9.

<sup>158</sup> *ibid.*, p. 650.

<sup>159</sup> *Chronica Maiora*, p. 393-4.

<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*, p. 395.

<sup>161</sup> *Chronica Maiora*, pp. 405-6.

indictment of the rising as a Lollard project. If people were drawn to the meeting at St. Giles' Fields under false pretenses, under the promise of preferment, under the banner images that their leaders thought to be tainted, this struck at the core of the self-perception of Lollardy. Wyclif had imagined the moral agency of each Christian soul, acting in a knowledge of a truth not so very elusive, in a moral economy where religious and political right were one, with an ideal of all things in common for men in God's grace. The implication in Walsingham was that, rather than a classless utopia of Christian fellowship, the authors of the incident in January 1414 would establish a new aristocracy in which religious authority would follow social power, presumably with Oldcastle as steward at the apex, the guarantor of reform.

The deceit attributed to Oldcastle as leader of the rising is also an imputed failure of Lollard populism, of their inability to field their forces through an earnest representation of the change that they offered. The depiction of the deceived followers is a jibe at the misguided political agency of the mob, which is no more endorsed at this moment than in Walsingham's treatment of the Peasants' Rebellion. Those who gathered at St. Giles' Fields or would have done were a mixture the misguided—and intrinsically in need of control—and the malign. Thus, the Lollard true believers betray their nature, “men of religion, who for outer show displayed in their looks and words self-restraint patience, humility, and love, but whose minds and inner selves. . .were full of bitterness, rancorous bile, disdain, falsity, trickery and deceit and vindictiveness in equal measure.”<sup>162</sup> The “servants and apprentices,”<sup>163</sup> a notorious reservoir of riot, are in their rebellion against recognized authority emblematic of the sort of “trickery and deceit” that social power characteristically perceives when the cowed subaltern puts aside humility and takes up violent action.

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<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*, p. 396.

<sup>163</sup> *ibid.*

Strangely absent from the event he might be assumed to have authored, Oldcastle began a curious interval in his life, as an outlaw and the most notorious opponent of Lancastrian rule. As the *Gesta* author writes,

Oldcastle himself, who, with his both archaic and new-fangled ideas, had devoted himself to Satan, from that time on lurked in holes and corners out of the sight of men, and indeed still does, like another Cain, a vagabond and fugitive upon the face of the earth.<sup>164</sup>

Like Cain, Oldcastle seemed to be imbued with a mark of protection that allowed him to wander unmolested. Since his whereabouts could not be known, he seemed to exist everywhere. In York, Margery Kempe was accused complicity with the Lollard leader: “Than cam tho too men which had arestyd hir, seyng with the frer that sche was Combomis [Cobham’s] dowtyr and was sent to beryn lettrys abowtyn the cuntre.”<sup>165</sup> The notion that Oldcastle was at the center of a Lollard network actively involved in revolt after St. Giles’ Fields was in wide circulation. Walsingham credits him with involvement in the plot of Lord Scrope and Sir Thomas Gray<sup>166</sup> as well as the abortive 1417 invasion by the Scots.<sup>167</sup> In the popular imagination, Lollardy had been emphatically coupled to revolt. The legal identification of heresy with treason was made law by the Leicester parliament of 1414, which determined that the heretic should also be drawn and hung, as well as burned.<sup>168</sup>

It would take over three years to produce Oldcastle, a surprising interval considering the generous reward offered for his capture. Oldcastle was captured in late November of 1417, through the duplicity of a relative of his by marriage, John Merbury, who revealed that Oldcastle had been living in Almeley.<sup>169</sup> Perhaps warned of imminent arrest, Oldcastle set out for the

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<sup>164</sup> *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, p. 8.

<sup>165</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Harlow, England: Longman, 2000), p. 262.

<sup>166</sup> *Chronica Maiora*, pp. 404-5.

<sup>167</sup> *ibid.*, p. 425.

<sup>168</sup> Edward Powell, *Kingship, Law and Society* (London: Oxford, 1989), p. 165-6.

<sup>169</sup> *Chronica Maiora*, p. 427; Usk, p. 267, in H. G. Richardson, “John Oldcastle in Hiding,” *The English Historical Review*, vol. 55, no. 219 (July, 1940), pp. 423-3

Welsh frontier. He was captured at a farmhouse near Welshpool by a company in the service of Lord Charlton of Powys.<sup>170</sup> Walsingham reports that he resisted the effort to capture, wounding several of his attackers, but being so injured himself that he had to be conducted to London in a litter.<sup>171</sup> Oldcastle appeared before parliament on December 14. The duke of Bedford stood in for the king at trial, the king being away on his French expedition. The session began with the reading of an indictment detailing Oldcastle's purported treasonous acts, including his participation in the rising at St. Giles' Fields. When asked to reply to the charges, Walsingham claims that Oldcastle began to preach of the subject of mercy, until he was interrupted:

So the ruler of the land ordered him to confine his replies to the charges brought against him. . . .He meditated briefly, then, breaking silence, he replied at last, saying, 'It means absolutely nothing to me that I am being judged by you or put to death by men.' And he began again his impertinent prattlings until the chief justice ordered him to. . .tell them, if he could, why he should not be put to death. With consummate arrogance and perversity he evaded the question and forthwith replied that he acknowledged no judge among them while his liege lord, King Richard, was still alive in Scotland.<sup>172</sup>

Waugh describes Oldcastle's conduct before parliament as "discourteous, unconciliatory, and tactless,"<sup>173</sup> and considers the possibility that Oldcastle was not in his right mind: "It is possible that towards the end of his life he was a victim of religious mania."<sup>174</sup> Oldcastle's performance does not seem that of a man bent on saving himself, but no more is it the raving of a religious maniac. What is suggested in this brief account is that Oldcastle was a Lollard who had accepted that the polarization between his own sect and the Lancastrian government was irreconcilable, marked by his claim about Richard, rumors of whose survival were understood as a classic attack on Lancastrian legitimacy. This complicates Strohm's claim that Oldcastle ultimately refused the role to which he had been called by Lancastrian and Wycliffite alike, as Lollard revolutionary

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<sup>170</sup> Waugh, October, 1905, p. 655.

<sup>171</sup> *Chronica Maiora*, p. 427.

<sup>172</sup> *ibid.*, p. 428.

<sup>173</sup> Waugh, October, 1905, p. 657.

<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*, p. 658.

leader. In his final public speech, Oldcastle appears to have embraced the Lancastrian position that a commitment to Lollardy was a rejection of Lancastrian rule, and was willing to face death in that resolve. Whether this is an indication of his complicity in the St. Giles' Fields incident is, once again, ambiguous.

Oldcastle was taken to St. Giles' Fields immediately after his trial, where he was hung from a gallows with an iron chain while being burned over a fire, "thus [as Usk recounts] paying the penalty of both swords—and deservedly so."<sup>175</sup> In this way, Oldcastle was the emblem of the Leicester parliament's decision that heresy *was* treason. A rumor is reproduced in Walsingham that Oldcastle claimed he would rise from death on the third day, charging Sir Thomas Erpingham to take up the cause of the Lollards thereafter. Consistent with his suggestion of religious mania, Waugh claims that "it is unlikely that his prophecy concerning his resurrection was invented by his enemies,"<sup>176</sup> but in fact, just such a claim appears in the orthodox accounts of the execution of prominent heretics. The false Rudolph, a heretic of the "free spirit" movement, is said to have made precisely the same claim.

The burning of a heretic can be understood as a part of the same sort of resurrectionist, incarnational theology as the veneration of saintly relics and the cult of the Host. Burning sent the heretic on his way, depriving him of a body to be raised on the last day, depriving any followers of the sort of bodily remnant to be venerated as a saintly relic. The Lollards took the position that the living body of a predestinate man was more worthy of worship than an image or a relic. A Lollard pamphlet claims that, in the dock in parliament, Oldcastle was asked if he would worship a cross in the manner described by St. Paul. Oldcastle is said to have spread his

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<sup>175</sup> Usk, p. 267.

<sup>176</sup> Waugh, October 1905, p. 658.

own arms and said, “This is a very cross,”<sup>177</sup> in what could only have seemed a heretical and subversive identification with the Savior. If the Eucharist as Christ’s body signified the social order now guaranteed by the king, Oldcastle, suspended in chains for treason and burned for heresy, is the anti-Eucharist, a body claiming an illicit relationship to Christ’s body, a body to be reviled and destroyed. Burning is a deliberate indignity, a foretaste of the fires of hell to which the heretic is conveyed. Jan Hus, traveling to the conclave under the protection of Sigismund of Luxemburg to defend Wyclif’s works, had been burned at the behest of the Council of Constance only two years before and died unrepentant, chanting a plea for Christ’s forgiveness.<sup>178</sup> When Arundel sent 267 heretical extracts from Wyclif’s writings to Rome for condemnations, he “prayed that the reformer’s bones might be exhumed and thrown on a dunghill.”<sup>179</sup> Ten years after Oldcastle’s death, Wyclif’s bones were exhumed, burned, and the ashes cast into the river Swift. The immediate effect of Oldcastle’s death was what perhaps was expected: the parliamentary supporters of disendowment were in retreat, Lollardy was marginalized, a sect for hard-core believers, but with a diminished appeal for others. . . and yet the tables would turn. It is a truism that there is a subtle difference between the martyrdom of a saint and the just execution of a heretic, and in the sixteenth century, England would be forced into a reappraisal of its Lollard children. If the heretic’s burning at the hands of the state is a site of interpellation in which social power seeks to draw its audience into ideological alignment with itself, the act remains ambivalent, like many instances of interpellation. It is one event in a dialectic, and social power tries and fails to monopolize its significance once and for all time.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> A. Pollard, ed., *Fifteenth-Century Verse and Prose* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1903), p. 187.

<sup>178</sup> Pope John Paul II, who apologized for the burning of Hus, was very much a believer in resurrectionist theology. When he was shot in 1981, surgeons were forced to remove a section of intestine. It was embalmed, and interred with the pontiff when he died in 2005.

<sup>179</sup> Waugh, Dec. 1905, 466.

<sup>180</sup> Janet Marie Spencer has developed a sophisticated notion of the polyvalent quality of martyr spectacles around the function of *voice*: “By failing to appropriate its victim’s body, the state turned its ultimate display of power into

In the historical study of religious reform, there has often been a tendency to understand the interplay between orthodoxy and heterodoxy polemically rather than dialectically or genealogically, and yet there is much to be gained by understanding both the Lollards and their Lancastrian opponents as products of the same historical development. While Wyclif was unwilling to confront the logical consequence in the secular sphere of his theory that dominion was founded in grace, Henry Bolingbroke, ever the pragmatic one, put it into violent practice.<sup>181</sup> If Wyclif wanted to enhance the power of the crown by giving the king the power to police religious error, the Lancastrian dynasty expanded its own authority into this area, in the disciplining of the Lollard heresy. The historical development from the inquisitions of the earliest Wycliffite clerics, where the assimilation into English of technical theological terms was greeted with dismay, to the application of the most severe penalty for lay heresy in the person of the tailor John Badby marks a watershed in the constitution of the lay person as an agent of religious belief and action. In a historically abrupt period, the very disciplinary apparatus that had been mobilized to contend with the Lollard heresy is compelled to grant to the layman the authority to answer a question like, “What is your belief concerning the Eucharist?” Far from an alienation from the sacrament of the altar, this new moment draws humble folk into a discursive intimacy with abstruse questions of the greatest import. Even such a characteristically Lollard practice as the composition of vernacular religious literature for lay readers was picked up by their persecutors: Archbishop Arundel himself approved for publication Nicholas Love’s

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a platform from which the martyr could project his voice first to the immediate audience and then to an extended audience through oral and printed representations” (The Politics of Mixed-Genre Drama: The Comic Treatment of Punishment Spectacles in Shakespeare (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1990), p. 36). While Spencer’s work deserves attention, this work wishes to emphasize the *inherent* ambivalence of interpellating events. The beating of Rodney King, the execution of Saddam Hussein, even the events of September 11, 2001 have dramatically different ideological meaning depending on membership in certain constituencies.

<sup>181</sup> As McNiven has argued, “The son of the lord who had done most to permit the publicizing of Wyclif’s teachings twenty years earlier now took up, doubtless unwittingly, the most extreme doctrine which men had ever inferred from Lollard works – that an erring lord could be lawfully dispossessed,” McNiven, p. 62.

Myrrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ, a translation of a text attributed to Bonaventure, with the express intention that it be read by lay Christians.<sup>182</sup>

In a mere four decades, England had changed fundamentally. In the latter part of the fourteenth century, the duchy of Lancaster was something singular; virtually a government in its own right. It is a curiosity of the late-medieval state that the house of a great magnate like Gaunt and the institutions of government were not terribly dissimilar. When Henry IV assumed the throne, he filled critical positions in the government of the realm—chancellor, treasurer, receiver—with officeholders from the same posts in the duchy.<sup>183</sup> Lancaster, at this feudal moment, was in important ways a state unto itself. With the granting of a county palatinate to Gaunt’s heirs in 1390, the duchy enjoyed semi-sovereign powers granted to few barons indeed, a “kingdom within a kingdom,” as Richard Dutton has called it.<sup>184</sup> In the reign of Henry V, the Lancastrian state would mutate into something new and distinct, with new prerogatives, an unprecedented national organization, and a secular bureaucracy using Chancery English. The Lancastrian monarchs were able to change the very conception of the nature of the king. As Helen Castor writes, “Where Richard’s Kingship was increasingly focusing on his personal lordship over one section of his subjects, Henry was seeking to develop his specific lordship into a universal kingship, a distinction crucial to a proper understanding of the two reigns.”<sup>185</sup> Richard had unsettled the great with his creation of baronies for his cronies, while Henry showed no inclination to expand the ranks of the upper aristocracy. This is an aspect of a general Lancastrian policy that dates to the beginning of the reign of Henry IV: to make of the crown and its government something distinct from other feudal relationships. The assimilation to the

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<sup>182</sup> Aston, 1993, p. 82.

<sup>183</sup> Helen Castor, The King, the Crown, and the Duchy of Lancaster (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.27.

<sup>184</sup> Richard Dutton, “Shakespeare and Lancaster,” Shakespeare Quarterly, vol. 49, no. 1 (Spring, 1998), p. 4.

<sup>185</sup> *ibid.*, p. 19.

crown of certain religious prerogatives in the struggle against heresy has the force of such a universalizing symbolic act, “catholic” in the technical sense of encompassing all, but representing a certain nationalization of an area of religious authority.

Considered as the object of nationalism, the state is more than simply a hierarchy, more than institutions, more than the national language, though these things are all important and necessary. The nation is defined as much by the *other* that is excluded as by the *people* who are included. In fifteenth-century England, the nascent national identity coalescing around chauvinism against foreigners such as the French or the Welsh was made manifest and concrete through acts of legislation intended to curb what were perceived as foreign abuses in trade and other matters. The 1414 dissolution of alien priories was intended to remove what were popularly seen as nests of foreign influence on English soil. While it is perfectly just and rational to say that Henry V was a Norman prince pursuing his interests in France, that the campaign was itself based on the argument that the English king was French, this may be precisely why it was necessary to promote a new sense of Englishness on the home front with Henry V’s signet letters in the national language. Though he promoted both the power of the sovereign and the vernacular language, Wyclif does not seem to have had a premonition of what we would call “nationalism,” but it would be difficult to say the same thing about Henry V.

With the definitive identification of Lollardy with treason in the burning of Oldcastle, much of the imaginative space in which an English Lollard subjectivity could thrive had vanished. Wyclif’s original theoretical formulation of reform had been, after all, quite royalist, and surprisingly consistent with the Lancastrian notion of universal kingship. In a manner remarkably similar to the fate of English Catholicism under the Tudors, the possibility of being loyal to one’s sovereign while rejecting the state religion—the position that the Lollard Knights

had once occupied – had become problematic indeed. Faith had become a matter of state, enforced by statute and punished under secular law. Just as important, the English monarch had become closely identified with the church: Henry V was styled “*princeps presbyterorum*,” more than hinting at the role that the Tudors would assume for themselves.

### III. THE FIRES OF REFORM: ICONOCLASM, MARTYRDOM, AND NATION

“Thou shalt understand therefore that the scripture hath but one sense which is the literal sense. And that literal sense is the root and ground of all and the anchor that never faileth where unto if thou cleave thou canst not err or go out of the way.”

--William Tyndale, Obedience of a Christian Man<sup>1</sup>

It is an unfortunate fact that the contemporary historiography of the Reformation has had a tendency to reproduce the sort of polemical conflict that marked religious controversy in that period. In a 2001 article, John N. King writes, “In focusing on the smashing of saints’ images, shattering of stained-glass windows, dismantling of altars, and despoliation of shrines, [so-called “revisionist historians”] maintain an embarrassing silence about the emergence of a richly diverse and powerful literature grounded upon Tyndale’s scriptural translations.”<sup>2</sup> King’s argument poses a problem for the empiricist, since it suggests that even the choice of critical object can be located ideologically. The question that King is not inclined to confront is actually much more interesting than the spurious opposition he poses: what is the relationship between Protestant iconoclasm on the one hand and the burgeoning reformist literature – often incorporating images of its own – on the other? The fact of the matter is that the genealogy that included Tyndale, Bale and Foxe was anything but silent or embarrassed on the topic of Protestant iconoclasm. The new technology of the printing press enabled the unprecedented

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<sup>1</sup> William Tyndale, “Obedience of a Christian Man,” in Voices of the Reformation ed. John N. King (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> John N. King, “The Light of Printing”: William Tyndale, John Foxe, John Day, and Early Modern Print Culture,” Renaissance Quarterly, v. 54, no. 1 (Spring, 2001), p. 53.

circulation of a huge cultural production around questions of the image, the Mass, the souls of Christians, and the appropriate relationship between sovereign and religious authority. Were it not for the need on the part of sixteenth-century Protestants to find a past consistent with their self-understanding, Sir John Oldcastle would have remained little more than a historical footnote, of interest only to the antiquarian. Instead, with the English Protestant appropriation of Wyclif as the “morning star of the Reformation,” traduced Oldcastle would once again be found near the heart of religious controversy. As the prototypical Protestant martyr, the very anxieties produced by Oldcastle as potentially a militant political dissident make him the locus of a reformist self-understanding in a Tudor state undergoing a top-down Reformation. Through the controversialists Bale and Foxe (and possibly including Tyndale as well), the Oldcastle narratives and images of the Wycliffite martyr are one site of an evolving notion of the representation of martyrdom in a historical moment in which traditional modes of veneration of the saints, the adoration of images and the veneration of relics in particular, have been rejected by ascendant Protestantism. The problem of recovering Oldcastle as Protestant martyr is intimately related to the problem of licit images in the context of iconoclasm.

## A. REPRESENTING ICONOCLASM, PRINTING GOD’S WORD

William Tyndale’s scriptural translations were not aloof of the struggle between visual piety and iconoclasm. Tyndale’s work did not emerge from a vacuum, but in a historical dialectic, in the ferment between traditional and reformist positions marked in Tyndale’s time by the polemical exchange between himself and Thomas More.<sup>3</sup> More complained that the reformist who appealed to the “one sense” of scripture as the anchor for lay biblical understanding had made polemic of the scriptures themselves in his New Testament:

So yt was now that amonge other tokens of Tyndale’s euyl entent in his tranlacyon / I shewed for ensample yt he changed comenly this worde chyrche in to this worde congregacyon, and this worde preste, into this worde senyour, and cheryte in to loue, and grace in to fauor, . . .with many wordes mo which he chaungeth and vseth dayly, as in turnyng idoles in to ymages. . .<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, an iconoclastic rhetoric pervades Tyndale’s writing. In his Obedience of a Christian Man, Tyndale renders Ephesians 5:5 in this manner: “For this ye know that no whoremonger, or other unclean person, or covetous person (which is the worshipper of images) hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”<sup>5</sup> The liberties Tyndale takes with this passage from Ephesians can be understood if we look at his sources. In the Vulgate, the Latin “aut avarus quod est idolorum servitus” translates more plainly as “the greedy [person] who is of idols the servant.”<sup>6</sup> In rendering the biblical text in an iconoclastic sixteenth-century Protestant vocabulary, Tyndale emphasizes the oblique reference to idolatry at the expense of the logical connection of the clause to its context (there is no necessary relation between covetousness and

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<sup>3</sup> In much the same manner as the later exchanges between Nicholas Harpsfield and John Foxe.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas More, The Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer, Book II, The Complete Works of St. Thomas More (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), vol. 8 part I, p. 144.

<sup>5</sup> Tyndale, “Obedience of a Christian Man,” p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 5,5 in Latin Vulgate: “hoc enim scitote intellegentes quod omnis fornicator aut inmundus aut avarus quod est idolorum servitus non habet hereditatem in regno Christi et Dei.” The Greek makes a similar reference to “eidolons” (ειδωλολατρης).

idolatry, the notion of wealth as an idol is lost). While replacing Tyndale's nomenclature, the compilers of the King James Bible were sufficiently beholden to Tyndale's translation as primary source that the clause still appears a gratuitous interjection: "the covetous man, who is an idolator. . ." The question of the image enters the genealogy of English Protestant agitation at its beginning.

An episode from Foxe's Acts and Monuments of the English Martyrs explores, both overtly and in its suppressed tensions, the perplex among the many strains of Protestant hagiography, iconoclasm, image, text, tradition, miracle and providence. The only extant source for these events, Foxe receives this story "ex epistola Roberti Gardneri,"<sup>7</sup> from the written testimony of one of the perpetrators. To Englishmen on the ground, the 1530s must have seemed a watershed for the reformist position. 1532 saw the promulgation of the Act of Submission of the Clergy and the resignation of Thomas More. To some radical Protestants, it must have seemed that the time had come to take matters in hand. Four Protestants from the town of Dedham in Essex, Robert King, Robert Debnam, Nicholas Marsh, and Robert Gardner, traveled the ten-odd miles to the coastal town of Dovercourt in that year to strike decisively against what they must have perceived as a idolatrous blasphemy<sup>8</sup>:

In the same year of our lord 1532, there was an idol named the Rood of Dovercourt, whereunto was much and great resort of the people. For at that time there was a great rumor blown abroad amongst the ignorant sort, that the power of the Idol of Dovercourt was so great, that no man had the power to shut the door where he stood, and therefore they let the church door both night and day continually stand open, for the more credit unto their blind rumor.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John Foxe. *Acts and Monuments* [...] (1563 edition), [online] (hriOnline, Sheffield), p. 499. Available from: <http://www.hrionline.shef.ac.uk/foxe/>. For purposes of consistency, all citations from Foxe will be referred to the Sheffield variorum edition.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Aston has pointed to the possible connection between this and other instances of iconoclasm in East Anglia and the iconoclastic tincture of the ministries of Thomas Rose, a Suffolk clergyman, and Thomas Bilney, who was burned in Norwich in August of 1531, and whose death may have been a precipitating incident. Margaret Aston, Faith and Fire: Popular and Unpopular Religion, 1350-1600 (London: The Hambleton Press, 1993), pp. 264-6.

<sup>9</sup> Foxe (1563), pp. 499-500.

The Dovercourt rood is not merely an icon, a tangible representation of Christ, but one to which miraculous qualities are ascribed. Its physical nature carries an excess in the supernatural register (to those who credit such things), as well as being at the focus of a tradition and a set of practices. That the rood was a source of civic pride and identity may be in play in this incident, since it is not local Protestants who destroy it but iconoclasts from a neighboring town.

In a distinctly Protestant joke, the tradition of the miraculous qualities of the rood abets the iconoclasts in its destruction. On the night that the party arrives, the church door stands open,

For there durst no vnfaithfull body shut it, which happened wel for their purpose, for they found the Idoll whiche had as much power to kepe the dore shut, as to kepe him open. And for profe therof, they toke the Idol from his shrine, and caried him a quarter of a mile frō the place wher he stode, without any resistance of the said Idol.<sup>10</sup>

The miraculous icon is revealed to be impotent in its own defense, and the divine countenance is revealed not through miraculous intervention, but through fortuitous circumstances. The party removed the rood, along with its coat, shoes, and some altar candles, to a field, where they burned the “idol.” Within six months, three of the iconoclasts, King, Debnam and Marsh, were indicted of felony and hung in chains.

Foxe as historian, recovering the evanescent record of Gardiner’s epistle, functions always within an apocalyptic framework in which events refer ultimately to the struggle of the true church of the saved against the false church of antichrist. This project is expedited by an omnivorous providentialism that can make a meal of whatever is set before it. Circumstance favors the reformist cabal at every turn, their expedition taking place on “a wondrous goodly night, both hard frost and fair mone shyne, although the night before, and the nyght after were

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 500.

exceeding foule and rainye.”<sup>11</sup> While his abettors are hanged, Gardiner escapes that fate, “Albeit that he was cruellye sought for, to haue had the like deathe, but the liuing Lord preserued him, to whome be al ho- nor and glory world without ende.”<sup>12</sup> Providence smooths the way of the iconoclastic party, demonstrating the election of the three who are martyred for their pious act, while being articulated also in the escape of their surviving comrade.

The problem for the narrative, the dissonance that must be brought into harmony, is the secular nature of the indictment and punishment of the rest of the company. It is not for doctrinal error *per se* that King, Debnam and Marsh are hung, but for the theft of the rood (which appears to have been of significant value in its material construction) and other sundries. The stigma of a crass civil theft is developed in the text, where it is reported that “there went a great talke abrode that they shoulde haue greate riches in that place.”<sup>13</sup> This the text explicitly denies, claiming on the basis of the confessions of the accused that, “they had neyther peny, halfe peny, gold, grote nor iewell.”<sup>14</sup> For Foxe, theft is a question of profit, and the act of the reformist cabal needs to be understood in another way.

The account of the Dovercourt rood incident is headed by a woodcut image<sup>15</sup> that assembles many of the narrative’s disparate elements into a temporally immediate whole. The executions of the three conspirators are brought together with the burning of the rood. What is startling about this illustration, particularly in what could be fairly described as an iconoclastic text, is that it strikingly resembles certain representations of the crucifixion, those that depict Christ crucified in the company of Dismas and Gestas. The woodcut is authorized and made

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> An image of the woodcut illustration can be seen in the online variorum edition of Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* [http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/johnfoxe/main/3\\_1563\\_0500.jsp](http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/johnfoxe/main/3_1563_0500.jsp)

legible by a tradition of crucifixion imagery, while woodcut and narrative together defend the destruction of the rood, another product of that same tradition of representation.

The configuration of the three gallows is perfectly conventional. Only the central figure is so positioned to look in the direction of the viewer; his head is inclined slightly to the left (to his right). In traditional depictions of the crucifixion like that of Duccio di Buoninsegna (~1310),<sup>16</sup> Christ looks with favor on the blessed at his right hand. Perhaps the central figure in the Dovercourt rood illustration is looking with analogous approval on the destruction of the rood. The appropriation of crucifixion motifs permits the reinscription of the civil punishment of the iconoclasts as a religious persecution in the same manner that the civil and the sacred were conflated in Christ's execution. If Christ was hung unjustly with thieves, the Essex iconoclasts were hung unjustly *as* thieves, the covert religious motive for their persecution emblemized by the officiating cleric in the foreground. The extra-textual device of the clergyman as an agent of the persecution of the just unites this woodcut with various others in the Acts and Monuments, notably the depiction of the burning of the Oxford martyrs. The burning rood, surrounded by curls of smoke, is a further visual component connecting the Essex iconoclasts to Protestants burned for heresy. The Roman soldiers of a traditional crucifixion scene have become the henchmen of a "Romish" church. This illustration is resonant with the frontispiece of the Acts and Monuments, where the veneration due to martyrs on their pyres is misdirected by the Roman church toward another "idol," and another instance of the body of Christ : the Eucharist. The Dovercourt Rood illustration is a Protestant lesson on the subject of licit and illicit images, on bodies to be venerated and others to be rejected and destroyed. Historically, it emblemizes a transfer of legitimacy from traditional to reformed representations.

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<sup>16</sup> An image of the Duccio di Buoninsegna crucifixion can be seen at Olga's Online Gallery <http://www.abcgallery.com/D/duccio/duccio78.JPG>

Foxe is by no means an initiate in the theology of religious representation. In the Acts and Monuments, he functions more as a plasterer, covering up the cracks in an edifice built from unwieldy historical materials and reformist theologies that were by no means all of a piece. We should, nevertheless, consider the problem of how Protestants accepted their own *printed* visual representations in the context of iconoclasm. This phenomenon was by no means restricted to English Protestantism: an Italian commentator roughly contemporary with Foxe commented that the Lutherans of Padua shunned images “except those printed in paper.”<sup>17</sup>

Walter Benjamin’s critical category of “aura” can help us understand the distinction Protestant writers were able to make between their own printed religious pictures and the “idols” that they anathematized. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production.” Benjamin observes,

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined by the history to which it subject throughout the time of existence.<sup>18</sup>

Aura is not conferred in an instant by the hand of the maker, but is instead an accretion through the haphazard accumulation of tradition and use. As moderns, we tend to think of aura as connecting art to its author, but this is because we exist on one side of a historical divide. At a moment in which all art is religious art, aura connects us to the ineffable, to God, or the saints. Of course, Benjamin is well aware of this:

. . .The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of a tradition. . . .In other words, the unique value of the “authentic” work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Eugenio Battisti, “Reformation and Counter-Reformation,” Encyclopedia of World Art (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966), v. 11, col. 902, quoted in Ernest B. Gilman, Iconoclasm and Poetry in the English Reformation: Down Went Dagon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1986), p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> Walter Benjamin, Illuminations (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 220.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 223-4.

How, then, are Protestant images, of which the illustration in Foxe is an example, exempt from the Protestant rejection of religious imagery? It is clear that Protestants understood the vehicle of printing as something special. In his excursus on “The benefite and inuention of Printyng,” Foxe observes, “Notwithstandyng, what man so euer was the instrumēt, without all doubt God him self was the ordainer and disposer therof, no otherwise, thē he was of the gift of tongues, & that for a singular purpose.”<sup>20</sup> Printing was so intimately identified with the reformist cause that, “. . . either the Pope must abolish knowledge & printyng, or printyng at length will roote him out”<sup>21</sup> The notion that the suppression of printing is a counter-Reformation strategy will appear again in Foxe’s Augustine Packington anecdote.

Ernest Gilman has argued that it is the vehicle of printing that makes the religious image acceptable to Protestant eyes: “Produced by the same technology as the printed book and, in the case of text illustrations, contained within it, the reformation image is absorbed into the verbal world and in a sense redeemed from the taint of idolatry by its verbal context.”<sup>22</sup> While the argument from context is unobjectionable, it does not seem to fully account for images like that accompanying the Dovercourt rood narrative. Once again, we appeal to Benjamin. If the rood as a physical object imbedded in the old tradition claims a certain singularity (found in a certain place, with its own specific transcendent properties), the illustration in the martyrology does no such thing. In an important sense, a given impression of a woodcut is *not* a copy. Like the mirror-reversed form of a letter in movable type, the carved block is not something complete in itself, but a sort of instrumentality to be completed through inking and impressing on paper. The duplications of such an image are not subordinated to some original, but realize their nature though repeated reproduction, no instance of which enjoys a special privilege, or lays claim to

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<sup>20</sup> Foxe (1570), p. 837.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 838.

<sup>22</sup> Gilman, p. 36.

Benjamin's "aura." Extracted from its context in traditional piety, the visual tropes of the crucifixion scene are like Foxe's rather generic representations of individual martyrs:<sup>23</sup> semiotic objects to be assembled in configurations to suit the author's purpose, just as the historical time in which these disparate events took place is collapsed into one concentrated moment.

Whatever their similarities viewed from afar, the illustration in Foxe and the rood of Dovercourt are distinct sorts of religious imagery. The historical and traditional context from which the Dovercourt rood has been sundered returns, in Foxe's narrative, as an ironical attribution of agency to the rood itself. The rood is removed from the church "without any resistance of the said Idol."<sup>24</sup> Set afire, the figure burns so brightly that "he lighted them homewarde one good mile."<sup>25</sup> The iconoclastic act reveals what the reformist sees as the subterfuge of the icon. Joseph Leo Koerner has argued that the religious image raises the problem of a problematic transaction between inner and outer, between substance and semblance.<sup>26</sup> In this way, it is the nature of the image of the crucifixion to show what it is not: a death that is no death, a defeat that is actually a victory. For the reformist, this quality of representation debases the image beyond the possibility that other qualities might redeem it. To such a perception, the Dovercourt Rood is no different than those images revealed by iconoclasts to be puppets animated by hidden operators,

. . . as the Images of Walsingham, Ipswich, Worcester, the lady of Wilsdon, Tho. Becket, with many moe, hauing engines to make their eies to open and role about, and other parts of theyr body to styrre, and many other false iugglings, as the bloud of hayles, & such like, wherewith the simple people a long time had bene deceiued.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> That martyr images were often considered interchangeable is demonstrated by the manner in which Foxe and his collaborators used the same illustrations to represent different historical persons. The same woodcut, for instance, is used to represent William White, Richard Hoveden, and John Goose in the 1570 Acts and Monuments.

<sup>24</sup> Foxe (1563), p. 500.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 125-132.

<sup>27</sup> Foxe (1588), p. 1100.

To the Protestant iconoclast, these automata and other devices are not exceptional by any means, but are patent examples of the nature of all religious images and the feigned transactions in which they ensnare the faithful, or at least the credulous. If the rood of Dovercourt did not conceal a hidden mechanism of wires, it was similarly implicated in a different artifice, a tradition calculated to dupe the humble parishioner. The theft and destruction of the rood demonstrated the emptiness of the tradition that attributed to it such agency; consumed on an iconoclastic pyre, the image seems both impotent and somewhat miffed. The men who burn the Dovercourt rood reveal it to be merely material. The cross that was the object of visual adoration and a failure of spiritual sight—a tradition attributed to the “blind talk of ignorant people”<sup>28</sup>—becomes the real if mundane visual illumination that helps its breakers make their escape.

Benjamin’s “aura,” the accumulation of social meaning around the material object that this work argues illuminates the problem of licit Protestant images, is a quality that English Protestantism is inclined to deny in many different contexts. It is just this sort of embeddedness in practice that Thomas More invokes when he claims that Protestants only know the Bible itself because the church has given it to them:

. . . god hath vnto this chyrche geuen his gyfte of dyscernynge the very scrypture of god from the counterfete. . . . those heretykes lyke as they came out of this whole chyrche, and theyr authours and beginners were onys a parte therof, and then of this chyrche receyued the scrypture byfore they departed oute therof. . . .<sup>29</sup>

For More, the Bible is historically constituted, continuous with the patrimony of the church and the myriad practices that locate faith in a historical tradition. The scripture is not an unmediated transmission from the holy spirit to the believer but a document known through the erudition of

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<sup>28</sup> Foxe (1563), p. 500.

<sup>29</sup> Tomas More, “The Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer, Book VII,” *The Complete Works of Thomas More* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), vol. 8 part II, p. 707.

those, like Saint Jerome, whom the church has invested with the authority to make that judgment, and it is thus that it comes into the hands of the reformists, deny it though they may. The integrity and meaning of the bible, like the qualities of the Dovercourt rood, derive from history, practice, and tradition.

Word and image as printed artifacts enjoy a place of privilege in English Protestantism. Protestant controversialists enjoyed close relations with working printers, both in England and abroad. Tyndale's continental travels were punctuated by his relationships with printers: Peter Schoeffer in Worms, printer of the Worms New Testament, Martin de Keyser in Antwerp, who used the pseudonym "Hans Luft" (the name of a Wittenberg printer who had collaborated with Luther). In another generation, both John Bale and John Foxe worked for and were published by the prosperous Basel printer Johannes Oporinus. The Protestants' enthusiasm for the printing press as a vehicle of truth is articulated in an anecdote concerning the printing of Tyndale's 1529 New Testament that appears in Foxe's Actes and Monuments. Thinking to forestall the distribution of Tyndale's translation, the Bishop of London contracts with one Augustine Packington, a mercer in Antwerp, a man who "fauoured Tyndall, but shewed the contrary vnto the bishop."<sup>30</sup> Claiming to have intimate knowledge of the "Dutchmen and strangers" who are retailing Tyndale's book, Packington receives funds from the bishop, who shares with him his intention of burning the entire edition. Packington thus follows the letter of his contract with the bishop:

This Augustine Packington, went vnto William Tyndall and declared the whole matter, and so vpon compact made betwene them, the byshop of London hadde the bookes, Packington had the thankes, and Tyndall hadde the monye. After this, Tyndall corrected the same newe testaments againe, and caused them to be newly imprynted, so that they came thicke and threfolde ouer into Englande..<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Foxe, (1563), p. 443.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

Taken aback that the burning of the Bibles at St. Paul's has not sufficed to halt the distribution of Tyndale's translation, the bishop once again summons Packington:

howe come this that there are so many newe Testamentes abroade? you promysed me that you hadde bought al. Then aunswered Packington, surely I bought all that was to be had, but I perceauē they haue prynted more synce, I see it wyl neuer be better, so longe as they haue letters and stampe, wherfore you were best to bye the stampes to, and so you shalbe sure: at which aunwere the byshop smyled and so the matter ended..<sup>32</sup>

The printing press is a vehicle for the endless duplication of the word, "thick and threefold," springing up it would appear from the very ground on which it was burned. In Foxe's narrative, sly, sympathetic Packington offers a veiled taunt to the bishop: the very fact that printing exists will guarantee the dissemination of the English Bible. The bishop's smile—contemplating the eradication of reformist presses or a wry response to Packington's faux-naïf posture—rounds out the story neatly. Such neatness or clarity of narrative is a quality of Foxe's polemical mode. The evidence of the providential nature of this history is apparent in the ease with which the bishop is duped, in the *peripetia* by which his efforts to destroy Tyndale's work in fact promote it. Elided is the fact that among the profusion of English Bibles were pirated editions of Tyndale's original, often filled with errors.

Some said it was not possible to translate the scripture into English; some said it was not lawful for the lay people to have it in their mother tongue; some that it would make them all heretics. To reduce the temporal rulers unto their purpose they said it would make the people rise against the king.<sup>33</sup>

That religious reform, or the bible itself, might be a recipe for secular revolution is a possibility that reformist polemic is always attempting to contain. The widely accepted position that the 1381 Peasants' Revolt was associated with Wyclif's teachings was echoed by the more immediate sixteenth-century events, notably in France and the Netherlands. Indeed, the events

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<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* ed. G. A. Williamson (London: Secker and Warburg, 1965), p. 124.

culminating in the establishment of the “Calvinist Republics” of Flanders and Brabant were unfolding even as Foxe’s Acts and Monuments went through its first editions.

It was one thing for Luther, from a comfortable distance, to declare Wyclif “the Morning Star of the Reformation,” but, in England, his legacy was a matter of dispute. William Tyndale wished to recover Wyclif as an exemplar of that true English church that had ever opposed the false church of Rome, a would-be preserver of both the faith and the realm:

Wickliffe preached repentance unto our fathers not long since: they repented not, for their hearts were indurate, and their eyes blinded with their own pope-holy righteousness. . . . But what followed? They slew their true and right king, and set up three wrong kings a row, under which all the noble blood was slain up and half the commons thereto. . . .<sup>34</sup>

In Thomas More’s apology, the followers of Wyclif are a subversive and revolutionary force:

. . . in the time of ye said famouse prince kyng Henry the fyfth, they conspired amonge them, not onely the abolycyon of the faith , & spolyng of the spyrytualtye, but also the destruccyon of the kyng & all hys nobylite, with a playne subuersyon & ouerturning of ye state of his hole realme.<sup>35</sup>

The question of Wyclif and his followers as ancestors of the sixteenth-century Reformation turns upon questions of temporal governments and, in particular, the legitimacy of the Lancastrian succession. Tyndale’s position on the legitimacy of the Lancastrian kings becomes an uncomfortable one for English Protestants because pro-Tudor<sup>36</sup> documents like Edward Hall’s Union of the Two Noble and Illustrious Families of Lancaster and York would claim that the first Tudor monarch, Henry VII, had his crown by inheritance from the house of Lancaster. The problem for Tudor Protestants would be to reclaim both Wyclif and Lancaster.

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<sup>34</sup> Tyndale, “The Prophet Jonas,” The Works of the English Reformers: William Tyndale and John Frith, ed. Thomas Russell, v. I, (printed for Ebenezer Palmer: London, 1831), pp 64-5.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas More, *The Apology*, The Complete Works of St. Thomas More (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), vol. 9, p. 162.

<sup>36</sup> As well as emphatically Protestant.

## B. RESSURECTING OLDCASTLE

Written in continental exile during the reign of Henry Tudor, John Bale's A Brief Chronicle Concerning the Examination and Death of Sir John Oldcastle is an effort to imagine the Wycliffite martyr as the harbinger of a Reformation that, at that moment in Bale's own life, seemed far from complete. A lapsed Carmelite and quondam Catholic hagiographer, Bale intervened at this moment with a new, Protestant history, retrieving a man executed for heresy and treason as a type for the loyal English Protestant: persecuted, yes, but without compromising his allegiance to his monarch. Bale's martyrology becomes the core of the compendious and growing collection of Oldcastle documents published by his collaborator John Foxe in successive editions of his Acts and Monuments. The texts produced by this first rank of Protestant controversialists would have to confront or carefully elide issues of religious heterodoxy, power politics, the legitimacy of the Lancastrian monarchy and its heirs, in order to see the past as figuring the Reformation moment. Notwithstanding his reputation as the bellwether of a new liberal historiography, Bale's apocalyptic historical paradigm is in a crucial manner anachronistic and uncritical, homogenizing historical moments and collapsing distinctions. His notion of reform as in all ages the same project would put forth "Protestantism" as self-evident thing rather than what it manifestly was—a normative category—eliding doctrinal divisions between reformists of different stripes. If the English church of the 1540s varied with Bale's notions of what it should be, it could only be because the process of Reformation was not complete.

Bale saw the fifteenth-century events surrounding Oldcastle's trial and execution as continuous with the process of reform in which he was embroiled, and did justice to them insofar as he was able, a judgment that is often offered with more than a hint of critical smugness. In

treating of reformist figures from Luther to Oldcastle, Ritchie Kendall informs us that "to their divergent theological outlooks, temperaments, and qualities of mind, Bale was oblivious."<sup>37</sup> For all of this imputed lack of subtlety, Bale's narrative of Oldcastle's eclipse would shape representations of these events for centuries, as well as providing a paradigm text for his associate John Foxe, who would generate a veritable martyrology industry. It's clear that Bale saw his own work as a foray into a new sort of chronicle; "I would wish some learned Englishman . . . to set forth the English Chronicles in their right shape, all affections set apart."<sup>38</sup> While we might well desire a gloss on this often-quoted passage, it may be that Bale is calling for a "secular" history of a sixteenth-century kind, produced from without the institution of the church. Certainly, Bale is no empiricist, but rather a Protestant illuminated by grace. As Leslie Fairfield writes, "he never. . . approached historical research or writing in a spirit of calm disinterest. Antiquary he was, but one passionately engaged in demonstrating the truth which he knew before he began."<sup>39</sup> Bale's Chronicle is a synthesis drawn primarily from two sources: a Protestant pamphlet published in Antwerp, possibly by Tyndale, entitled The Examinacion of Syr Iohn Oldcastel, and Thomas Netter of Walden's Fasciculi Zizaniorum Wiclevi, the work of one of Bale's one-time Carmelite brothers.<sup>40</sup> More broadly, Bale draws upon various clerical sources, notably Polydore Vergil, the target of much reformist invective. An important feature of Bale's method is to indict glozing Papists with their own words (and some of their own methods). This hodgepodge of sources with their very different ideological positions demands a

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<sup>37</sup> Ritchie D. Kendall, The Drama of Dissent: The Radical Poetics of Nonconformity, 1380-1590 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 90.

<sup>38</sup> John Bale, Select Works of John Bale, D. D. (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 8.

<sup>39</sup> Leslie P. Fairfield, John Bale: Mythmaker of the English Reformation (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1976), 27.

<sup>40</sup> On Bale's sources, *ibid.* p. 124-5.

rigid textual discipline organizing the whole, with the ubiquitous glosses hovering like a bribed umpire at the edge of the fray.

As Peter Happé reports, for Bale the English faithful are heirs to a primordial Christianity transmitted directly from Christ's disciples by the legendary Joseph of Arimathea, arriving well before the Roman church of St. Augustine of Canterbury.<sup>41</sup> Thus, for Bale, "Reformation" constitutes an effort to return to practices followed by the "primative church" immediately after the apostolic age."<sup>42</sup> Bale produces Oldcastle as the champion of a native and popular English belief against the incursions of a Romish heresy. Bale would recover Oldcastle as the most prominent Lollard of his day, at the center of the effort to reform the English church. In this effort, Oldcastle becomes the author of the late-14<sup>th</sup>-century "Lollard" bills put before parliament:

In the year of our Lord 1391 this noble lord Cobham, with certain other more, motioned the King at Westminster. . .that it were very commodious to England if the Romish Bishop's authority extended no further than the ocean sea or haven of Calais. . . . Whereupon the king made this act by consent of his lords, that no man from thenceforth should sue the pope in any matter. . .<sup>43</sup>

It is central to Bale's production of Oldcastle that, while he is militant in the service of God, his agenda is advanced through parliamentary means, possibly even in collaboration with his king. The potential problem of Oldcastle as central agency of fifteenth-century Lollardy is that it tends to draw him to the center of "Lollard" events both flattering and possibly damning to sixteenth-century Protestant interests. It is the edge of this precipice that the Protestant martyrologists must carefully navigate.

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<sup>41</sup> Peter Happe and John N. King. The Vocacyon of Johan Bale (Binghamton: Renaissance English Text Society, 1990), p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>43</sup> Bale, p. 11.

Many workers have commented upon Oldcastle's self-dramatization in the midst of his difficulties, as well as the manner in which his Protestant hagiographers have enhanced his history with dramatic or theatrical effects. Such theatricality, John Knott has argued, is the template for the dramatic quality which can be discerned in a tradition of Protestant martyr narratives and "would not have been seen as undermining the integrity of acts of witnessing, rather increasing their efficacy."<sup>44</sup> Sarah Beckwith has recognized the opposition between the martyr's self-representation and the depiction of the holy in religious images in Oldcastle's trial as some of the most densely coded and potentially subversive material in Bale. Asked by a friar if he would worship the cross of Christ, Oldcastle spreads his arms: "This is a very cross, yea, and so much better than your cross of wood, in that it was created of God. Yet will not I seek to have it worshipped." For Beckwith, "the dramatic reinscription of crucifixion on his own body, effected by the simple gesture of spreading his arms wide, emotively capitalizes on the full potentiality of the image of the crucifixion whilst simultaneously abjuring the dissimulative mediation of an actual image."<sup>45</sup> Stephen Greenblatt understands Oldcastle as seizing the symbolic initiative by this "brilliant piece of histrionic improvisation."<sup>46</sup> In a trope that Murray Roston has called "postfiguration," the Protestant (in this case, the Lollard) sees himself "in biblical terms, re-enacting or 'postfiguring' in his life leading incidents from the lives of scriptural heroes."<sup>47</sup> There is a sort of shocking audacity to the subversive identification in which the reformist, while rejecting the images of Christ or the saints, lays claim to such a

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<sup>44</sup> John R. Knott, Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature: 1563 – 1694 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 52.

<sup>45</sup> Sarah Beckwith, Christ's Body: Identity, Culture, and Society in Late Medieval Writings (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 72.

<sup>46</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 78-9. What critics have been reluctant to do is to question the "improvisational" nature of Oldcastle's gesture, but it is entirely possible that this was a Lollard commonplace, in the same manner that Oldcastle rings the changes on the subject of the "material" after the manner of other Lollards in their examinations.

<sup>47</sup> Murray Roston, Biblical Drama in England from the Middle Ages to the Present Day (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 71.

connection in her person. In much the same manner as Oldcastle, Anne Askewe is reported, in Bale and Foxe, to respond to her examiner's question on the Eucharist, wondering "wherefore St. Stephen was stoned to death . . ." <sup>48</sup> Again, a means by which the reader can accept this gesture is that the martyr never explicitly claims to be the image of Christ or Stephen, although for the reader that connection is unavoidable. Reproduced in Bale's martyrology, Oldcastle's gesture, the claim of a dissident identification with Christ in his suffering, takes on a more complicated dimension, for here Oldcastle has been put forward, first by Bale, later by Foxe and his successors, as an object of our veneration. In English Protestant representational theology, this is always a complex situation, calling upon certain kinds of denial or erasure that these martyr narratives must make. Around the question of the dramatic, in anticipating their own martyrdom in the manner of Oldcastle or Askew, martyrs demonstrate their relationship with divine providence while displacing the authorship of their dramatic acts from themselves. The persecutors, who may be the mechanism of the unfolding of an apocalyptic providence, set the scene. If a *martyr* is etymologically a "witness," it is a set of external circumstances that create the necessity of the act of witnessing.

An aspect of the dramatization of Oldcastle's inquisition that has elicited critical comment is Bale's emphasis various kinds of audience to his inquisition. <sup>49</sup> The dynamic between Oldcastle and his persecutors is inflected by the presence of (potentially unbiased) observers. Oldcastle's appeals directly to this audience: "Lo, good people, lo: for the breaking of God's law and his great commandments they never yet cursed me" <sup>50</sup> That it takes place before onlookers locates the drama of his trial, his imputed rhetorical points and the discomfiture of his judges in a public forum. It is to Arundel himself that Bale attributes this observation:

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<sup>48</sup> Foxe (1583), p. 1234.

<sup>49</sup> e.g., Knott, p. 45.

<sup>50</sup> Knott, p. 53; Bale, p. 29

Sir John, ye have spoken here many wonderful words to the slanderous rebuke of the whole spirituality, giving a great ill example unto the common sort here, to have us in the more disdain.<sup>51</sup>

Oldcastle's response characteristically displaces responsibility onto his inquisitors: "Much more have you offended me than ever I offended you, in thus troubling me before this multitude"<sup>52</sup> His clerical judges have staged their own very public embarrassment. The question of publicness extends into matters theological. Challenged on the manner and matter of the altar bread, Oldcastle replies, "if God be upon my side (as I trust he is) but that there is Christ's body in form of bread, as the common belief is."<sup>53</sup> Through unnamed compatriots, Oldcastle has a bill copied and posted around London declaring his sacramental belief. Once again, the martyr's public openness causes the embarrassment of his persecutors: "After this the bishops and priests were much in obloquy both of the nobility and commons. . .partly. . .because his opinion. . .was perfect concerning the sacrament."<sup>54</sup> In the context of Bale's production of Oldcastle, we must resist the inclination to understand Oldcastle's profession of faith as a careful Lollard statement, sufficiently vague as to be unobjectionable. Bale certainly uses "perfect" here in its two senses of "without flaw" and "complete." The ratification of his sacramental theology by the "nobility and commons" locates his belief in the true English church – his opponents are, by extension, an alien influence, attempting to impose theological novelties.

There has been a certain amount of critical-historical discussion of Tudor representations of publicness, of critical public discourses, and the relevance of Habermas' category of the "bourgeois public sphere" to this historical moment. Thomas Betteridge is interested in the way that pro-Tudor histories rhetorically produce a public sphere of sorts in which the reader is

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<sup>51</sup> Bale, p. 40; Foxe (1563), p. 271.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Bale, p. 37; Foxe (1563), p. 270

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p. 45.

invited to join with a sort of polity to condemn “papist” acts or institutions and “spontaneously” endorse those flattering to the Tudor settlement. The diabolical nature of Romish machinations is revealed by their clandestine nature. In his discussion of the tract A litel treatise ageynste the mutteryng of some papists in corners, Betteridge explores the way in which the Protestant tract constructs itself as public and open in contradistinction to Catholic textual practices, “to oppose a form of reading/writing, ‘muttering’, that is inherently disruptive, disordered and private.”<sup>55</sup>

Bale works in a similar vein in his martyrology, producing Oldcastle as a representative of the people<sup>56</sup> and a popular religious practice. In contrast, when confronted with Oldcastle’s public document, the clerical panel “drew their heads together,”<sup>57</sup> composing surreptitiously a counterfeited abjuration in Oldcastle’s name. In a practice that articulates this populist openness, Bale’s chronicle reproduces the feigned recantation, as it does any number of documents critical of Oldcastle. Bale’s history is a sort of archive—this is even more the case in Foxe—inviting the reader to examine the evidence and render judgment. The reader is strongly identified with the audience to Oldcastle’s trial, witnesses to an event that is not remote and historically specific but continuous with our own experience of Reformation.

The question of the empirical existence of something like a public sphere is not supported by the literature of religious controversy. In continental exile, Bale composes a paradigm martyrology too radically Protestant to be tolerated in the England of Henry VIII. In it, he deploys a populist discourse of representation, openness, the public, imaginatively attributed to the Lancastrian England. What may be most interesting is the way in which populist discourses proliferate in a political situation not much characterized by representative political practices, freedom of debate, or an intellectual sector dedicated to a principle of rational deliberation. Jesse

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<sup>55</sup> Thomas Betteridge, Tudor Histories of the English Reformations, 1530-83 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), p. 47.

<sup>56</sup> Knott, p. 53.

<sup>57</sup> Bale, p. 45.

M. Lander has argued that it precisely around the question of *religion* that Habermas' formulation of *Offentlichkiet* fails to account for sixteenth-century political life. As much as we might be inclined to find proto-liberal social institutions in early-modern England, the religious controversies that were the content of much of political discourse in this period have little in common with the "ideal and idealized vision of Augustan reason engaged in unconstrained debate" that Lander would attribute to Habermas.<sup>58</sup> The nature of political representation in this period is characterized by the antagonism of the polemical texts. Public "debate," if it is fairly so characterized, served not to constitute a national intellectual community, but to foster increasing division and to delegitimize oppositional voices.

In Bale's account of Oldcastle's examination and death, the agency of the people as reservoir of the true faith is opposed to the malign agency of the English clergy. This opposition leaves out the sovereign, the fulcrum of right religious action for both Bale and Wyclif. While it is difficult to construct the intersection of Henry V with these events in a flattering light, Bale's representation of the king differs markedly from Tyndale's characterization of the house of Lancaster as a usurper dynasty. Bale's approach to characterization is not that of a humanist; there is no attempt at what we would think of as psychological realism. In Bale's narrative, Henry V is a complex character, his motivations occasionally crass, sometimes sympathetic, often as mysterious as providence itself. Bale claims that Archbishop Arundel and the bishops of England had made Henry "fit for their hand"—possibly a consequence of his inexperience as king.<sup>59</sup> While Bale does not shrink from all criticism of Henry, any blame in matters of religious policy is displaced from the king onto the prelates who surround him with ill counsel.

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<sup>58</sup> Jesse M. Lander, *Inventing Polemic: Religion, Print, and Literary Culture in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 17.

<sup>59</sup> Bale, p. 16.

In a diatribe against the chronicler Polydore Vergil, Bale argues that Henry was not the author of anti-Lollard policy:

And whereas he saith in the end, that the king thereupon made an act that they from thenceforward should be taken as traitors against his own person, which were proved to follow that sect, he maketh an abominable lie. For that act was made only at the bishops' complaint and false suit, in the first year of his reign. . .<sup>60</sup>

The construction of Henry as a king yet green in experience, his regard for Oldcastle alienated by parasitic clergymen, is picked up in Foxe:

Fyrst in the tyme of kyng Henry the fourth, he was sēt ouer to Fraunce to the Duke of Orlyance, he did obey. Afterward king Henry the fift, comming to the crown, he was of hym lykewyse well lyked and faouered, vntil the tyme þ<sup>t</sup> Thomas Arundel with his Clergy, cōplaying to the king, made bate betwene them.<sup>61</sup>

It must be said that even where Bale is superficially critical of Henry, in the text the king's inclination appears to have been to approach the question of Oldcastle's Lollard activism with the greatest delicacy. The king's signal failure, as Bale has construed it, is his abandonment of his loyal subject, in leaving him "so utterly"<sup>62</sup> to the mercy of the clergymen. If Henry sanctioned anti-Lollard policies, it is because his acquiescence was purchased by churchmen with the support of his dynastic ambitions: "They put the king in remembrance to claim his right in France, and granted him thereunto a dime, with other great subsidy of money."<sup>63</sup>

In his 1543 Yet a course at the Romysh Foxe, Bale argues that even in the reign of Henry Tudor, the bishops of the Church of England are secretly minions of the pope, and the failures of the church (from Bale's doctrinal perspective) can be explained by this mechanism. According to Rainer Pineas, "Bale maintains the useful fiction that Henry is a good Protestant who is being

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<sup>60</sup> Bale, p. 10.

<sup>61</sup> Foxe (1570), p. 676

<sup>62</sup> Bale, p. 18.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid*, p. 50

deceived by his popish bishops.”<sup>64</sup> Bale’s Actes of the English Votaries forged the myth of England as the “beleaguered isle”: essentially an extension of Protestant anti-papery into the nation’s past, a history in which an unblemished strain of the primordial church had always struggled against the political and spiritual taint of the Roman Antichrist.<sup>65</sup> In his *Oldcastle chronicle*, it is not difficult to read Lancastrian history as another moment of Reformation, pursued by Oldcastle through parliamentary action and the king as the proper agent of reform:

He admonished the kings, as Richard the Second, Henry the Fourth, and Henry the Fifth, of the clergy’s manifold abuses, and put into the parliament-house certain books concerning their just reformation. . .<sup>66</sup>

The persecution of Oldcastle is in the manner of an escalation of hostilities between the true church and her enemy, facilitated by an unfortunate pact between the young king and conniving bishops. The Roman clergy are depicted as having at once too much power and hardly any at all, beholden to the king’s power in the absence of popular support, “for they perceived themselves very far too weak else to follow against their enemies that they had so largely enterprised.”<sup>67</sup> In an interview with the king, Oldcastle makes a profession of loyalty that is akin to his statements of Christian belief, in which he strongly implies the role of the king in correcting religious error. It is in the abrogation or perversion of this royal authority that Henry invites disaster. Indeed, both the Romish clergy and the Lollard gentleman Oldcastle seem to give a nod to a royal authority in matters of religion.<sup>68</sup> That the reign of Henry V represents a dark interlude in the process of reform is developed in Foxe. While praising Henry’s “virtues

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<sup>64</sup> Rainer Pineas, “John Bale’s Non-Dramatic Works of Religious Controversy,” Studies in the Renaissance vol 9 (1962) p. 220

<sup>65</sup> Fairfield, p. 94.

<sup>66</sup> Bale, p. 11.

<sup>67</sup> Bale, p. 49.

<sup>68</sup> Bale, pp.17-8

... & great victories,” Foxe observes that the auguries at the king’s coronation were full of foreboding, “an excedyng stormy day, and so tempestuous, that many did wonder at the portent therof.”<sup>69</sup> This omen is strongly associated with Archbishop Arundel’s convening of a universal synod.<sup>70</sup> It is important to recognize that, err though the king may in matters of religion, it is the king’s error to make.

The possibility that the critique of authority in Wyclif’s work might have secular consequences is vehemently denied in Bale. When Archbishop Arundel complains that Oldcastle’s rabidly anti-papal talk will “maketh division or . . .dissention among the poor commons,” Oldcastle replies, “Both Christ and his apostles were accused of sedition-making, yet were they the most peaceable of men.”<sup>71</sup> Leveled at reformist martyrs, the accusation of civil crime is almost inevitably a slander by interested chroniclers and bad clerics. Foxe provides historical context for this argument:

Nemesion the Egyptian and true martyr of Christ, was he not first accused to bee a felon? And when that could not be proued, he was condēned at the same iudgement for a Christian: & therefore beyng cast into bandes, was scourged, by the commanndement of the president, double to the other felones: and at length was burned with the theeues, although he neuer was found thief nor felon.<sup>72</sup>

If Oldcastle were guilty of complicity in the 1414 uprising, his crime would be the greatest imaginable, short of regicide, and seemingly compassing it. The answer for Bale and Foxe is that the St. Giles’ Fields incident never happened, at least in the violent construction that had later been created around it. Turning Lancastrian histories on their heads, the king prepares for the confrontation with a Lollard host with some fanfare:

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<sup>69</sup> Foxe (1570), p. 663.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Bale, p. 36.

<sup>72</sup> Foxe (1570), p. 679.

The complaint was made unto the king of them that they had made a great assemble in S. Giles field at London, purposing the destruction of the land, and the subversion of the commonwealth. As the king was thus informed, he erected a banner (saith Walden) with a cross thereupon, (as the Pope doth commonly by his legates, when he pretendeth to war against the Turk) and with a great number of men entered the same field, where as he found no such company.<sup>73</sup>

Bale attacks Henry on the field of his greatest pretensions, as a military leader. The king vaingloriously enters the field to find. . . apparently nothing. The “uprising” is constituted after the fact in the work of propagandistic chroniclers in the service of the church. Bale claims this on the authority of Thomas Netter of Walden against other chroniclers.<sup>74</sup> Oldcastle’s escape, according to Bale, is purely coincidental. Bale sets the example for Foxe’s extensive defense of Oldcastle against the claims of Alanus Copus, attacking inconvenient chronicle reports through petty fault-finding. The only echo of possible Lollard militancy is Bale’s claim that Roger Acton, John Brown and John Beverlay were arrested (no doubt also coincidentally) for “quarrelling with certain priests.”<sup>75</sup>

If Oldcastle is not the author of the events in St. Giles’ fields, if his escape is only coincidentally “in the mean season,” if finally there was no “Oldcastle’s rising,” then the period of his flight is an anomalous intermission, an attempt to evade what we—in our after-knowledge—know Oldcastle to be. In this sense, he recalls Slavoj Žižek’s discussion of a figure in the dialectical process of history being “between two deaths”:

. . . an entity “becomes what it is” by realizing its own inherent negativity – in other words, by taking cognizance of its own death. What is “absolute knowledge” but a name for the final moment of this process, when “consciousness” purifies itself of every presupposition of a positive being – the moment paid for by radical loss, the moment which coincides with pure nothingness?<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Bale, p. 51.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p 50.

<sup>76</sup> Slavoj Žižek, For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor (London: Verso 1991), p. 67.

Such an entity persists because, in a strange sense, he doesn't know that he's dead. Oldcastle's flight into the Welsh borderlands is a one of the narrative's lacunae, a hole that refuses to be filled with positive action. While Oldcastle is the most notorious fugitive of his age, supposed author of every intrigue, in Bale his flight is a mysterious pilgrimage with only one possible objective. It recalls Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, a place where radical possibility might have been realized, but was not.

A critical problem of the literature of religious controversy is its unrelentingly polemical nature, nuanced as if with a sledgehammer, battering down all positions except those privileged by the text. Foxe himself seems to acknowledge the relentlessness of such a document, that eschews pleasure and serves "not so much to delight the eare, as to garnish the lyfe. . . and to encourage men to all kinde of Christian godlynes. . ." <sup>77</sup> It is not advertised as an Epicurian delight but a sort of exercise through which we attend while the text works itself out in overdetermined ways that the reader assimilates as her own, unconstructed conclusions. By reading itself in a strict manner, the text attempts to exhaust its own meaning, and yet there are many important points at which historical contingency refuses to be shaped to Bale's container. At an early point in Oldcastle's conflict with the religious authorities is this interview with the king:

Then said the Lord Cobham to the king, that he had appealed from the archbishop to the pope of Rome, and therefore he ought (he said) in no case to be his judge. And having his appeal there at hand ready written, he shewed it with all reverence to the king. Wherewith the king was then much more displeased than afore, and said angerly unto him, that he should not pursue his appeal: but rather he should tarry in hold, till such time as it were of the pope allowed; and then, would he or nilde he, the archbishop should be his judge. <sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Foxe (1570), p. 11.

<sup>78</sup> Bale, p. 23; Foxe (1563), p. 264.

This is a moment where Bale's polemical apparatus fails us. In a text in which the reader is so carefully and continuously positioned, it is difficult to say how this passage is to be read.

Oldcastle, who has been developed as an aristocrat of stature who has, with the king, pursued legislation to limit the jurisdiction of the pope, has appealed to the very authority that the Protestant reader (perhaps any reader of Bale) would expect him to reject. If the gloss on this passage claims that "The king here worshippeth the beast,"<sup>79</sup> it functions as a clumsy misdirection. It is Oldcastle here who invokes the authority of the pope, and we can only grasp at rationales: that the injustice alluded to is the frustration of the legal act itself, that "there was nothing allowed that the good Lord Cobham had lawfully afore required";<sup>80</sup> that the king resents the attack on the authority of his archbishop to hear the action (doubly problematic). The episode is, finally, a sort of historical anomaly that is present in Bale but imperfectly assimilated.

The textual imperative to give Oldcastle the advantage over his interlocutors in every instance similarly stumbles at points. In an exchange on the subject of whether it is possible to know who is among the saved, Thomas Netter of Walden challenges Oldcastle on the texts he cites in defense of his position:

Then said Doctor Walden unto him: "Ye make here no difference of judgments: ye put no diversity between the ill judgments, which Christ hath forbidden, and the good judgments, which he hath commanded us to have. Rash judgment and right judgment, all is one with you. So is judgment presumed and judgment of office."<sup>81</sup>

Netter has made an effort to engage with Oldcastle by citing a verse from Matthew, but even in matters of the textual, there is little common ground between Lollard and cleric. For Netter, the meaning of a biblical text is to be examined with all of the analytical tools of scholasticism and arranged in careful taxonomies. For Oldcastle, meaning is transparent, and argument consists of

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<sup>79</sup> Bale, p. 23.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, p. 34.

an accumulation of biblical texts of varying relevance. His exchange with Netter ends in an *ad hominem* attack: “Preposterous are your judgments ever more.” The narrative addresses any anxiety we might have about Oldcastle’s performance:

They were so amazed with his answers (not all unlike to them which disputed with Stephen), that they knew not well how to occupy their time, their wits and their sophistry . . .so failed them that day.<sup>82</sup>

Bale’s Oldcastle narrative ultimately fails to achieve perfect closure, to read itself so seamlessly that its cracks cannot be discovered. Historically, however, the tremendous success of Bale and Foxe suggest that any such dissident readings were effectively contained.

If a Protestant martyr is a witness to the word, he is also a victim who meets a horrible death in a manner reflecting God’s grace. In the teleological force of Bale’s narrative, Oldcastle is always headed toward this end; to confute the Pharisees after the manner of Stephen is die as he died. As presented by Bale, Oldcastle’s death is strangely generic:

As he was come to the place of execution. . .he fell down devoutly on his knees, desiring Almighty God to forgive his enemies. Then he stood up and beheld the multitude, exhorting them in most godly manner to follow the laws of God written in the scriptures, and in any wise to beware of such teachers as they see contrary to Christ in their conversation and living. . . Then he was hanged up there by the middle in chains of iron, and so consumed alive in the fire, praising the name of God so long as his life lasted.<sup>83</sup>

Bale does not offer any of Oldcastle’s final oration in first-person speech, though elsewhere he does not scruple to so dramatize chronicle record. Even the horror of burning alive is not emphasized. Instead, “In the end he commended his soul into the hands of God, and so departed hence most Christianly, his body resolved into ashes”<sup>84</sup> Oldcastle’s final act is one of language, almost simultaneous, it would seem, with the utter dissolution of his body.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, Bale’s

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<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*,

<sup>85</sup> This is not offensive to Susan Breitz Monta’s argument that there is a particularly Protestant species of “miracle” expressed in their martyrologies (see Susan Breitz Monta, *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England*

account of the entire event seems to suggest the martyr being purified, in the action of the executioner's flame, to a text. A discourse of refining surrounds martyrdom in the work of the Protestant controversialists. "As gold in the furnace doth God try his elect, and a most pleasant brent offering receiveth he them to rest," Bale observes. Foxe has also commented on this figure from Cyprian:

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saintes. Item, although before men they suffered tormentes, yet their hope is full of immortalitie: and being vexed in small thinges, they shall be well requited in great matters. For the Lord hath tried them as gold in the fyre.<sup>86</sup>

In the Protestant register, fire rids the martyr of the troublesome corporeality, of even the possibility of the veneration of relics associated with idolatrous Catholic practices. Notable in Foxe and Bale is the claim of the desirability of martyrdom, "Precious in the sight of the lord." The refining fire rids the martyr of all troublesome historical particularity, makes the apotheosis of the martyr—if not a generic thing—a consistent one, an iteration of an apocalyptic moment that is always in some sense the same. In a project like this, historical specificity is not a foundation for the effort of historical recovery, but functions as a sort of *auctoritas*, concrete instances where an eternal truth is revealed in the finite world. A figure like Oldcastle is but an instance of a recurring type, and for Bale the idiosyncrasies of the man and the events surrounding his examinations and execution are an ambivalent legacy, at once bestowing on Bale's account the stamp of the historical and detracting from the transparency of Oldcastle as a servant of the word.

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 58). While this work is very close to Monta in the symbolic importance of the dissolution of the body in Protestant martyrology, we note that Monta's emphasis is on the body as a miraculous "liminal site of testimony," where this work wishes to emphasize the translation of the body of the martyr into language.

<sup>86</sup> Foxe (1570), p. 83.

The impulse that is often at war with Bale's antiquarian sensibility is the desire to express that apocalyptic moment in its purity. Nowhere is this better realized than in the martyrdom of Evangelium, the allegorical Gospel, in Bale's A Comedy concerning Three Laws:

Though yow, for my sake impryson men cruellye,  
Famysh them, stocke them, and them with fagotes frye,  
Hurt me, ye shall not, for I can never dye,  
And they for my sake shall lyve perpetuallye.<sup>87</sup>

The character Evangelium is the epitome of the martyr as transparent witness to the word. The Gospel is given a body so that the body may be burned, purified away so that the word only remains, through a repeated process of violent martyrdom. Here the logic of martyrdom has a resonance with the logic of "creative" iconoclasm as understood by Ernest B. Gilman, in which "the image is made significant through being obliterated."<sup>88</sup> Tested to destruction by iconoclastic breakers, the image reveals itself as mere matter. In Foxe's production of the scene of Protestant martyrdom, repeated successively in apocalyptic time, the trivially factual body of the martyr is destroyed, and what we celebrate is an iteration of a durable template or archetype. The intersection of the logic of martyrdom and iconoclasm to a certain Protestant sensibility is articulated in Bale's account of Oldcastle's execution: "This terrible kind of death with gallows, chains, and fire, appeareth not very precious in the eyes of men that be carnal, no more than did the death of Christ when he was hanged up among thieves."<sup>89</sup> Bale makes evident to the reader the deception of the image even as it is invoked.

In the context of iconoclasm, the strange fact about the image of Oldcastle is that it continues to be an *image*. Foxe makes no bones about his desire to have martyrs such as Oldcastle not only as edifying examples of steadfast faith, but as pictures to be circulated:

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<sup>87</sup> John Bale, Complete Plays of John Bale ed. Peter Happé (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1986), p. 113.

<sup>88</sup> Gilman, p. 108.

<sup>89</sup> Bale, p. 55.

. . . me thinks I haue good cause to wish, that like as other subiectes, euen so also Kings and Princes, which commonly delite in heroicall stories, would diligently peruse suche monumentes of Martyrs, and lay them alwayes in sight, not alonely to read, but to follow, and would paint them vpon their walles, cuppes, ringes, & gates.<sup>90</sup>

In the manner of much of Protestant religious representation, in making of himself the image of the cross, Oldcastle is a figure who denies that he is a figure. Indeed, in the tradition beginning with Bale, images of the martyr accompanied the great Protestant martyrologies, beginning with the frontispiece of Bale's Brief Chronicle.<sup>91</sup>

As Margaret Aston and Elizabeth Ingram have observed, problematic though the frontispiece image may be under Protestant theories of religious representation, its importance is attested to by the manner in which it is echoed by the almost identical woodcut representation of Oldcastle in Foxe's 1559 Rerum in Ecclesia Gestarum.<sup>92</sup> The problems are manifold, but reflect Oldcastle's complex legacy. Here, he is the prototypical Protestant knight, "warrior of Jesus Christ," on the model of both classical heroes<sup>93</sup> and traditional Catholic and national figures like St. George. As appealing as such an image might be, it raises the troublesome legacy of the 1414 uprising.<sup>94</sup> When Oldcastle draws his sword in the service of the word, he comes into anxious proximity with the traitor described by Catholic writers like More and Harpsfield. Further, there is the incongruous crucifix, an image dramatically undermined by Oldcastle in Bale's narrative.<sup>95</sup> The shield of the Christian knight has become a representational problem. In his Faerie Queene, Edmund Spenser places in the hands of the Red Crosse Knight a shield accommodated to Protestant anxiety about religious imagery, though it bears an eponymous

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<sup>90</sup> Foxe (1570), p. 11.

<sup>91</sup> An image of the Oldcastle frontispiece can be seen at the Early English Books Online database (membership is required) at the following url:

[http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:image:721](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:721)

<sup>92</sup> Margaret Aston and Elizabeth Ingram, "The Iconography of the *Acts and Monuments*," John Foxe and the English Reformation ed. David Loades (Hants: Scolar Press, 1997), pp. 81-4.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid*, pp. 81-2.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid*, pp. 82.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid*.

cross. As Ernest B. Gilman has argued, Spenser frustrates expectations derived from the classical model of Aeneas' shield: that it should be decorated in a manner that invites *ekphrasis*, word-painting on the part of the poet that reflects their significant imagery. Instead, Red Crosse's shield is "scor'd" with a cross among the scars of battle in a process that Gilman likens tellingly to the making of a woodcut.<sup>96</sup>

In the woodcut illustration from Foxe's 1563 Acts and Monuments, the visual emphasis has shifted from Oldcastle the knight to Oldcastle the martyr at the very moment of his execution.<sup>97</sup> In the midst of a sea of pikes, Oldcastle hangs in chains, his eyes raised toward heaven. While two peripheral figures poke at the fire, a man in the foreground leads the horse that pulls the hurdle on which Oldcastle was dragged to the scene. Heroism in this context is not associated with martial virtue but with stoic endurance. Oldcastle, in the tension between these two woodcuts, encounters what John R. Knott has described as the "clash of metaphors":

Christians were taught to see themselves both as heroes, following their captain Christ into battle, and as victims, sheep to be slaughtered. . . . Being a Christian soldier implied not only having the courage to speak the truth boldly but being willing to imitate Christ in dying for it.<sup>98</sup>

These divergent representations of Oldcastle enact different solutions to the problem and opportunity posed by the historical Oldcastle. If, in keeping with the iconography of the Actes and Monuments, the woodcut tends to emphasize the horrific aspects of his martyrdom, the text that encloses it constrains our reading of that appearance. Foxe reads the manner of Oldcastle's execution into a classical model:

Thys is not to be forgotten which is reported by many that he should say that he should die here in earth after the sort and manner of Helias, . . . . For lyke as when Helias should leaue this mortal life, he was caryed in a fiery charyot into immortality: euen so the order

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<sup>96</sup> Gilman, p. 66.

<sup>97</sup> An image of the woodcut illustration can be seen in the online variorum edition of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* [http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/johnfoxe/main/2\\_1563\\_0277.jsp](http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/johnfoxe/main/2_1563_0277.jsp)

<sup>98</sup> Knott, p. 29.

of thys mannes death not beinge muche vnlike, follwed the fygure of his departure. For he fyrste of all being lyfted vp vpon the galowes, as into a chariot, and compassed in round aboute wyth flamyng fyre, what other thyng I pray you dyd thys most holy martir of Christ represent then onlye a fygure of a certayne Helias flying vp into heauen.<sup>99</sup>

The ignominy and horror of the martyr's end are reinscribed as a signal honor, the traitor and heretic as a sort of demigod, the gallows as the chariot of the sun. The deception of the image is revealed by the martyr's own (reported) prophetic claim. While much has been made of the polemical gruesomeness of Foxe's illustrations, the image of the degrading death of Oldcastle is problematized by a reading that confounds what is seen by carnal eyes.

If Protestant martyr narratives exist in a genealogy with a traditional Catholic devotional literature, it is a patrimony they deny. The defense of the reformist position in the broad polemical dispute over religious practice in the sixteenth century stands upon a fundamental (if dubious) textual distinction. In this argument, which can be found as early as Tyndale, the Protestant appeals to the transparency of scripture against the practice of the Roman church, tainted by comparison to Jewish hermeneutic practice:

The Jews have set up a book of traditions called the Talmud, to destroy the sense of the scripture unto which they give faith, and unto the scripture none at all be it ever so plain; even so have ours set up their Dunces, their Thomas, and a thousand like draffe, to establish their lies through falsifying the scripture.<sup>100</sup>

Jesse M. Lander has discussed an illustration in Williamson's 1613 pamphlet The Sword of the Spirit that has a similar valence. On a pair of scales are balanced the emblematic representations of Catholic and Protestant religious practice. Notable among the beads and candles of Catholic practice are a number of books, weighed against the single large volume that is the sole item on the Protestant side of the scale, the Bible: "By focusing of the material book, the emblem avoids

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<sup>99</sup> Foxe (1563), p. 281.

<sup>100</sup> William Tyndale quoted in Thomas More, The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer, Book II, p. 707.

the obvious problems of interpretation that confront all readers of any text.”<sup>101</sup> The singularity of the Bible is opposed to the plurality of Catholic books. This Protestant device appears in the Faerie Queene, where Spenser’s Red Crosse Knight does battle with the monster Errorr:

Therewith she spewd out of her filthy maw  
A floud of poison horrible and blacke,  
Full of great lumpes of flesh and gobbets raw,  
Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slacke,  
His grasping hold, and from her turne him backe:  
Her vomit full of bookes and papers was,  
Which loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke,  
And creeping sought way in weedy gras:  
Her filthy parbreake all the place defiled has.<sup>102</sup>

The strange corollary to the Protestant celebration of printing as the providential instrument of reform is the flexibility to which it can be turned to the work of error and heresy. In the frontispiece of the Acts and Monuments, the congregation of the blessed can be seen worshipping the word shining on high in the form of the tetragrammaton, a God without a body, a divine text without mediation. The lucid transparency of God’s word, free from the papist dross of patristic interpretation, is insisted upon even in the torrent of literature that stabilized and guaranteed Protestant reading practices.

The sixteenth-century discourses of martyrdom and iconoclasm are the corollary in language of real, material violence, society-wide in scope. Brad S. Gregory, drawing on the work of William Monter, estimates the total number of persons, English and continental, executed for their adherence to either a reformist or Catholic position in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries at approximately 5,000.<sup>103</sup> It would be a mistake to see the execution of

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<sup>101</sup> Lander, p. 24.

<sup>102</sup> Edmund Spenser, Faerie Queene, I.i 20.

<sup>103</sup> Brad S. Gregory, Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge Mass: Harvard UP 1999), p. 6; William Monter, “Heresy Executions in Reformation Europe,” in Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation, ed. Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 48-65. To put this figure in perspective, Gregory adds “The martyrologists’ primary raw material were not isolated occurrences, but they pale in comparison to the genocidal slaughters of the twentieth century. The Nazis on

heretics as an aberration of “Catholic” power. John Calvin was instrumental in the death by burning of the heretic Servetus in 1553, which was carried out with the agreement of Bullinger, Haller, and ultimately Melancthon. Alexandre Ganoczy has written,

For all these great leaders of the reform camp there existed no freedom of conscience to affirm a doctrine that deviated from theirs. The confession of faith was understood very “dogmatically” and as such was considered holy and untouchable. Its value stood higher than a person’s life.<sup>104</sup>

It is difficult to imagine the subjectivity of those who endorsed the gruesome execution of other human beings for religious heterodoxy, and the effort carries the troublesome suggestion that we are not guiltless in our own time of endorsing violence against others in projects that will seem, in the light of history, to be just as suspect. To execute heretics was understood as the prerogative of Tudor monarchs; Mary Tudor distinguished herself by the number of those killed in her reign, Henry VIII by the scope of religious opinions of those so punished. While Michel Foucault has discussed the relationship between the spectacle of execution and sovereign power, he only hints at the potential ambivalence of this spectacle: “. . .the people never felt closer to those who paid the penalty than in those rituals intended to show the horror of the crime and the invincibility of power.”<sup>105</sup> The problem of such a performance of power is that it can actually produce solidarity in just those parts of the population that it is intended to impress. In the case of heretic burning, the ascendant religious power is never capable of monopolizing the meaning of the martyr’s death. This is true on both sides of the confessional divide, and it appears that sixteenth-century martyr literature thrived on disputes like those surrounding Oldcastle, the executed Jesuit Edmund Campion, or Archbishop Thomas Cranmer.

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average killed more Jews *each day* in 1941 and 1942 than there were Christians executed for heterodoxy in the entire sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.”

<sup>104</sup> Alexandre Ganoczy, “Calvin’s Life,” The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 18.

<sup>105</sup> Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (New York: Vintage Books, 1977) , p. 62

It is no easier to sympathize with the reformist zeal that led Protestant England to destroy its heritage in medieval art. The sort of act for which the Essex iconoclasts who destroyed the Dovercourt rood were executed in 1532 had become state policy within a decade. The Royal Injunctions of 1538, drafted by Thomas Cromwell, attacked images as idolatrous and mandated their removal from places of worship. It is a bit ironic that a Protestant movement that had repudiated the piety of good works as something tainted by the *ex opere operato* of traditional piety should dedicate itself to the work of iconoclasm in such a zealous, even frenzied way. The record keeping of the iconoclast William Dowsing represents an obsessive toting-up, not only in a sort of bookkeeping register, but in a distorted reflection of the economies of mass-saying, verse-reciting and candle-burning of Catholic practice. There may be a relationship between state-mandated iconoclasm and the act of consecration. In traditional Catholic practice, the official consecration of a church must be preceded by an act involving saintly relics: “On the evening preceding the day of consecration, the consecrating bishop places in a reliquary the relics of the martyrs, which are to be placed in the altar, three grains of incense, and an attestation written on parchment.”<sup>106</sup> For the Protestant iconoclast, the destruction of the saints and holy family in religious imagery is part of a rejection of the intercessory value of bodies, from the Eucharist to Christ’s image on the cross to the *cheirotomia* whereby ordination in the church is conferred by the laying on of hands. In the English Protestant instance, this is best understood as an act of de-consecration: as in the rejection of pilgrimage, it is the bible around which Protestant worship coheres, not a physical place defined by its relationship to the relic of a saint.

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<sup>106</sup> The Catholic Encyclopedia, s.v. “Consecration,” (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04276a.htm>).

As Andrew Graham-Dixon has observed, “Nothing says more about British culture than the holes that have been punched into the fabric of its past.”<sup>107</sup> The phenomenon of iconoclasm is not the obscure concern of a radical Protestant minority, but pervades the art and intellectual work of early-modern England. The visual piety that was an integral part of traditional religious practice had been sanctioned by a theory elucidated by the Council of Nicea:

. . .to these [images] should be given due salutation and honorable reverence not indeed that true worship of faith which pertains alone to the divine nature. . .For the honor which is paid to the image passes on to that which the image represents, and he who reveres the image reveres in it the subject represented . . .

For many in the late-sixteenth century, the mechanism by which the reverence done to an image was transferred to its right object no longer seemed to be functioning as it should. In Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Polonius’ pedantic critique of a letter written by Hamlet to his daughter seems to articulate this disorder under heaven: “*To the celestial, and my soul’s idol, the most beautified Ophelia*” (2.2.109-10). The ultimate object of Hamlet’s worship is the remote, “celestial” Ophelia. Hamlet does worship to her image or *eidolon* in a manner that should establish this metaphysical connection, but it runs aground on the “beautified” object of his devotions, which, for the Wittenberg-educated prince, is reduced to a mere artifice, a thing constructed of crass material stuff, a “juggling” like the Rood of Grace. As a result, any pretension to divinity comes toppling down.

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<sup>107</sup> Andrew Graham-Dixon, A History of British Art: Dreams and Hammers (BBC, 1996).

#### IV. RUDE MECHANICALS, FRACTURED ELOQUENCE, AND THE THEATRICAL ICON

The London stage, one target of the iconoclastic tendencies of Reformation iconoclasm, was a complex social phenomenon, at one moment bodying forth the practices that most offended the antitheatricalists, at another serving as the platform for Protestant theological positions. In placing bodies in view, bodies that dissimulated their class or gender for the pleasure of audiences, the theater transiently licensed the transgression of social boundaries on the part of both actors and audience. At the focus of theatrical embodiment, a variety of *dramatis personae* are produced standing in different relations to Reformation theories of representation. Objects of desire themselves, some *dramatis personae* seem to be imbued with desires of their own, with a theatrical consciousness that threatens to escape from the drama.

Rhetoric too is a site of uneasiness for Reformation Protestantism. In setting their belief apart from the dogma of despised popery, English Protestants demanded that Christ's reference to the bread of communion, "This is my body," be understood as a metaphor. In reading the scriptures, perhaps the defining act of Protestant piety, the transparent truth of God's word demanded that the metaphorical play of biblical language be significantly curtailed. Rhetoric is also implicated in the debate over the social value of the theater. While its defenders made recourse to the moral-didactic potential of stage plays, its detractors knew it to be a fake: dissembling words emerging from false bodies, a commodity of flesh and rhetoric sold for pleasure.

## A. THE FLESH MADE WORD

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term *trope* comes into the English language in the pamphlet “The Supper of the Lord” long attributed to William Tyndale: “If you be so sworn to the literal sense in this matter, . . . you will not in these words of Christ, This is my body etc., admit in so plain a speech any trope.”<sup>1</sup> In this way, this fundamental rhetorical figure is introduced to the speakers of English in an argument against the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and an admonition on how the Protestant is to read John and I Corinthians. There is something almost paradoxical in this, since the relationship of English Protestant biblical exegesis to the rhetorical legacy of continental humanism is a troubled one. For the Catholic humanist Erasmus, the Christian faith was everywhere illuminated and propagated through rhetoric. A hermeneutic revealing the rhetoric of divine speech could free the scriptures from an impoverished literalism while avoiding the dangers of what Manfred Hoffmann describes as “the multiple choices of an arbitrary libertinism.”<sup>2</sup> For Erasmus, as it would be for many others, a central problem of hermeneutics is the containment of heterodox meaning. The scripture is rescued from its “constricted literal sense” through the mediation of “God’s *verbum*, Christ, that endows the letter with the freedom of the spirit to convey its true meaning.”<sup>3</sup> That rhetoric has a role in the teaching of this truth is to be expected. In his Ecclesiastes, Erasmus advocates a panoply of rhetorical techniques in preaching, a theater of the word appropriate to a cosmos ordered on rhetorical principles.

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “trope”: “1533 TINDALE *Supper of the Lord* Cv, If ye be so sworne to the litteral sense in this matter, that ye will not in these wordes of Christe, Thys is my bodye &c, admitte in so playne a speech anye troope” I have modernized the spelling in the above.

<sup>2</sup> Manfred Hoffmann, Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutic of Erasmus (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 89.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

To the English Protestant, the valorization of the literal sense conditions an awkward relationship toward humanist rhetoric where it impinges upon the scriptures. For Erasmus and his Catholic compatriots, Paul's injunction, "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6), has a clear hermeneutic referent, liberating us from a crass and dangerous literalism.

Hence the Protestant Thomas Swynnerton's complaint:

The letter killeth, The letter killeth, The letter killeth, Take heed (say they) the letter killeth. With this pitiful noise, and most miserable refuge, they stop the mouths of the simple and unlearned. With this sword they subdue all dreadful doubts.<sup>4</sup>

Curiously, Swynnerton's defense of the transparency of scriptural language appears in a text that advertises itself as a *rhetoric*: his Tropes and Figures of Scripture. In Swynnerton's Protestant tropology, the scope of sacred rhetoric is radically constrained: "We at this time will hold us content, and right well paid, to bestow our diligence, about the bringing to light of those parts, which of mere necessity be required to the avoiding of jeopardies in dangerous places."<sup>5</sup> For Swynnerton, the rhetorical interpretation of scripture is governed by what has been described as the "absurdity criterion." As Richard Rex writes, in Swynnerton's rhetorical exegesis, "The literal sense is to be adhered to except when to do so entails absurdity, blasphemy, heresy or immorality."<sup>6</sup> Like the author of "The Supper of the Lord," Swynnerton requires rhetoric to rescue the scriptures from doctrinal error on the Eucharist and in other matters, but that rhetoric is a court of last resort and not the pervasive hermeneutic championed by Erasmus.

In this way, the relationship of Erasmus to English Protestant humanism<sup>7</sup> is a genealogy that cannot be reduced to a simple binary of agreement and opposition. This is nowhere more evident than around the question of the embodied Christ. The Council of Constance of 1415

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Swynnerton, The Tropes and Figures of Scripture in A Reformation Rhetoric (Cambridge, RTM Publications, 1999), 97-8. I have modernized the spelling in this and the following quotations from Swynnerton.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 116.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Rex, A Reformation Rhetoric: Thomas Swynnerton (Cambridge, RTM Publications, 1999), 88.

<sup>7</sup> And anti-humanism, for that matter.

made palpable the church's position on the centrality of Christ's fleshly embodiment through its promulgation of the doctrine of transubstantiation, which invoked Christ's real presence in the Eucharist mediated by a cleric who received his authority bodily, from the hands of those who had received that authority from Christ. Peter Womack's work on the York religious pageant suggests that the purpose of the religious drama was to invoke Christ's bodily and spiritual presence in the community. In late-Medieval England, the (not uncontested) understanding of a community of the faithful realized through the fleshly body of Christ is articulated through the feast of Corpus Christi, whose religious and civic importance grew during the fourteenth century, among whose observances were a panoply of theatrical representations of Christ's life and suffering, culminating in the procession of the consecrated Eucharist through the community, "[A] total *permeation* of the town by the divine body, whose originating oneness their very multiplicity denotes."<sup>8</sup> In this late-medieval corporal piety, the mundane body of player or priest invokes the saving presence of Christ. Thus, in Honorius Augustodensis' often-cited "*De tragodediis*," quotidian religious observances are explicitly identified with the theater:

It is known that those who recited tragedies in the theater represented to the people, by their gestures, the actions of conflicting forces. Even so, our tragedian represents to the Christian people in the theater of the church, by his gestures, the struggle of Christ, and impresses upon them the victory of his redemption. So when the priest says *Pray*, he expresses Christ placed for us in agony, when he admonished the apostles to pray. By the liturgical silence, he signifies Christ as a lamb without voice being led to the sacrifice. . .<sup>9</sup>

Representation for Honorius has this quality of doubleness, the cleric present as himself and yet representing Christ to the faithful through a theatrical identification, often in the mass, where these significations converge upon that moment where the officiating priest repeats Christ's

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Womack, "Medieval Drama," in *English Drama: A Cultural History*, ed. Simon Shepherd and Peter Womack (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Honorius Augustodunensis, *Eucharisticon*, *Patrologiae*, 172:12543 A-1255, quoted in Michal Kobialka, *This is My Body: Representational Practices in the Early Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), p. 149.

words, "*Hoc est corpus meum*," and the quasi-theatrical embodiment of Christ in his vicar becomes the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

We find Erasmus' desire for Christ's textual incarnation in an awkward relationship to this corporal piety. For the Catholic humanist, Christ is more perfectly present in the scriptures than ever was he in his fleshly body, the *verbum dei* completed in a New Testament that represents the sum of God's revelation: the flesh made word. It is this trajectory that English Protestantism would follow, to the extreme of the destruction of its own heritage in religious art and drama. While iconoclastic hammers chipped the faces from figures of saints and patriarchs, the regional religious drama first responded to the new Protestant moment through a tactical retreat. If the representation of Christ or the deity was forbidden, this still left significant scope for the traditional religious theater associated with East Anglia, the Midlands, and the North of England. Indeed, the historical record does not indicate the wholesale suppression of the cycle plays by the sudden fiat of a Protestant state either under Edward VI or after even Elizabeth's accession in 1558. Instead, in a regionally variable history that has been mapped out by Michael O'Connell, there is a period in which ecclesiastical authorities intervened in the religious drama in an effort to bring it into accord with Protestant orthodoxy.

The plays dramatizing the Virgin are a barometer of Protestant intervention, and it is not surprising that they should reflect the tides of the Tudor reformations:

In its first performance after Edward's accession, in 1548, the city council [of York] specified that "certen pagauntes" were to be omitted, "That is to say/ the deying of *our* Lady / assumpcion of *our* Lady/ and Coronacion of *our* Lady." The following year the same exception was made. . . .[In 1554], however, after Mary Tudor's accession and the return of Catholicism, the plays that had been omitted were again played by the guilds that had previously owned them, a state of affairs that continued throughout Mary's reign. But when the cycle was performed for the first time in Elizabeth's reign in 1561,

the three plays on the Virgin were again omitted, as they were in subsequent Elizabethan performances.<sup>10</sup>

The historical record from York, Chester and elsewhere suggests that the regional religious theater remained a robust and integral part of these communities throughout the reigns of successive Tudor monarchs. The guilds whose responsibility the plays were seem to have done what they could to either omit offensive plays or to edit existing plays to conform to reformed doctrine<sup>11</sup> (the Norwich Paradise play survives in two versions, one of which is explicitly a Protestant correction).<sup>12</sup> The ultimate failure of the effort to redact the plays points to the genuinely intractable problem posed by religious drama under the new orthodoxy. It might seem eminently Protestant that a reformed theologian intervene in the *book*—in the play as a *text*—but the real problem was the embodiment of religious figures and events in performance, a thing that escapes textuality. For a Calvinist like Edmund Grindal, whose archbishopric of York marked the end of that city’s religious drama, the dramatic representation of the holy was of a piece with its “idolatrous” representation in art: “Clearly, what was wanted by the ecclesiastical authorities at York. . . was not a biblical drama in conformity with reformed theology, but no biblical drama at all.”<sup>13</sup>

With the waning of the regional religious drama and the emergence of the London theater, the concerns of Protestant anti-theatrical iconoclasts are secularized: generalized to apply to representations that are not religious but exist for the iconophobe in a continuum from the idols of the tainted Roman church to other forms of alluring visual display, and the stage in particular. In a warning against the danger of boy actors portraying women, John Rainoldes

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<sup>10</sup> Michael O’Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye; Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 23-4

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, 24.

reminds the reader, “men may be ravished with love of Stones, of dead stuffe, framed by gravers to beautifull women’s likeness.”<sup>14</sup> The graven image of the idol has become a pornographic one, and that image extended to the cross-dressing boy actor, who tempts the viewer to homoerotic passion. The Catholic iconophile doing reverence to an image is not simply analogous to the theatergoer titillated by cross-dressing boys, it is the same phenomenon, “men ravished of stones” being capable of such excesses. The danger of the visual is the danger of things that misrepresent themselves, that are at once stone and Virgin, actor and character. For Rainoldes’ fellow polemicist Stephen Gosson, the stage is explicitly Catholic; a device of the devil for the undoing of Tudor Protestantism.<sup>15</sup>

The cultural prominence of the antitheatrical discourses has been subjected to some debate, whose divergent tendencies may be represented on the one hand by Jean Howard, who has argued that “the topoi and conventions of antitheatrical discourse provide a language by which to render England’s condition intelligible,”<sup>16</sup> and on the other by Thomas Postlewait, who writes, “the ‘antitheatrical prejudice’ has become, within the context of studies of English Renaissance culture, one of those ideas we now accept with little of no reservation.”<sup>17</sup>

Postlewait takes particular umbrage at the construction of the theater as an fragile enclave subject to monolithic “Protestant” attack.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, a construction of broad and undifferentiated

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<sup>14</sup> John Rainoldes, The Overthrow of Stage-playes (1599), p. 34.

<sup>15</sup> Jean Howard, The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 133.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Postlewait, “Theatricality and antitheatricality in renaissance London,” in Theatricality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 104.

<sup>18</sup> In this view, the antitheatrical tracts have been given underserved critical prominence, and Postlewait quotes with approval Stephen Orgel’s claim, “It is necessary to remember that the antitheatrical tracts are pathological. They share assumptions with the culture as a whole, but their conclusions are eccentric” (Stephen Orgel, Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 35). It is difficult to say what “pathological might signify in this historical sense; it is as if a negative valuation has been coupled with the notion that these objects are not properly of their historical moment, a sort of tumor in an otherwise healthy historiography. And, it should be added, Postlewait objects to the use of “theatricality” as a hermeneutic category to explore power and representation in the Early Modern period, particularly in the hands of New Historicist and Cultural Materialist criticism: “. . .in some of the current scholarship on renaissance theatre and

“Protestant antitheatricalism” does not do justice to the strange affinities and antipathies of a reforming England and the dramatic stage. We should consider the career of Anthony Munday, a playwright of sustained popularity<sup>19</sup> whose works include Fedele and Fortunio (printed in 1584), and an antitheatrical writer early into the fray, author of A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters (1580).<sup>20</sup> Over a period of several decades, Munday wrote several pageants celebrating the installation of London’s lords mayor, thus representing a relationship between the theater proper and the theatrical staging of civic power. Munday’s case would seem to suggest that the theater and the discourses that would attack it could exist in a strange sort of intimacy, and that both playwright and pundit operated within a complex set of affiliations.

If criticism should not overestimate the cultural prominence of Protestant antitheatricalism, no more can it argue that of the dramatic stage. As Steven Mullaney has argued, “Elizabethan drama is a relatively transient phenomenon.”<sup>21</sup> Temporally, the drama existed between the suppression by Protestant authorities of its ancestor, the cycle and morality drama, and the closing of the theaters by a Puritan government in 1642. Politically, the theater existed between the power of the city and the royal license, while antitheatrical pamphleteers and the London authorities called for its repeal or, as we have seen, turned its powers to their own ends. Geographically, the theater existed amongst the stews and animal shows of the “licenses,” whence, according to Mullaney, it developed its particular vantage on the social and political world:

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society the idea of theatricality has become a pseudo-concept; it neither describes nor classifies events in a historically specific manner because, in a reified manner, it exists, before the fact, as a framing (tautological) condition.” Postlewait, p. 121.

<sup>19</sup> Munday was still receiving commissions from Philip Henslowe in 1602.

<sup>20</sup> Notoriously, Munday was brutally caricatured as Posthaste in John Marston’s Histrionomastix.

<sup>21</sup> Steven Mullaney, The Place of the Stage: License, Play and Power in Renaissance England (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 55.

A social and political distance was . . . established when popular drama took liberties with the royal license and thus appropriated the liberties of the city. In doing so, it gained a different sort of license: a liberty that was at once moral, , ideological, and topological, a freedom to experiment with a wide range of perspectives on its own times.<sup>22</sup>

The very liminality of the drama conditioned its self-understanding, a theatricality whose reflexivity was not uncontaminated by the heated cultural conversations about its method..

Indeed, it may be that certain aspects of dramatic representation were better theorized by those who condemned the theater than by its would-be defenders. Crucially, the Protestant anti-humanists could discuss pleasure in a way that the defenders of the stage could not. In his An Apology for Actors, Thomas Heywood praises the theater as a vehicle for moral normativity and ideological interpellation: “Playes are writ in this ayme. . .to teach subjects obedience to their King, to shew the untimely ends of such as have moved tumults, commotions, and insurrections.”<sup>23</sup> We are nevertheless free to doubt that audiences were attracted to plays by their homiletics. For the antitheatrical writers, the appeal of the stage was the magnetism of visible bodies, whose class- and gender transvestism signaled the doubleness that was their state, as well as the dangerous volatility with which they could infect civil society.

The morally troublesome understanding of the stage articulated in antitheatrical polemic, the conflux of desire, the innate falseness and idolatry of vision, the deception of the body, are dramatized in Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus (~1592). For all of his apparently significant intellectual accomplishment, Faustus first stumbles in a manner that articulates a characteristic Reformation anxiety: he engages in bad biblical exegesis:<sup>24</sup>

I do confess it, Faustus, and rejoice:  
'Twas I that, when thou wert i'the way to heaven,  
Damm'd up thy passage; when thou took'st the book

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>23</sup> In Howard, *op. cit.* , p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Westlund, “The Orthodox Christian Framework of Marlowe’s *Faustus*,” Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900, vol. 3, no. 2 (Spring, 1963), p. 194.

To view the Scriptures, then I turn'd the leaves,  
And led thine eye. (5.2.99-103)

Indeed, it is the repeatedly through the *eye* that Falstaff is beguiled and beguiles others. When Falstaff demands a wife, Mephistophilis puts him off with the promise of courtesans, “She whom thine eye shall like, thy heart shall have” (2.2.156). Similarly, when his familiar devil produces the semblance of Helen of Troy, she is speechless, a phantasm or disguised devil, which Mephistophilis has produced “in twinkling of an eye” (5.1.94). Pleasure, in both the sexual and the broader aesthetic sense, is figured as visual, as in the moment when Faustus views the world in miniature, “And what might please mine eye, I there beheld” (3.1.76). The falseness of sight is coupled to the falsity of the theatrical imposture in the following line, in which Faustus declares, “Then in this show let me an actor be” (3.1.77).

The indictment of the visual in Doctor Faustus is related to the dramatic undermining of the body. When Mephistophilis reminds Faustus that he has sold the devil his soul, he replies, “Ay, and body too; but what of that?” (2.1.137). As Joseph Westlund has observed, “Faustus’ reply is very characteristic, for the body seems more real to him than the soul.”<sup>25</sup> In fact, the drama reveals that Faustus’ body is itself a kind of palpable fiction. This is the stuff of comedy in the scene with the cozened Horse-courser. Having discovered that the “horse” he has bought of Faustus is nothing more than a bundle of hay, the Horse-courser returns to call Faustus to account:

I kept a hallowing and whooping in his ears, but all could not wake him. I seeing that,  
took him by the leg and never rested pulling till I had pulled me his leg quite off, and now  
‘tis at home in my hostry. (4.6.56-60)

The theological rationale for the comic action here is precisely that of those iconoclasts who demanded that the images they were about to destroy demonstrate their humanity by speaking or

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 198.

drinking wine.<sup>26</sup> The unusual status of Faustus' body is further endorsed by the Horse-courser keeping the leg as a sort of debased relic. If Faustus' body is an idol in the Protestant register, it is the idol that he worships, the Vitruvian Man, the locus of his humanistic pretensions. What is comic in his exchanges with the Horse-courser becomes tragic in the play's final act, where the scholars discover what has been left behind when Faustus is dragged down to Hell: "O, help us heaven, see, here are Faustus' limbs / All torn asunder by the hand of death!" (5.3.6-7). What Faustus' humanist allies find is the dramatic counterpart to the shattered icon: the thing to which Faustus attributed a value that did not reside there at all. Its emptiness, its mere substance is revealed by its destruction.

There is no single theatrical body. The figure of the *dramatis persona* can body forth qualities that endorse, deny, or complicate the notions of the Protestant antitheatrical polemics. The theatrical body is both a place of signification and something more. Of course, the body is a surface on which may be displayed the sartorial signs of status or gender, a sign that may be arrayed in more elaborate displays and rhetorics. We are not so naïve that we would want to invoke the body somehow prior to its intersection with culture, and yet there are qualities of the body that are not primarily semiotic. The body is also a presence making certain demands upon us. In pleasure and in pain, the body is an insistent thing before us, calling upon attention, desire, revulsion<sup>27</sup> (and yes, available to be decked and choreographed according to the codes of dress and custom). In thinking the dramatic body, it is useful to think in terms of seduction. In seduction, my body is not some "natural" body prior to cultural codes, but a perfect, a dissimulated, a *desirable* body. The anti-theatrical polemics recognized this quality of the visual availability of bodies decked in sartorial disguise as a characteristic quality of the theatrical

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<sup>26</sup> Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 131-2

<sup>27</sup> One only need think of those things that mimic the body: we've all known the shock of mistaken recognition when something (doll, mannequin, etc.) seems for an instant to be a living body before us.

deception on the part of both company and audience. In this way, it is perfectly fitting that such an eminently theatrical creature as hunchbacked Richard III should so twist body and words to seduce the lady Anne. The language of the *dramatis persona* is generated at the intersection of its present body and its action (the kneeling Richard Gloucester offers Anne the blade while choreographing subsequent actions: “Take up the sword again, or take up me” 1.2.183). The body—vulnerable, desiring—is the tangible marker that its words are rhetorical in the sense that Bakhtin would insist upon: the utterance that implies a *speaker*. The words of the character on stage emerge from desirous bodies and are heard by other desiring bodies in the audience. In the antitheatrical discourses, this desire can be understood as explicitly sexual. In Steven Orgel’s work, the anti-humanist tracts understand stage and pit as loci of a markedly amorphous sexual desire: “[W]hat the spectator is ‘really’ attracted to is an undifferentiated sexuality.”<sup>28</sup> In their attacks on the theater, pamphleteers like Rainoldes, Stubbes and Prynne were free to understand the theater in terms of *pleasure*, if only to condemn it. Marlowe’s play stages the body of Falstaff only to demonstrate that the body, locus of intellectual vanity and corporal pleasure, is itself a sort of idol.

Interestingly, and in the manner of a great deal of Protestant iconoclastic discourse, Doctor Faustus makes a clear distinction between images to be shunned, and images to be endorsed. In act three, in Rome, Faustus and Mephistophilis observe as the pope treads on Bruno, a rival elected by the Emperor, “as Pope Alexander, our progenitor, / Trod on the neck of German Frederick” (3.1.137-8). As Leslie M. Oliver has argued, the Pope’s historical reference is one familiar to the readers of the Acts and Monuments, and visually reproduces one of its

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<sup>28</sup> Orgel, 29.

prominent woodcuts.<sup>29</sup> While condemning an iconology, dramatized as both pagan and Catholic, one that demands that we attend to the presence of the body, Doctor Faustus is inclined to endorse an alternative one, perhaps recuperating the stage as a place of moral/visual instruction.

## B. THE LIE OF IDENTIFICATION

The difficulty that adheres to the criticism of character often emerges from a confusion of effects or a conflation of critical categories. A critical genealogy from Aristotle to Coleridge and beyond has depended upon a conflation of sympathy and identification through the denial of that aspect of theatricality that has come to be known as “perspective.” In a manner not unrelated, the relationship between dramatic rhetoric and the *dramatis persona* has been subjected to a variety of critical approaches without illuminating certain necessary qualities of the dramatic presence. The drama of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England produces, alongside an emerging sort of historical consciousness, a reflection upon the relationship between audience and *dramatis persona* that underscores the problem of identification. If comedy was the natal home of metadramatic reflexivity, no surprise, then, that Beaumont and Fletcher’s 1613 comedy The Knight of the Burning Pestle can be read as a meditation on theatrical self-awareness and the question of identification.

Transgressing the division between audience and action, hopping up on the stage to interrupt the Prologue, the Citizen and his Wife reveal themselves as aficionados of a sort. The

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<sup>29</sup> Leslie M. Oliver, “Rowley, Foxe, and the Faustus Additions,” *Modern Language Notes*, LX (1945), pp. 391-4. This woodcut image from Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments* can be seen at the variorum online edition at [http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/johnfoxe/main/1\\_1563\\_0040.jsp](http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/johnfoxe/main/1_1563_0040.jsp)

Citizen would advise the boy company on a more fitting repertoire: “Why could you not be contented. . .with ‘The Legend of Whittington,’ or ‘The Life and Death of Sir Thomas Gresham with the building of the Royal Exchange’ . . .” (Knight 1.1). The relationship between history and identity is played out explicitly here: the freeman grocer has put down his money, and expects a history consonant with his urban identity and class position. The relationship between the audience and the Citizen is a queasy mixture of alienation and recognition; we might titter at the pedestrian concerns of the character, but he reminds us that art and the art of history are not outside of class and other interests.

The Knight of the Burning Pestle is a drama of incongruity, achieving its effects by producing in us a sense of unfitness. The play repeatedly appeals to its audience’s sense of anachronism, identified by Peter Burke as the signal difference between the historical consciousness of the Renaissance and that which preceded it. Burke offers as exemplar of the earlier, “medieval” habitus the thirteenth-century author of the Florentine History, Ricordano Malespini:

He describes the career of Catiline, who married a woman called Belisea after he had killed her husband. Her daughter was taken away by a centurion. One day, ‘when queen Belisea was at mass in the church of Fiesole on Easter morning’, the centurion went up and spoke to her. Malespini may or may not have thought that Catiline was a king; he probably did not think about the question of whether other societies had forms of political organization different from his own. But he does know that Catiline came before Christ. . . Yet he makes the ‘queen’ go to ‘Mass.’”<sup>30</sup>

Exploiting anachronism to comic effect, The Knight produces the assumed historical and aesthetic sophistication of its audience through its alienation from certain naïve figures within the comedy. Much of this work is done around the figure of Ralph, the eponymous knight, and we would do well to note the levels of representation the drama requires we understand in that character: he is the Citizen’s boy become actor, the grocer become knight, and these levels of

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<sup>30</sup> Peter Burke, The Renaissance Sense of the Past (New York: St. Martin’s, 1969), 1-2.

imposture foreground the fact that he is a boy company actor beneath all (now acting his own role *as* a role). “I wonder why the kings do not raise an army of fourteen or fifteen hundred thousand men, as big as the army that the Prince of Portigo brought against Rosicleer, and destroy these giants; they do much hurt to wandering damsels, that go in quest of their knights” (3.1). Ralph’s naiveté admits no distinctions either of historical time or between a chivalric myth and the real, the signal expression of which is his belief that an economy based on chivalric honor can be recovered in commercial London. Offering to settle his account with a publican by knighting one of his “squires,” his host replies, “Fair knight, I thank you for your gentle offer: Therefore, gentle knight, Twelve shillings you must pay, or I must cap you” (3.2).

The signal incongruity embodied in Ralph is produced through his identification with his favorite chivalric personae: first the Harry Percy of Shakespeare’s 1 Henry IV (Knight, 1.1), whom he invokes hyperbolically at the prodding of the Citizen, and later the Knight of the Burning Pestle himself. The Knight’s comical inability to see the now is a specifically historical confusion: the failure to see the present historical moment and its social world as produced by its difference from other, remote moments. Ralph’s reference to Shakespeare’s Hotspur is may be in the same vein: the grocer’s boy innocently identifies with the charismatic Percy as an ideal of chivalry even as the passage he quotes interrogates Percy’s self-dramatization, even as Henry IV as a whole puts significant pressure on the chivalric economy. In the friction between The Knight of the Burning Pestle and Henry IV, identification itself is drawn into question. If the strutting actor on the stage is a sort of chimera, a common man dressed in the borrowed finery of the aristocrat, so our desire to identify with the *dramatis persona* does a similar violence not only to distinctions of class and historical moment, but to the ultimately illusory nature of the drama itself.

This can be appreciated through a parallel development in the Knight's attack on the distinct category of sympathy. Feminized and delegitimized through its association with the Citizen's wife, sympathy is produced as not only pedestrian, but as a misunderstanding of the mechanics of dramatic presence. Identifying with the trivially spurned Mistress Merrythought in censuring Old Merrythought's apparently harmless excesses, the Wife asks the Citizen her husband, "He's not in earnest, I hope, George, is he?" (3.4). *Earnest* is a heavily-laden term here, for it encodes the Wife's collapsing of the comic action into her own world. In a crucial way, Old Merrythought cannot be in earnest, because he is a character in a play, and the Wife should know better because it is a play she has helped to re-write. Under the spell of a sympathy for Mistress Merrythought produced by the crudest sort of resonance (primarily a similarity in gender and class-position), the Wife becomes incapable of distinguishing between the play and the world, signaled by her transgression of the dramatic space by directly addressing Old Merrythought:

I had not thought, in truth, Master Merrythought, that a man of your age and discretion (as I may say) being a gentleman, and therefore known by your gentle conditions, could have used so little respect to the weakness of his wife. . . (3.4)

Intensely metadramatic in its reflection on the artifice of drama and the effects it produces in its audience, The Knight of the Burning Pestle insists upon our awareness of the double (and more) nature of character, producing our experience of our own sophistication through the naïve characters of the Citizen, his wife, and Ralph, and thus cozening us in the process, for we should know that these characters, too, are part of the fictive world of the play. As a reflection on the intricacies and possibilities of theatrical self-consciousness, The Knight may represent something of a *cul-de-sac*: R. C. Bald recounts that "The publisher in an introductory epistle in the first edition stated that the play was 'in eight daies. . .begot and borne' and 'exposed to the wide

world, who. . .utterly rejected it.”<sup>31</sup> Snobbish, exploring the possibilities of stage imposture in the service of a sort of connoisseurship, The Knight is very nearly a work of criticism, theorizing different modes of audience consumption of character, hence perhaps both its value and its early popular failure.

### C. THE IMAGE OF THE KING

The first play in Shakespeare’s second Lancatrian cycle, Richard II has been recognized as a political play of some importance since Ernst H. Kantorowicz’ The King’s Two Bodies, and even before. Kantorowicz recognized the play’s engagement with the political-theological doctrine of the king’s “body natural” and his “body politic,” and Kantorowicz’ work has served as a foundational text for Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben and others. This is not to say that the play has not been read into the discourse of tragic, affective identification. Peter Ure represents a synthesis of a certain critical genealogy in the understanding of Shakespeare’s Richard II. Aligning himself with Coleridge, Ure claims that the “center of interest” in the play will be found in a ““history of the human mind””<sup>32</sup> developed through the character of Richard. The privileged categories here will be interiority and affect: “[I]t is laid down for [Richard] that he must give voice to what is in him. . .must say what he feels all the time about the situation,”<sup>33</sup> “The alternating moods go to make up a man rather than to expose the relativity of a doctrine.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> R. C. Bald, ed., Six Elizabethan Plays (Boston: Riverside, 1963), p. 133.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Ure, “Introduction,” The Arden Shakespeare King Richard II (London: Methuen 1964), p. lxxviii.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. lxxix.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p. lxxviii.

A characterology of mood and inwardness rests upon certain realist assumptions about representation rejects a dramatic reflexivity vested in character, so,

The gracefulness, the enthusiasm, the loquacity, the taking of the center of the stage and the consciousness of onlookers are Shakespeare's own powers and the means which he uses to give us Richard as fully and centrally as he can; they are not attributes of the character, for Richard is no more an actor than he is a poet.<sup>35</sup>

In fairness to Ure's position, it must be said that this claim is in dialogue with critics who would understand poetic or dramatic qualities as quasi-biographical dimensions of Richard's fictive nature, like Mark Van Doren's claim that Richard loved poetry "more than power and more than any other person."<sup>36</sup> That theatrical self-consciousness might be a quality of Richard's dramatic incarnation may be impossible in Ure's naturalistic paradigm.<sup>37</sup> Finally, Ure warns us away from political questions: "It is doubtful if we can even ask about this play. . . ." "What is the precise political position taken. . . in the conflict between Richard II and Bolingbroke?"<sup>38</sup> The tragic is only incidentally historical, the backdrop against which may be dramatized the travail of the human.

Dramatically, there must be some common ground between the dynamics of character mediated by sympathy or perspective effects and the exigencies of historical drama. Richard II is a *dramatis persona*, and also the king whose deposition led to the long strife between York and Lancaster. Sixteenth-century England was fascinated with the Wars of the Roses which, along with the Reformation, were the object of a huge production of textual history in many forms, from Samuel Daniel's verse treatment The Civil Wars Between the Two Houses of Lancaster and York, to Edward Hall's Union, to Holinshed's Chronicles. In its novel approach

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Mark Van Doren, Shakespeare (New York, 1939), p. 89, quoted in Ure, p. lxix.

<sup>37</sup> Yet, as we shall see, the influence of this sort of reading extends into the work of critics whose practice examines character effects that Ure or Coleridge would never credit.

<sup>38</sup> Van Doren *op. cit.*, p. lxxviii.

to character, Shakespeare's Richard II has been approached through the critical category of perspective but a thorough understanding of the politics of the play will not be possible until we understand the relationship between perspective, sympathy, and identification.

In the play's first act, Richard is confronted with the dispute between Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford, and Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, ostensibly over Mowbray's complicity in the murder of Thomas of Woodstock. Adjudicating over his quarrelling subjects, the king assures Mowbray,

. . .impartial are our eyes and ears.  
Were he my brother, nay, my kingdom's heir,  
As he is but my father's brother's son,  
Now by my scepter's awe I make a vow,  
Such neighbour nearness to our sacred blood  
Should nothing privilege him nor partialize  
The unstooping firmness of my upright soul. (1.1.115-21).

While we cannot assess with certainty the historical knowledge of the play's audience, in emphasizing his blood relationship to Bolingbroke, the king is dissimulating his real loyalty to Mowbray, and the question is merely one of whether the audience realizes this immediately, or will understand it only in retrospect. As a representation of the convolutions of Richard's self-understanding, it serves as a useful point of departure. Richard addresses this speech to Mowbray, although he cannot help but see that it is disingenuous: Mowbray is, in effect, Richard's champion, and his factor in the murder of Woodstock. The implication that his blood relation to Bolingbroke might incline him toward favoring his cousin can fool none of his auditors, and may serve to further alienate the already-dangerous Bolingbroke. In the balance opposite these awkward misrepresentations, Richard places an impartiality guaranteed by his "upright soul." This raises disturbing possibilities. Either Richard is willing to knowingly deploy the signifiers of his God-anointed royalty in a context that makes sarcasms of them, or he

can dissemble in these circumstances—effectively a legal proceeding of the highest order—without understanding how this debases them. As an act of public political rhetoric, it can only be judged by its result: the escalation of the dispute to judicial combat.

Phyllis Rackin would argue for an identification between a cultural investment in trial by combat and Richard's legitimacy:

Trial by combat is a ritual based on the assumption that right makes might, an assumption that underlies the authority of the whole feudal system, including the authority of God's anointed king. In preventing the symbolic ritual of chivalry, Richard attacks the source of the only authority that makes him king.<sup>39</sup>

In the opposition between Machiavellian and providential theories of history central to her study, she aligns judicial combat with the providential and with a presumably waning "feudal system" endorsing the hereditary monarch. The history of this practice suggests a more complicated set of relationships. Trial by combat is an instance of a more general class of "folklaw proof" including various forms of oaths and the palpable or "thinglike"<sup>40</sup> practices that endorsed their veracity: the judicial ordeal (e.g., trial by hot iron), compurgation, and so on. Trial by combat is thus more intimately connected to a folklaw based upon the "truth" of the oath, and displaced by a burgeoning written law emphasizing written evidence.<sup>41</sup> The combat between Bolingbroke and Mowbray must be understood in relation to the oaths sworn by the would be combatants. "Look what I speak, for my life shall prove it true," Bolingbroke says (1.1.87), asserting that Mowbray has misused funds and crucially that Mowbray was involved in the murder of the Duke of Gloucester, Thomas of Woodstock (1.1.88-100). A character able, like Bolingbroke, to give voice to a careful oath in a morally equivocal situation, Mowbray gives his own account of

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<sup>39</sup> Phyllis Rackin, *The Stages of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 49

<sup>40</sup> In the sense that Richard Firth Green uses this term: "[T]he early folklaw of Western Europe. . . appears to share with African law. . . at least two basic assumptions: that all solemn agreements must partake of the corporeal. . . and thus that any failure to honor them is a kind of tort, the breach of duty in rem." *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 47.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, p. 38-9.

disputed past events, “Which in myself I boldly will defend” (1.1.141), giving a body to his truth, his “troth.”<sup>42</sup> In an important sense, the dispute between Bolingbroke and Mowbray is a dispute over history, over what sort of force might authorize history in a definitive way. This notion of the judicial challenge as substantiating an oath is articulated by Aumerle in a parallel scene in which he defends himself against his accuser, Bagot: “There is my gage, the manual seal of death, That marks thee out for hell. I say thou liest, And will maintain what thou hast said is false” (4.1.25-7). Aumerle’s combat will be a “manual seal”: the imprimatur on a figural document that would contest the history being written by Bolingbroke’s faction. Notwithstanding the careful rhetoric of the pleaders, what the proving of oaths in the trial by combat strives for is a truth not contingent and rhetorical but legible to all. . .or failing that, a truth constituted by demonstrable force.

The confrontation in the first scene sets up an expectation that the judicial combat promises to resolve in an entertaining spectacle and a decisive judgment with God and his proxy, the king, as arbiters. What the audience gets is something different: a frustrated or deferred expectation, an effect enhanced by the mechanism of having the appellants proceed through all of the exciting apparatus of preparation, the taking up of their lances, the announcements of the heralds, and indeed the sounding of the charge, at which moment the king intervenes. The audience is positioned, like the combatants, to be surprised and disappointed. In explanation,

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<sup>42</sup> The logic of judicial combat is not so much providential as it is sacramental. The ballad recounts how naughty Sir Aldingar is struck down in a judicial duel by a four-year-old opponent. Like the Eucharist which, in drama, reveals its true nature over its accidents (bleeds when pierced with a nail, etc.) Aldingar’s diminutive opponent gives a body to divine justice (ibid., p. 80). The same logic of incarnation is at work in the practice of trial by hot iron, where the divine justice is manifest in the cleanness of the burn. This, of course, is not to suggest that such legal practices were exempt from manipulation to produce a desired legal result, any more than are our own contemporary ones. It is interesting that Mowbray, a few lines earlier, mentions that he had confessed that he contemplated an “ambush” against Lancaster “ere I last received the sacrament” (1.1.139). In this speech of Mowbray’s, we find a conjunction of sacrament/civil strife/English blood that recurs throughout the *Henriad*.

Richard invokes the crucial figure of the English soil as mother, one which informs the second Lancastrian cycle:

For that our kingdom's earth should not be soil'd  
With that dear blood which it hath fostered,  
And for our eyes do hate the dire aspect  
Of civil wounds ploughed up with neighbor's sword, (1.3.125-8)

Richard will instead banish the appellants. The metaphorical connection between the living flesh of the two opponents and the earth that is the nation will be resolved by separating Bolingbroke and Mowbray from England. Repudiating his earlier consent to the juridical process, Richard now wishes to identify it with civil war,

To wake our peace, which in our country's cradle  
Draws the sweet infant breath of gentle sleep;  
Which so roused up. . .  
Might from our quiet confines fright fair peace,  
And make us wade even in our kindred's blood. . .(1.3.132-8)

An act of royal fiat is called for by circumstances that cannot allow of a legal process (however suspect).<sup>43</sup> Neither oath will be publicly validated by combat. Rather than the hoped-for resolution, the problem will be swept out of sight indefinitely lest peace frighten itself.<sup>44</sup>

The variety of means by which the audience is positioned with regard to Richard invites the “perspective” approach to character employed by Larry Champion, Imtiaz Habib, and others.<sup>45</sup> Habib's work is of particular interest because it brings into relief both the strengths and weaknesses of perspective approaches. For Habib, the Richard of act I is an “emotionally opaque” character,<sup>46</sup> whose seemingly arbitrary acts are a “deliberate dramatic distancing on

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<sup>43</sup> Judicial combat was an antiquarian curiosity in Shakespeare's time, and the abortive judicial combat between Bolingbroke and Mowbray may be the last in England's historical record.

<sup>44</sup> For alternative constructions of these difficult lines, see Ure p. 29.

<sup>45</sup> For analogous treatments of perspective effects, see S. L. Rothell, *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* (London: Staples Press 1948); A. P. Rossiter, *Angel With Horns* (London: Longman Press, 1961).

<sup>46</sup> Imtiaz Habib, *Shakespeare's Pluralistic Concepts of Character* (London: Associated Universities Press, 1993), p. 84

Shakespeare's part."<sup>47</sup> In this reading, perspective is mediated by our limited awareness or knowledge, a primary mechanism of the tragic mode, situating the audience in a position analogous to that of Bolingbroke.

Perspective as Habib understands it exists in some relationship with affect, with the result that sympathy is a privileged category: the key to a "real" interiority. In this way, apropos of Bolingbroke's reflections on his exile in act I scene iii, Habib claims "With the direct access they provide to the inside of the character, they invite confidence and suspension of disbelief in what he seems to be."<sup>48</sup> Habib seems to be of two minds when it comes to Bolingbroke. On the one hand, Bolingbroke "must . . . be made to manipulate our sympathy and perception of stage events."<sup>49</sup> On the other, "we can see into" Bolingbroke with "relative clarity."<sup>50</sup> There is a clear emphasis on the earnest and emotionally revelatory quality of the character's dramatic representations in Habib's reading of this scene, where "sympathy and attention" are the result of "the emotional intensity of his words."<sup>51</sup> Notwithstanding the care with which he qualifies the absolute truth of what we hear from Henry, Habib seems quite charmed by him:

With manly fortitude he refuses to use poetic sentiment to blunt the harshness of his immediate fate: "O who can hold a fire in his hand / By thinking on the frosty Caucasus? . . . Or wallow naked in December snow, / By thinking on fantastic summer's heat?"<sup>52</sup>

The appeal here is to Henry's pragmatic candor, confronting his tangible situation in a manner presumably free from the mediation of a certain suspect sort of language. Is this a fair appraisal of what is taking place here? In fact, the immediate precedent to the speech quoted is Bolingbroke's claim that his exile has made him a "journeyman to grief" (1.3.274), and that

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

speech is followed by the observation, “Fell sorrow’s tooth doth never rankle more / Than when he bites, but lanceth not the sore” (1.3.302-3). In a manner which might be germane to Habib’s argument, Bolingbroke is meditating at length upon his own *emotional* state, as is clear in his dialogue with his father, who tells him, “Woe doth the heavier sit / Where it perceives it is but faintly borne” (1.3.280-1).<sup>53</sup> Bolingbroke is exploring his own grief in comparison with the promise of his future happiness through a series of metaphors.<sup>54</sup>

It is crucial we note that what we have here is not an unmediated access into Henry’s interior state, but an appeal to our emotional involvement couched in a deliberate language, the first of many such appeals we will encounter in the play. That the play tends to align its audience with Bolingbroke is circumstantially supported by the fact that any references to his own possibly suspect plans or motivation is drawn into question since they issue from characters we have some reason to doubt. Mowbray calls Bolingbroke “traitor” at various points, and though he is Bolingbroke’s opponent, his words before his exit from the play have the ring of prophecy: “. . . what thou art, God, thou, and I do know / And all too soon, I fear, the king shall rue” (1.3.204-5). King Richard numbers “eagle-winged pride / Of sky-aspiring and ambitious thoughts” (1.3.129-30) as a cause for the quarrel between the two dukes, a reprise of the hawking metaphor applied to Bolingbroke in act one: “How high a pitch his resolution soars!” (1.1.109). Our alignment with Bolingbroke is substantial but imperfect because we already know what his enemies’ remarks imply: that he will usurp Richard’s throne. The first act thus leaves open the question of Henry’s intentions.

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<sup>53</sup> Habib’s understanding of Bolingbroke’s rhetoric situates him in a perennial misreading of this speech: In Hershel Baker’s introduction to the play in The Riverside Shakespeare, he writes of those same lines, “Bullingbrook also knows the force of language and bends it to his purpose, but he does not confuse his mental constructs, however deftly verbalized, with hard, unyielding fact; and he does not permit mere words, however sacrosanct and laden with association, to take the place of swift, incisive action (803). The gender assumptions inherent in these readings deserve attention as well: the “manly fortitude” with which Bolingbroke confronts “hard, unyielding fact,” is presumably the corollary of the effeminacy of Richard’s more “poetic” worldview.

<sup>54</sup> The auditor may decide whether they are “poetic.”

With his departure comes the first account of a Lancastrian populism that will inform every play of the *Henriad*. Again, it is mediated through the interested perspective of Richard that we learn of it:

Ourself and Bushy  
Observe'd his courtship to the common people,  
How he did seem to dive into their hearts  
With humble and familiar courtesy;  
What reverence he did throw away on slaves,  
Wooring poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles  
And patient underbearing of his fortune,  
As 'twere to banish their affects with him.  
Off goes his bonnet to an oyster wench;  
A brace of draymen bid God speed him well,  
And had the tribute of his supple knee,  
With "Thanks, my countrymen, my loving friends"—  
As were our England in reversion his,  
And he our subjects next degree in hope. (1.4.23-36)

Richard understands Bolingbroke as engaging is a sort of low technique, a "craft of smiles" that at once debases him and raises him higher than the king, now alienated from the affections of his subjects, which follow Henry abroad. Richard's revolves his characteristically fractured eloquence: he at once envies and disdains Bolingbroke's possession of the love of the "common people," "slaves" whom Richard would never lower himself to cultivate.<sup>55</sup> That Bolingbroke is a shrewd manipulator of the people and his fellow magnates seems to be borne out consistently in the *Henriad*; Harry Percy will recall Henry on his return from exile as a "king of smiles" and a "vile poltician." (1 *Henry IV* 1.3.245, 240). Richard seems disinclined to think of government in the populist categories of his Lancastrian cousins. It is John of Gaunt who admonishes him,

Now He that made me knows I see thee ill.  
Ill in myself to see, and in thee, seeing ill.  
Thy death-bed is no lesser than thy land

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<sup>55</sup> However, this is hardly the "subliminal image of practiced subterfuge and deception" that Habib wants to characterize it (87), happening, after all, in the sight of the King and Bushy.

Wherin thou liest in reputation sick. . . (2.1.93-6)

But the king is not inclined to examine his reputation, cannot imagine that reputation could be uncoupled from his innate royalty, even as he observes his cousin, whose canny political sense operates even as he travels into exile. Developed in the play as a sort of moral measure comparable to York, Gaunt can see Richard as Richard cannot see himself. This lack of critical self-understanding makes possible Richard's continuing excesses, of which the most damning is the "farming of the realm," which Gaunt has lamented in his "sceptered isle" speech (2.1.31-68): "this dear, dear land, / Is now leased out—I die pronouncing it--/ Like to a tenement or a pelting farm" (2.1.57-9). This is quickly joined by Gaunt's explicit denunciation of Richard as author the play's primordial crime: the murder of Woodstock (2.1.128). Making possible the retrospective reassessment of what has gone before, "seeing ill" from the dramatic perspective of the upright John of Gaunt rather than his potentially compromised son, this reasonably seems Richard's moral nadir and a punctuated moment of our alienation from his character.<sup>56</sup>

As a mode of audience relationship to character, perspective can be produced through various kinds of expectation effects, and the play's great modulation between Bolingbroke and Richard depends crucially on a technique of retrospective reevaluation. This is as true around the character of Bolingbroke as it is of Richard. The revelations of act two seem to have prepared us to identify with Bolingbroke as the moral champion who would cleanse the realm of the corruption it has known under Richard. It is precisely at this point that we learn from Northumberland that Bolingbroke's military force is preparing to land in Wales. When York demands that Bolingbroke give an accounting of his arrival in warlike array, he says,

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<sup>56</sup> In what seems a rather forced reading, Habib sees this as a shift toward our identification with Richard: "His vicious treatment of Gaunt and his requisitioning of his estates is, though horrific, emotionally revealing. The dramatic fascination of kingly wrath shown from close quarters. . . palliates the harshness of Richard's behavior and partially eclipses it" (87).

I am denied to sue my livery here,  
And yet my letters patents give me leave.  
My father's goods are all distraint'd and sold,  
And these, and all, are all amiss employed.  
What would you have me do? I am a subject,  
And I challenge law; attorneys are denied me,  
And therefore personally I lay my claim  
To my inheritance of free descent. (2.3.128-35)

Prepared to identify with Bolingbroke, and inclined to accept just such an argument, the audience must be troubled by the fact that his claim is disingenuous. His military expedition set in motion prior to the seizure of his estate. Thus are drawn into question his motivations for accusing Mowbray and in general his earlier representations of loyalty to Richard. The frustration of our inclination to identify with Henry is abetted by the fact that it is York whom he misleads. The identification between York and John of Gaunt is made explicit by Henry: "You are my father, for methinks in you / I see old Gaunt alive" (2.3.116-7). In dissembling to York, charismatic and manipulative Bolingbroke undermines the priority of the perspective that understood him as an honest subject wronged by Richard.

We have been prepared for Richard's return to England from his ill-considered Irish expedition by a series of perspective shifts that have left the audience once again very nearly ambivalent, but This moment is far different from the beginning of the play. The dispute between Bolingbroke and Mowbray has functioned as a widening crack through which the audience can view the state of the kingdom, and the repeated modulations of dramatic perspective—from Bolingbroke to Gaunt and finally York, have finally left us with no firm ground on which to stand. The ease with which Bolingbroke assimilates York to his purposes represents the capitulation of a certain decency, however weak and vacillating York may be. If the beginning of act one promised the resolution of a conflict between noble opponents in a milieu that was equal parts chivalric virtue and the rule of law, act three locates us in a contest

between two morally compromised figures operating in brute politics. If the recuperation of Richard is to occur, it must happen in this context.

On Richard's return to England, knowing that Bolingbroke has returned in force, he greets the English earth:

I weep for Joy  
To stand upon my kingdom once again.  
Dear earth, I do salute thee with my hand,  
As rebels wound thee with their horses' hoofs.  
As a long-parted mother with her child  
Plays fondly with her tears and smiles in meeting,  
So weeping, smiling, greet I thee, my earth,  
And do thee favours with my royal hands. (3.2.4-11)

While this speech has received much critical admiration,<sup>57</sup> there is more to this passage than admirable poetic sentiment. The earth has been a recurring figure in the play. John of Gaunt laments "This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England/ This nurse, This teeming womb of royal kings" (2.1.50-1). The last words of his son before his exile are, "Then England's ground, farewell; sweet soil, adieu, / My mother and my nurse that bears me yet" (1.3.306-7).<sup>58</sup> Richard reverses the conventional figuration by himself assuming the role of mother to the nation. As Richard understands it, the realm exists through him, a hubristic belief that will be tested by the drama in a manner that becomes apparent in the same scene.<sup>59</sup>

If perspective is produced expressions of affect, then Richard gives us as much as we could ask, and more, alternating from hyperbolic self-confidence to despair by turns. Even more important, Richard's immediate actions are constructed by the acts of distant Bolingbroke,

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<sup>57</sup> Champion, op. cit., p. 81, "Certainly the spectators react sympathetically to Richard's almost parental concern for his native land as he returns from Ireland in III, ii." Or Coleridge, "How beautifully the amiable part of Richard's character is brought forward. . . his intense love of his country, yet still as a feminine feeling..." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Shakespeare Criticism* (Dutton: New York, 1960), v. 1 p. 139.

<sup>58</sup> Henry's opening speech in act I of *1 Henry IV* also employs this personification.

<sup>59</sup> Here, I'm rather close to Calderwood's position on Richard, but he located this argument in a broader argument about "The fall of kingly speech" and its associated world-view which I don't endorse. See James L. Calderwood, *Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 13.

collapsing each new resolve. It is almost as if Richard is vainly trying to intervene in a history already written by Bolingbroke, who has become for a time more like a series of events than a character. Sympathy is certainly a relevant category at this moment, but at the same time our new orientation toward Richard involves recurrent distancing effects:

. . .you have mistook me all this while.  
I live with bread like you, feel want,  
Taste grief, need friends: subjected thus,  
How can you say to me that I am a king? (3.2.174-7)

If Bolingbroke is a politician, Richard is colored by his inability to think politically, to understand his own power even as it flows away from him. His understanding of his nature through a parody of the ideology of divine right leads him to egregious political errors. Reduced to his small circle of allies, Richard makes their continuing support of their embattled king a symptom of his debasement. The awareness of the need to produce his own legitimacy through the good will of others is a painful one for him; his alienation of faithful York has already demonstrated this.

Richard's fitful resolves reveal as much as his lamentations. Recovering himself from the news of the desertion of his Welsh forces, Richard says

I had forgot myself, am I not king?  
Awake, thou coward majesty! thou sleepest.  
Is not the king's name twenty thousand names?  
Arm, arm, my name! a puny subject strikes  
At thy great glory. (3.2.83-7)

Richard invites the truth that is enshrined in language to inscribe itself on the real, and demonstrate once again that he is king. It is characteristic of Richard that, faced with a crisis that devolves from his stained legitimacy, he nevertheless understands the name of "king" to stand aloof of any context. The irony of this statement is that it does point to a possibility: in strategic defeat, Richard could do worse than to play upon the legitimacy that still adheres to his title in an

effort at political recovery. This he repeatedly refuses to do. In a play in which Henry Bolingbroke can turn York to his own purposes in the space of a few lines, Richard squanders his rhetorical agency on *pleasure*. While the Bishop of Carlisle admonishes him, “wise men ne’er sit and wail their woes, / But presently prevent the ways to wail” (3.2.179-80), Richard embraces a despair that does not force him to confront his contingent political situation: “A king, woe’s slave, shall kingly woe obey” (3.2.210). Considered as a self-dramatization, Richard indulges himself in “sad stories of the death of kings” (3.2.156), chooses a narrative template for his fall as full of narcissistic pleasure as his earlier self-aggrandizement. The tactical misuse of his agency is emphasized in word and action: against Aumerle’s objection, Richard throws his remaining military force to the wind (3.2.217) in a dramatic situation in which advantage adheres to the smallest of resources.

Our potentially tragic alignment with Richard modified through a consistent characterization; in Richard appeals to sympathy are consistently problematized by the audience’s consciousness of his self-dramatization, though it can only be through his perspective that we experience subsequent events. So begin the strange negotiations through which Richard and Henry will determine the fate of England. As has been much noted, Richard seems to guide Henry to his usurpation:

Fair cousin, you debase your princely knee  
To make the base earth proud with kissing it. . .  
Up, cousin, up; your heart is up; I know,  
This high at least, although your knee be low (3.3.190-5).

The ironic nature of Richard’s performance here must be understood. Richard employs a language of royalty previously reserved to himself and is ironic not because that language or the state it endorses is drawn into question, but because it is applied to Bolingbroke.

Richard's dramatic situation from this point forward will articulate the travail of a character caught in a sometimes competing set of rhetorical exigencies, performing as he must for Bolingbroke and yet indulging in the pleasures of his own self-conceit, employing a language that has lost its coherence.<sup>60</sup> The opposed self-dramatizations of Bolingbroke and the king converge in act 4 scene 1, where Richard surrenders the crown to Henry. The scene has been set by Bolingbroke, who positions himself within his customary legalisms in dispensing with the Lords Appellant and having the Bishop of Carlisle arrested for treason. In Henry's interest, the transfer of sovereignty will be staged as an operation of law for the benefit of the realm. Friction is inevitable since, even in this carefully contrived scene, it is impossible for Richard to step down on these terms. In response to Richard's tragic mien, Bolingbroke observes, "I thought you had been willing to resign" (4.1.190). Richard answers with a paradox, "Ay, no, no, ay; for I must nothing be; / Therefore no no, for I resign to thee."

In Ernst Kantorowicz' influential treatment, the development of the drama stages the division of the king's two bodies: "Bit by bit he deprives his body politic of the symbols of its dignity and exposes his poor body natural to the eyes of the spectators. . ." <sup>61</sup> For Kantorowicz, the fraught process that takes place between Richard and Bullingbrook is successful in the register of political theology: "It is the *demise* of Richard and the and the rise of a new body natural."<sup>62</sup> For Richard, the act of his deposition cannot be legitimate, and he rhetorically undermines what he trivially affirms: "With mine own hands I give away my crown, / With mine own tongue deny my sacred state" (4.1.208-9). The paradox of royal agency for Richard is this:

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<sup>60</sup> Again, I want to be specific about the distinction between my position and that of Calderwood, who understands the struggle for the crown in terms of the fall of a language of perfect correspondence between things and signifiers. My argument, that character in this play is the locus of rhetorical agency, seems borne out in this scene.

<sup>61</sup> Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 36.

<sup>62</sup> Kantorowicz, p. 40.

if his Kingship is enfranchised by God, in abandoning it, he surrenders the self on whose “willing” consent such a transfer is made; in alienating a position granted directly by God, aloof from any human institution, he surrenders a thing that cannot be legitimately transferred. In uncrowning himself, Richard raises a question that defines a disagreement between Antonio Negri and Giorgio Agamben on the nature of sovereignty: does sovereign authority contain constituting authority, the primordial sanction that invests the sovereign?<sup>63</sup> The clues in Richard II are only suggestive, but Richard’s language at his own deposition suggest that the transfer of power is incoherent. Henry’s coronation will not be dramatized, and we will not see a “coronation” in the Lancastrian cycle until Hal’s “self-coronation” in 2 Henry IV.

Never yielding wholly to Bolingbroke’s dramatization of events, Richard performs himself as the essential king deposed, the tragic figure whom he seems to be compelled to convince everyone –even Bolingbroke – that he is. While Richard has always considered himself identical with the realm, Henry can treat him as superfluous, a sign to announce his new regime, the source of an ambiguous rhetoric that serves its purpose nonetheless. It seems characteristic of Richard in these acts that dramatic rhetoric becomes a reflection on agency, and can find no agency to inform action or speech. Irony and impasse are produced because language cannot accomplish what we demand of it.

Efforts to read Richard II more comfortably into the tragic mode are legion, and this is as true of criticism that admits of dramatic perspective as that which insists on dramatic naturalism. We would do well to question the judgment of those critics eager to assimilate Richard to the “human,” a category that the deposed king would disdain:

Thus play I in one person many people,  
And none contented. Sometimes am I king;

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<sup>63</sup> Giorgio Agamben, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 41

Then treasons make me wish myself a beggar,  
And so I am. Then crushing penury  
Persuades me I was better when a king;  
Then am I king'd again, and by and by  
Think that I am unking'd by Bolingbroke  
And straight am nothing. But what e'er I be,  
Nor I, nor any man that but man is, till he be eas'd  
With being nothing (5.5.31-41)

The binaries manipulated by Richard are king/beggar and king/nothing, with at least the suggestion of an identification between beggar, nothing, and the nothing that is the dissolution of the self in death. One can only force upon this the reading that “This is the ultimate knowledge, the existential verity about the void between being and consciousness in king and commoner alike.”<sup>64</sup> For Richard, the condition of our common humanity is a sort of death, though the critic may endeavor to make this belief admirable.<sup>65</sup> If insight into one’s own condition is an element of the mechanics of tragedy, Richard is notable for his heroic resistance to it. If John of Gaunt challenged Richard with what he would not see, the fallen king’s demand for a mirror in the deposition scene seem to promise some self-examination, to “see the very book indeed / Where all my sins are writ, and that’s myself” (4.1.274-5). With an appeal to the unreliability of images, Richard rejects the evidence of the “flatt’ring glass” (4.1.279) and instead uses the mirror as a locus for more narcissistic rhetoric: “Was this the face / That like the sun did make beholders weep?” (4.1.283-4). While we should not be insensitive to Richard, while we cannot be when the dramatic choice offered us is between the afflicted Richard and the cool and laconic “silent king” Henry, the drama functions through an alienation that is not a flaw in its tragic development but an intentional displacement from Richard’s self-dramatization. Richard dashes the mirror against the floor, asking Henry to “Mark. . .How soon my sorrow hath destroyed my

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<sup>64</sup> Habib, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>65</sup> “The leap from the everything (KING) state straight to the no-thing state involves tremendous intellectual courage and integrity. . .” *ibid.*, p. 102.

face” (4.1.290-1). Bolingbroke, with a nod to the same anti-image discourse, replies, “The shadow of your sorrow hath destroyed / The shadow of your face” (4.1.292-3). A dubious optical image, distinct from the thing itself, is destroyed by a dramatic, rhetorical image of sorrow in a world of figures, but never the promised self-examination.

What is it Richard has seen in the glass? What is interesting is that his image is essentially unchanged:

No deeper wrinkles yet? Hath sorrow struck  
And made no deeper wounds? Oh flatt’ring glass,  
Like to my followers in prosperity,  
Thou dost beguile me! (4.1.278-81)

Richard destroys the mirror because it reports that his face, once the face of the sovereign, is strangely intact. He is the image of himself, which he denies in the act of breaking the mirror. In the strange calculus of royal bodies, the image of the king is not a neutral thing. In his discussion of the work of Kantorowicz, Agamben discusses a critical choice in the investigation of the genealogy of the sovereign body. Kantorowicz was aware of a potential classical source for the doctrine of the double sovereign body: the Roman *consecratio* in which a wax effigy of the dead emperor held court, receiving visitors and the care of physicians.<sup>66</sup> Agamben argues that the sovereign so understood, the image suspended in fictive life, shares with the sacrificial man, he who while living is placed under the sovereign ban, “a zone of indistinction in which they can no longer be told apart.”<sup>67</sup> *Homo sacer*, Agamben’s sacrificial man, is the debased counterpart of sovereignty:

He who has been banned is not, in fact, simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it, but rather abandoned by it, that is, exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, inside and outside, become indistinguishable.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Agamben, p. 93.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p. 28.

In a manner that Richard would probably be willing to grant, the image of the king thus displaced is not simply a man in the juridical or even the theological sense. He and Henry remain in an intimate and potentially unstable relationship. Image in this sense is not the *eidolon* of iconoclastic rhetoric but a thing constitutive of political reality.

In an explicit meditation on visual perspective within the dramatic world of Richard II, Bushy tells Richard's queen,

Each substance of grief hath twenty shadows,  
Which shows like grief itself, but is not so,  
For sorrow's eye, glazed with blinding tears,  
Divides one thing entire to many objects,  
Like perspectives, which, rightly gaz'd upon,  
Show nothing but confusion; ey'd awry,  
Distinguish form. So your sweet majesty,  
Looking awry on your lord's departure,  
Find shapes of grief more than himself to wail,  
Which, look'd on as it is, is nought but shadows,  
Of what it is not. . . (2.2.14-23)

Bushy's euphuistic quibble on the perspective trick of anamorphosis locates affect both within perspective effects and prior to them, just as vision itself cannot be perfected: true form can be distinguished when confusion is "ey'd awry," but the queen cannot discern that form because she is "looking awry."<sup>69</sup> While tragic affect cannot be dispensed with, its production of tragic depth is suspect, depth ultimately being a function of perspective. Tragedy, after all, is another structured language imposed on history. Larry Champion, who is sanguine about a canonically tragic development in Richard II, writes,

Admittedly Richard has several rhetorical flurries when action is virtually suspended and drama suffers despite the poetic eloquence; admittedly Richard never achieves true tragic insight. In his soliloquy in act 5, however, the spectators are compelled to believe that he is bordering on such wisdom. Like Edward II, he is remarkably engaging despite his deeply flawed nature. . . . Ultimately, he sacrifices full sympathy through his histrionic display of self-pity.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> This is also an echo of Gaunt's reply to Henry's lamentation of his banishment.

<sup>70</sup> Champion, *op. cit.*, p. 89, 82.

Sympathy is limited and privilege displaced, but the critic nevertheless judges it by its approach to an idealized tragic form. We should note Champion's "histrionic": the fracture in tragedy is located in the *histrion*, the actor who somehow intrudes upon his own action.

In the incommensurable characterizations of Richard and Bolingbroke, Richard II thematizes the problem of human motive as historical cause. From the first scenes, the audience attempts to fit public political actions to some possibly rational structure of motivation, only to have this effort frustrated by the dramatic action. This is another way in which perspective aligns us with Richard, as he attributes motive to his opponent Bolingbroke, while the Lancastrian orchestrates events without revealing himself. Richard seems increasingly available to sympathy and identification, but at the springs of his action we find no original intention, but figures and shadows, sad stories of the death of kings to be played out in increasingly artificial scenes constructed by an arbitrary power.

On his return from Ireland, threatened by Bolingbroke's army, Richard at one point says, "Proud Bullingbrook, I come, / To change blows with thee for our day of doom" (3.2.188-9). Is this another vain conceit, or is it possible that the promised contest of the first act, of which the audience has been so patently cheated, can be recovered, played out with the debauched counters left us at this point? The stakes are significant: the recovery of something like legitimacy from a legacy of civil strife. It is wrong to think of Richard after his return as reduced to no alternative save capitulation to the military force of Bolingbroke. This is revealed in the carefully developed contrast between Richard and Henry. Exiled, and later cut off from his inheritance, Henry is, in effect deprived of his own name in the complex sense that Richard attaches to this quantity. "The being of the man resides in the name. Banishment, dispossession and outlawry are intended to reduce Bolingbroke to a penniless nobody, the shadow of a man deprived of

name and legal rights.<sup>71</sup>” In fact, Henry appears to have an agency without his name, an agency that can treat name as a plastic category. When confronted by York about the violation of his exile, he replies, “As I was banish’d, I was banish’d Herford; But as I come, I come for Lancaster” (2.3.112-3). The Henry who has marshaled an ostentation of despised arms is a man who can act even though he is between names.

Richard, disappointed in the power of his name, dismisses his military force and awaits the whim of his enemy. We may wait for him to act in the interest of preserving the possibility of legitimacy in the state, but his action is squandered on himself in the perverse pleasure of his fall, rhetoric reaching an impasse in perfect narcissism. For Champion, Richard’s slaying of the two assassins before his own murder is an “anomalous moment of physical valor” raising Richard “as close to tragic stature as any figure in Shakespeare’s early plays. . .”<sup>72</sup> Rather than pressing anomaly into the service of our reading, we might consider this occurrence against the background of character and action. In contrast to Calderwood’s claim that “Exton kills a man who is, in his namelessness, already dead,”<sup>73</sup> it reveals at Richard’s ultimate moment that he does possess an unexpected agency, but one that is rendered only potential, save for this tantalizing hint. If, like Phyllis Rackin, we wished to preserve the category of “judicial combat” against the play’s attack on its credibility,<sup>74</sup> we might read this as an ambiguous hint of divine sanction. Defiant against intimidating odds, Richard defends himself as he did not defend his tottering reign. When we consider Richard in the unstable position of Agamben’s sacrificial

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<sup>71</sup> James Winny, *The Player King: A Theme of Shakespeare’s Plays* (New York: Norton, 1958), p. 48-9.

<sup>72</sup> Champion, *op. cit.* p. 82. Champion deserves significant credit for understanding the ambivalence of Richard’s characterization, but his insistence upon the tragic privilege’s affect at the expense of the political. Contrast this to Habib, who reads Richard into unambiguous sympathy and humanistic insight in an uncontaminated tragic form.

<sup>73</sup> Calderwood, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>74</sup> Rackin, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-55, 79, 163.

man, the one who cannot be sacrificed but whom it is not legal homicide to murder,<sup>75</sup> Richard remains the troublesome image of the king.

#### D. UNCOMFORTABLE ALIGNMENTS

That dramatic history as a “tragic” high form could drive a wedge between sympathy and perspective is nowhere better demonstrated than Shakespeare’s Richard III.<sup>76</sup> Richard of Gloucester has posed problems of containment both for Tudor historians and for a modern criticism that would understand Shakespeare’s play as providential in its theory of history. Known to Shakespeare’s sixteenth-century audience largely through histories written by Tudor clients—Polydore Virgil’s Historia Anglica and Thomas More’s History of King Richard the Third<sup>77</sup> -- this last Yorkist king was constructed as the other of Tudor legitimacy. This has contributed to his unusual incarnation in drama, which will reward a brief discussion.

In their book Mikhail Bakhtin, Katerina Clark and Micheal Holquist and offer a useful gloss on what Bakhtin termed a “politics of quotation.” Quotation’s particular violence is accomplished by an implied censorship, circumscribing the words of another in my own, so that “how much of the other’s meaning I will permit to get through when I surround his words with my own is a question about the governance of meaning, about who presides over it, and about how much of it is shared.”<sup>78</sup> In the treatment of Shakespeare’s Richard III, it is a commonplace

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<sup>75</sup> Agamben, p. 71.

<sup>76</sup> I beg the reader’s indulgence for moving now to a play with such a similar title.

<sup>77</sup> A text plagiarized in Hall’s Union.

<sup>78</sup> Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 236.

of criticism that priority be given to those dramatic voices that condemn Richard.<sup>79</sup> In the introduction to the play in the Riverside Shakespeare, the malign portrait of the king in Thomas More's history, alongside the testimony of the characters of Lady Anne, Queen Elizabeth, and others, prepare our undergraduates for their first meeting with Gloucester.<sup>80</sup> If Richard is so clearly portrayed as a Machiavel doomed by providence, why must he be contained so carefully?

While critical expressions of grudging admiration for Richard's strange charisma are common, few critics are able to account for how it is accomplished. To this problem Larry Champion brings a critical insight conveyed with qualifiers necessary to guarantee our distance from this troublesome character. Richard "dominates the stage, appearing in ten of eighteen scenes. . .and delivering more than 32 percent of the total lines. . . .Moreover through twelve soliloquies and four asides. . .Richard provides the eye—albeit jaundiced—through which the spectator observes the action. . ." <sup>81</sup> His soliloquies "reflect the unholy vigor and callous zeal which feed Richard's ambition and provoke in the spectators, if not sympathy, an awed appreciation of his boundless energy and vitality."<sup>82</sup> Here, Champion reasons better than he knows. If the audience is prepared for the play by a historiography written by Richard's Tudor opponents, by "their foreknowledge of Richard's historically appointed doom,"<sup>83</sup> then the play forces them through its management of perspective into an alignment with a character for whom they are unsympathetic. The drama is designed to produce this perverse identification in spite of the extra-dramatic certainty that Richard is condemned by a history already written.

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<sup>79</sup> In sources quoted above, both Champion and Rakin introduce Richard with a chorus of those who damn him.

<sup>80</sup> Herschel Baker, "Richard III: Introduction," in The Riverside Shakespeare (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), p. 708-9.

<sup>81</sup> Champion, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Rakin, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

Whatever Richard's victories, they can take place only against this antagonistic history.

In a play replete with prophetic announcements against him, it is easy to forget that it is Richard who first mentions prophecy:

And If King Edward be true and just  
As I am subtle, false, and treacherous,  
This day should Clarence closely be mew'd up  
About a prophecy, which says that G  
Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be. (1.1.35-40)

It would be difficult to imagine a more economical statement of the way that he will operate in this drama of history. The cunning Richard of Gloucester makes use of a history that implicates himself to condemn his innocent brother. If Richard knows himself to be diabolical, the strange effect of his actions is to ironize our perception of the play's other characters: "Simple plain Clarence, I do love thee so / That I will shortly send thy soul to heaven" (1.1.118-9). If Richard's self-dramatization makes him the author of the evil in the play, our perception of characters like Clarence, King Edward, of Buckingham is "jaundiced" because they lend themselves so readily to Richard's will. Announcing his intentions beforehand, Richard carries them out and enlists the agency of other characters, his success amplified by the seeming inadequacy of his means. Willard Farnham's category of the "grotesque comedian"<sup>84</sup> is apposite here: Richard choreographs an essentially *comic* action in which other characters are his gulls.

Born with teeth, Richard's is a grotesque body that announces its conflict with "dissembling nature" (1.1.19) and rational historical logic, "Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time / Into this breathing world" (1.1.20-1). Then again, it is a *performed* body equal to the demands of nimble capering. Thus, in his seduction of Anne, Richard performs a body to rival that of her lost Edward:

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<sup>84</sup> Willard Farnham, The Shakespearean Grotesque: Its Genesis and Formations (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 41.

I do mistake my person all this while!  
Upon my life, she finds (although I cannot)  
Myself to be a marv' llous proper man.  
I'll be at charges for a looking-glass,  
And entertain a score or two of tailors  
To study fashions to adorn my body. . . (1.2.252-6)

The fundamentally theatrical nature of this body is demonstrated by the manner in which Richard is most himself when he is dissimulating.<sup>85</sup> He wears his very deformity as a costume when he implores,

I pray you all, tell me what they deserve  
That do conspire my death with devilish plots  
Of damned witchcraft, and that have prevail'd  
Upon my body with their hellish charms?  
. . . Look how I am bewitch'd; behold mine arm  
Is like a blasted sapling, wither'd up;  
And this is Edward's wife; that monstrous witch,  
Consorted with that harlot, strumpet Shore,  
That by their witchcraft thus have marked me. (3.4.59-62, 67-72)

Richard's self dramatization is a contamination of the tragic mode by an ungovernable body, insinuating a comic awareness and sensibility into the high languages of the court, tragedy, and the Tudor historical myths. The seduction of Lady Anne is a marker of a broader seduction in which the audience is wooed into an often uncomfortable identification with a character for whom history has denied us sympathy. If pleasure was the source of our alienation from Richard II, it is the means of our identification with Richard of Gloucester.

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<sup>85</sup> Roland Barthes offers a very resonant account of theatricality in the poetry of Baudelaire: "The actor's body is artificial, but its duplicity is much more profound than the painted sets or the fake furniture of the stage; the grease paint, the imitation of gestures or intonations, the accessibility of the exposed body—all this is artificial but not factitious. . . the actor bears in himself the very overprecision of an excessive world. . . This suggests that Baudelaire had an acute sense of the most secret and also the most disturbing theatricality, the kind which puts the actor at the center of the theatrical prodigy and constitutes the theater as the site of an ultraincarnation, in which the body is double, at once a living body deriving from a trivial nature, and an emphatic, formal body, frozen by its function as an artificial object. . ." Roland Barthes, "Baudelaire's Theater," in *Critical Essays* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 27-8. Barthes would understand the doubleness of character as semiological, but the parallels are interesting, particularly around the question of "incarnation."

Richard's comic improvisation within a hostile history allows him an awareness that, while not unbounded, owes more to the comic than the tragic mode. Phyllis Rackin writes "Richard thinks he is living in a world governed by Machiavellian *Realpolitik*, but Shakespeare places him in a world governed by providence."<sup>86</sup> Indeed, the fourth act will see a divergence between Richard's will and events, the beginning of his reduction to history, and Richard himself observes that "All unavowed is the doom of destiny" (4.4.218). A difficulty for the providential reading of the play is the abruptness and lack of dramatically-developed warrant for the installation of Tudor stability under the gleaming Richmond. For Sigurd Burkhardt,

. . .it is entirely appropriate that the restorer—Richmond—has no history; he is only the restorer, coming into the play by divine dispensation, from a realm beyond time. . . .The restoring marriage of Richmond and Elizabeth is made in heaven. . . .no courtship leads up to it, nor even negotiations; prior to Richmond's formal announcement of it, it is mentioned once briefly by two secondary characters. . . .It is as though Shakespeare refused to take credit for this union—as though he wanted to exempt it also from the evil of human design and passion.<sup>87</sup>

The rationale for the inference of the play's endorsement of a restorative, providential resolution is, paradoxically, the lack of what would seem an appropriate dramatic preparation for it. In fact, the recurrent prophetic interventions into Richard's action suggest that with the final acts we have a *return* to a history that Richmond represents, and if the playwright hasn't provided it for us, we can read it in Hall's Union.<sup>88</sup> We are approaching an understanding of theatricality in the history play that permits us no comfortable moral normativity, that reveals the potential of character as a sort of monstrosity operating within the wreckage of history. If Richard's conspiratorial openness is the vehicle for a type of seduction, how much more suspect our seduction through sympathy by a Lady Anne or an Edward, making claims upon innocence and yet doing just as the fiend would have them do?

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<sup>86</sup> Rackin, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>87</sup> Sigurd Burkhardt, *Shakespearean Meanings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 175, 177, 178.

<sup>88</sup> And yet, Richard's ultimate defeat seems to hang upon the contingency of historical events: "a horse."

If the dramatic presence of the character is a suspect and potentially sacrilegious incarnation, the fear of the antitheatrical polemicists made flesh, how much more dangerous the character that recognizes itself at play in the providential history of the nation? Some recent criticism has argued that in thematizing the anxieties of Protestant anti-humanism, the theater is engaged in a fundamentally conservative Protestant enterprise. Huston Diehl writes that, “Thomas Nashe bases his defense of the stage on the very distrust of theatricality that the reformers seek to arouse.”<sup>89</sup> Jean Howard has argued that, in Much Ado About Nothing, as in the antitheatrical tracts, “a key question turns out to be: whose fiction-making activities are to be construed as legitimate? And, as in those tracts, the answer involves matters of gender and rank as much as moral motive.” Ultimately, Howard’s approach offers the potential for readings that resist assigning a normative moral calculus to a Don John or a Richard Gloucester, to understand how they operate in their own right in a terrain ruled strategically by superior power.

In his Defense of Poesy, Sir Philip Sydney produces a lukewarm critique of plays as the “unmannerly daughter” of poetry. For Sydney, it is the motley and impure quality of English drama that invites censure:

But besides these gross absurdities, how all their plays be neither right tragedies nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in clowns by head and shoulders, to play a part in majestical matters. . .<sup>90</sup>

The problem of the English stage is one of contamination, in which things are mingled which in the interest of art should be kept apart, and it is of course the intrusion into the high form of the comic that invites his particular censure. The intrusion of the gross body of Sir John Falstaff onto the historical stage seems calculated to produce just such a muddying of the clear waters of

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<sup>89</sup> Huston Diehl, Staging Reform. Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 72.

<sup>90</sup> Sir Philip Sydney, An Apology for Poetry (or The Defense of Poesy) ed. R. W. Maslen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 112.

art. Particularly troublesome would be the moment in which Falstaff presumes to play the king. As Hal reflects, “Thy state is taken for a joint stool, thy golden scepter for a leaden dagger, and thy precious rich crown for a pitiful bald crown” (2.4.302-3). One ironic register of this imposture is embodied in the imposter himself: neither Falstaff’s body nor his self-interest can be contained in the role, and he repeatedly emerges from the drama, flaunting mimesis. The transgression of social status and intrinsic gravity is too patent. . .until we recall that “Henry IV” is simply an actor, a common player imitating a king, with a richer costume and a better chair. In the play’s depiction of Lancastrian self-understanding, the king himself is a man playing a king, who deserves to do so because he plays the part better than his predecessor. In this way, the intrusion of the comic into the “majestic” that so troubled Sydney is a consequence of the drama’s reflection on its own method. The low intrudes on the high because theatricality understands that its highness is an interested performance. Tellingly, the contamination of the tragic mode is the corollary in the aesthetic realm of the antitheatricalists’ concern that the theater is a incitement for people to move from their assigned social places.

An excessive body demanding a host of signifiers, a character who plays at being himself with selfish abandon, the actor Will Kempe in a sack full of bombast, the dramatic avatar of John Oldcastle, Falstaff is theatricality gone riot. In Bale and Foxe, the immolation of the body of the martyred Oldcastle produces not the corporal relics of the spurned Catholic tradition but a text freed from its encumbering body, a text that can give witness to the master text, the Bible. In the dramatic incarnation of Oldcastle, the body returns as a fountain of interested rhetoric, of appetite and the promise of pleasure, and always the consciousness of the martyr’s pyre. Like the mandate to strike the name “John Oldcastle” from the production, the critical effort to reduce Falstaff to a type—the Vice, the *alazon*, the *miles gloriosus*—is a particular form of critical

ensorship. With Henry IV we encounter characters who know themselves to be actors on the stage of history, complicating any question of providence. If England's crisis of legitimacy begins with a king who laments "I have wasted time, and now doth time waste me," the articulation of a new legitimacy will come from a character whose providential self-dramatization will redeem time itself.

## V. OF GRACE AND GROSS BODIES: STRANGE BIRTHS AND THE BODY OF THE NATION

Prince: Sir John stands to his word; the devil shall have his bargain, for he was never yet a breaker of proverbs. He will give the devil his due.

Poins: Then art thou damned for keeping thy word with the devil.

Prince [*to Falstaff*]: Else he had been damned for cozening the devil.  
-- Henry IV, 1.2.91-94

If John Oldcastle's life is a cipher, at once illuminated and distorted by the writing of chronicle history, his afterlife has been a sort of textual explosion, marked at every moment by dispute over what his representation in his various avatars could mean to a spectrum of interested parties; he is the cause that polemic is in other men. A follower of Wyclif who appears to have believed in the clear sense of the text, his productions and reproductions have ever been the site of fundamental debate over meaning. Oldcastle's appropriation by Shakespeare was considered sufficiently offensive that the playwright was forced to change his character's name to "Sir John Falstaff," while leaving untouched a plethora of signs suggesting that the fat knight is indeed the Protestant martyr. It is a critical commonplace to approach Shakespeare's Falstaff with a list of those stock figures from which he may have been drawn: the *miles gloriosus*, the Vice of the morality play, the figure of Riot, the "Old Man" of the Protestant literature of reform. A. R. Humphreys has described him as "a rich amalgam, a world of comic ingredients."<sup>1</sup> This work too approaches him as a thing of parts, and this does a familiar sort of critical violence to the

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<sup>1</sup> A. R. Humphreys, The Arden Shakespeare King Henry IV Part 1 (London: Arden Shakespeare, 1960), p. xli

apparent wholeness of this character. Such an approach needs to be balanced by an understanding of how these competing tendencies are synthesized.

That John Falstaff is a dramatic representation of Oldcastle, and that the plays in which Falstaff appears insist upon that reference even after the playwright was compelled to change the name of the *dramatis persona* has been demonstrated by Gary Taylor and Alice-Lyle Scoufos with divergent critical emphasis.<sup>2</sup> Comic references to the character's original name occur in 2 Henry IV, including the Lord Chief Justice's angry rejoinder, "Do you set down *your name* in the scroll of youth, that are written down "*old*" with all the characters of age?"<sup>3</sup> Apparently, the association between the fat knight and the Lollard martyr was observed even in the breach. This having been said, this study employs the name "Falstaff" to refer to the *dramatis persona* not for the sake of setting aside the historical problems around that name, but as a signifier of the real historical pressures placed upon the text as we have received it.

A sort of orthodoxy has grown up locating Falstaff-Oldcastle in the role of the "grotesque Puritan," a critical interpretation that presents problems both historical and dramatic, as will become apparent. To Kristen Poole, Sir John's intimacy with certain modes of Puritan discourse is not simply one among many sociolects and registers he can articulate, but "the person of Falstaff is in and of himself a parody of the sixteenth-century Puritan."<sup>4</sup> The critical effort of reducing Falstaff to a member of the genealogy that includes Tribulation Wholesome and Martin Marprelate seems particularly problematic when the plays engage with Puritan theology. When

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<sup>2</sup> Gary Taylor, "The Fortunes of Oldcastle," Shakespeare Survey, vol. 38 (1985), pp. 85-100; Alice-Lyle Scoufos, Shakespeare's Typological Satire: A Study of the Falstaff-Oldcastle Problem (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979).

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, p. 96; The italics are his.

<sup>4</sup> Kristen Poole, "Saints Alive! Falstaff, Martin Marprelate, and the Staging of Puritanism," Shakespeare Quarterly, vol. 46, no. 1 (Spring, 1995), p. 54.

Falstaff returns from his abortive tryst with Mistress Ford in act three of The Merry Wives of Windsor, he has this exchange with Mistress Quickly:

Mistress Quickly: Marry sir, I come to your worship from Mistress Ford.

Falstaff: Mistress Ford? I have had ford enough. I was thrown into the ford; I have my belly full of ford.

Mistress Quickly: Alas the day! Good heart, that was not her fault. She does so take on with her men; they mistook their erection.

Falstaff: So did I mine, to build upon a foolish woman's promise.  
(The Merry Wives of Windsor, 3.4.33-42)

Mistress Quickly may be insensitive to her malapropism on "election," but Falstaff is not, and he continues the sexual quibble on that characteristically Puritan category with a level of self-consciousness that seems to insist that he knows himself to be among the Preterite. In fact, this play on election may continue the figure of his late-night swim as death from a few lines earlier: "you may know from my size that I have a kind of alacrity in sinking; and the bottom were as deep as hell, I should drown" (3.4.11-14).

The argument that Falstaff as an instance of Oldcastle was a recognizably "Puritan" figure also hangs upon a rather free reading of the Protestant tradition that produced the Oldcastle martyrologies. John Bale, without doubt the reformist to be credited with Oldcastle's recovery and assimilation to the Protestant cause, was horrified by the Puritan tendency.<sup>5</sup> The effort to produce the Oldcastle of the martyrologies as an important *Anglican* figure, appealing to royal supremacy when even the king abrogated his responsibility, should complicate the "grotesque Puritan" reading. Finally, the affinity of Falstaff for an array of traditional or "Catholic" figures and modes of representation, coupled with the manner in which his

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<sup>5</sup> "Writing to his friend Thomas Ashley sometime in 1556, Bale bewailed the new 'Church of the Purytie,' a group of zealots who were trying to establish "a seditious secte in contempte of the Englishe order for their owne pharisaycall advancement. . ." Leslie P. Fairfield, John Bale: Mythmaker for the English Reformation (West LaFayette, Indiana: Perdue University Press, 1972), p. 92.

representation articulates radical Protestant positions far more worrisome than those of the stage Puritan in the mold of Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, suggests that these reductive categories may be an impediment to understanding his characterization. The received Oldcastle of the late sixteenth century was a figure of complex and conflicted potential, debated in a moment when religious categories were anything but certain. The truth in Maitland's quip that England was "Protestant before the Reformation, and Catholic after" points to the complexity of English religious self-understanding in this period.

This study argues that the characterization of Falstaff functions through a dramatic method more akin to Viktor Shklovsky's "making strange" rather than by endorsing readily-available types circulating in sixteenth-century culture. The religious significance of Falstaff is developed in his relationship to the Lancastrian dynasty in the very process of forging itself in history and national myth. Not surprisingly, the representation of Falstaff is intimately related to problems raised around the future Henry V with regard to the agency of the figures of the past in various kinds of history. The moral question raised by prince's proverbial "cozening the devil" is a central question of the play: Can good be done in a world that seems morally compromised in every element? Can good acts or a good outcome come from the subject position of the fallen knight, or the usurper's heir?



is the personification of the English soil is strongly associated with the mother whose womb holds her embryonic sons, who are at once already soldiers and even already the dead whose blood she drinks. That the soldiers are to be associated with Christ is suggested by the parallel construction in the successive couplets “Christ – / Whose soldier now” and “English. . . / Whose arms were molded. . .” and so on. To put it plainly, the mother who drinks the blood of her sacrificed child is an identification of the realm of England with the mother of Christ. In this register, these lines evoke precisely the sort of inverted filial relationship that appears in Richard Crashaw’s poetic commentary on the second chapter of Luke:

Suppose he had been Tabled at thy Teats.  
Thy hunger feels not what he eats.  
He'll have his Teat ere long (a bloody one).  
The Mother then must suck the Son.

The blood-sucking mother is of course a grotesque image—in Laroque’s reading she is a “harp” – but this is a familiar *sacramental* horror, analogous to that of Saint Augustine’s observer who sees through the semblances of wine and altar bread their real substance, the flesh and blood of Christ. It may be important that Crashaw, though the son of a zealous Protestant divine, was himself a convert to Catholicism. The similar image deployed by the king shares an incarnational logic of representation with the *vierge ouvrante* figures of late-Medieval religion.<sup>7</sup> In such a figure, the Madonna at once embraces the infant Christ and contains within herself Christ crucified. Mary’s womb is symbolically the site of a chain of associations that link the milk of the *vierge lactans*, the nursing Madonna, to Christ’s redemptive blood, which is figured again as water and metaphorically, as in Crashaw’s “Luke II,” as milk. The grotesque quality of the relationship of mother and child is articulated through the consumption of bodily fluids, through the superposing of maternal organs and their functions on the son (Christ’s wound is

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<sup>7</sup> A representative image of a *vierge ouvrante* can be seen at <http://fits.depauw.edu/aharris/Courses/Gothic/TopicImages/MaryFS.jpg>

conventionally associated with a womb). Mikhail Bakhtin has discussed the grotesque image of the earth as the womb, not only of life, but of death.<sup>8</sup> In the careful rhetoric of Henry IV, it is not sufficient to say that these are “traditional” or “Catholic” figures, for they have been turned to a new purpose: they have been nationalized.<sup>9</sup>

The deployment of this mutated image of the virgin in Henry IV must be considered in terms of an evolving Reformation history. In a by now familiar appropriation of the despised popish icon, though Protestants displaced Mary from the prominent intercessory role she occupied in traditional worship, they were not always keen to discard her symbolic force. The affinity of the Virgin to the figure of the church personified as the immaculate mother of us all can be found in these lines from Calvin (in a gloss on Augustine):

For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother [the church] conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels.<sup>10</sup>

With the church our mother, we all potentially share the likeness of Christ. It is well known that Elizabeth Tudor exploited the representation of herself as the image of the virgin, the “*virgo potens* ‘who bore Christ in her heart as a womb.’”<sup>11</sup> Perhaps less well known is the mapping of

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<sup>8</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 21, 91.

<sup>9</sup> In her Politics of Mixed-Genre Drama: The Comic Treatment of Punishment Spectacles in Shakespeare (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1990), Janet Marie Spencer also discusses this appropriation of holy images by Tudor and Stuart monarchs: “. . . to students of Renaissance England, the ‘cult of the virgin’ makes more sense in reference to the virgin Queen than to the Blessed Virgin” (p. 179). Spencer seems to understand the use of the image of the virgin as a historically novel appropriation of religious imagery in the Protestant moment. The distinction with this work is important: this writing understands the plays to dramatize a Lancastrian use of religious imagery that can be located historically in such things as Henry V’s representations of his relationship with Edward the confessor. The result of this work is that the logic and tropes of religious representation in Shakespeare’s drama are surprisingly traditional (as opposed to reformed) with regard both to Falstaff and Lancaster.

<sup>10</sup> John Calvin, Institutes IV.1.1, 3-4 in Joel R. Beeke, “Calvin and Piety,” The Cambridge Companion to Calvin ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 131.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Josef Holtgen, “The Reformation of Images and Some Jacobean Writers on Art,” in Functions of Literature: Essays Presented to Erwin Wolff on his Sixtieth Birthday (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1984) p. 143, quoted in Julie Crawford, Marvelous Protestantism: Monstrous Births in Post-Reformation England (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), n. p. 190.

sacramental onto political bodies in Robert Crowley's An Epitome of Chronicles.<sup>12</sup> In this text, the body of Mary Tudor becomes the site in which a sacramental view of the body royal is tested and found wanting. As Thomas Betteridge has observed, Crowley presents an account of Mary's sterile and corrupted womb in her spurious pregnancies as a metaphor for the stillborn Catholic revival that she championed.<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that Crowley's discursus on Mary's womb is not somehow outside the traditional logic of sacred representation from which it is drawn, but relies on the logic of the *vierge ouvrante* to undermine the pretensions of a Tudor Catholic revival.

While Henry's image of the nation as mother is not uncontested, the drama puts forth a number of bodies in relation to that quasi-religious figure. The opening acts of Henry IV tend to situate Harry Percy as the martial child of England: he is a "Mars in swaddling clothes" and "infant warrior" (3.2.112-3), and King Henry wishes that his own son had been exchanged with Northumberland's as infants (1.1.85-9). Percy himself ironically comments on the "candy deal of courtesy" with which the king figures him as a child, "'Look, when his infant fortune came to age. . .'" (1.3.251). The Prince of Wales is constructed in opposition to this image of Percy, and the comparison is not one flattering to him, at least initially. That John Falstaff must be understood as a carnivalesque body in the context of the play has been brought out by critics including Laroque and Janet Marie Spencer, but a thick understanding of how that grotesque body functions in the political and spiritual economies of Tudor Protestantism remains to be developed. That Falstaff's is an excessive body is articulated in Hal's *amplificatio*:

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Crowley, An Epitome of Chronicles. . .continued to the Reign of Queen Elizabeth (London, 1559), STC 15217.5, quoted in Thomas Betteridge, Tudor Histories of the English Reformations, 1530-83 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), p. 169.

<sup>13</sup> Betteridge, p. 169. This trope, like a great deal of Tudor-Protestant propaganda, is picked up in Shekhar Kapur's 1998 film Elizabeth.

There is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat man; a tun of man is thy companion. Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humors, that bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swollen parcel of dropsies, that huge bombard of sack, that stuffed cloak-bag of guts, that roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly. . . (2.4.356-61)

In this *copia*, the body is imagined as an immense digestive tract, the container of a dubious and queasy forcemeat. As a veritable cathedral of digestion, Falstaff locates himself in a particular reformist cultural conversation about bodies and eating. Julie Crawford locates such discourses of bodily monstrosity in an emerging Protestant argument about the relationship between bodies and souls: “For many Protestants, despite—or perhaps because of—the Protestant doctrinal focus on the inscrutability of God’s ways on the much-touted ‘inwardness’ of post-Reformation belief, physiognomy took on a kind of predestinarian legibility”<sup>14</sup> If the bodies of the humble could be read, Falstaff’s body is a marked passage, pre-moralized and instantly recognizable. For English Protestants, there was nothing morally neutral about eating and digestion. Michael C. Schoenfeldt has explored the way in which a particular Protestant concept of dietary temperance informs the writing of George Herbert:

Eating requires one continually to determine the borders of morality: “A man dining eats at first lawfully; but proceeding on, comes to do unlawfully, even before he is aware”. . . . The consumer must be continually on the lookout for the moment “when the appetites of the body . . . [become] sins of gluttony.”<sup>15</sup>

Since eating is ever a moral tightrope, Herbert’s “consuming subject” treads a careful line between Bakhtin’s carnivalesque excess and the “holy fast” ascribed to traditional ascetic practice by Caroline Walker Bynum.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Julie Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism: Monstrous Births in Post-Reformation England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 117.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p. 119.

The moral sanction that attached to excessive food or drink is reproduced throughout Tudor-Protestant writing, with some surprising changes rung upon the theme. The Elizabethan Homilie Against Gluttony and Drunkenesse warns,

[God] so much abhorreth all beastly banquetting, that by his sonne our Sauour Christ in the Gospel, hee declareth his terrible indignation against all belly gods, in that hee pronounceth them accursed, saying, Wo bee to you that are full, for yee shall hunger.<sup>17</sup>

Like sumptuary laws, the Homilie can be understood as an attempt to contain social and economic mobility, to keep in its place a rising class that has the capacity to eat or drink to the degree of their betters. In a familiar vein, questions of social power are subordinated here to different sorts of social conflict. The curious figure of the “belly gods” is one that appears repeatedly in Protestant texts. Foxe’s Acts and Monuments admonishes against the same forms of excess in a similar language:

. . .for it is better and easier for a thirsty laboring mā to drink, thē for a dronken man to tell a sober wise tale. yea, it is a tokē that ye haue earnestly folowed your labor, and not kept company with dronkardes, and belly gods. . .<sup>18</sup>

This passage is evocative of Falstaff’s ambiance, particularly in the opposition of carnival excess and labor. The term “belly god” appears to have been drawn from Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, from a description of the enemies of Christ’s cross, “Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.”<sup>19</sup> In the polemical climate of Protestant England, such enemies were by no means anonymous. The Actes and Monuments records the inquisitor’s indictment of Elizabeth Warne, a Marian Protestant martyr: “The chieftest obiection that he vsed. . . was touching the reall and corporall

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<sup>17</sup> An Homilie Against Gluttony and Drunkenesse, STC 13675, II.5.1.47-50; Michael Davies makes a similar connection between the representation of Falstaff and the Homilie Against Gluttony and Drunkenesse, but does not examine the wider connection between “belly gods” and Eucharistic controversy in his “Falstaff’s Lateness: Calvinism and the Protestant Hero in *Henry IV*,” The Review of English Studies, New Series vol. 56 no. 255 (2005), pp. 351-78.

<sup>18</sup> Foxe 1563, p. 1238.

<sup>19</sup> Authorized Version, Philippians, 3:20.

presence of the body and bloud of Christe in the sacrament of the altar: as the chefest ground and profitablest foundation of their belly religion.”<sup>20</sup> Paul’s sinners whose God is their belly have become the adherents of the Real Presence, with a fleshly God in their bellies but spiritually empty. Thus in Foxe the objection of a reform-minded youth to a learned proponent of transubstantiation:

The same yong manne obiected against the said Broke, that he should say that the thyng which the Priest vseth to hold vp ouer his hed at Masse, is not þ<sup>e</sup> natural body of Iesu Christ, for if that were so, who so would, might haue their belly full of Goddes, their guttes full of Goddes. . .<sup>21</sup>

The material presence is lampooned as a carnivalesque object of abject digestion and regurgitation, “and he that hadde lately receyued the Sacrament before he went to the sea, myghte happily vomit God vp againe on shippe borde.”<sup>22</sup> The desire for communion with Christ’s flesh is re-imagined as both an insatiable gluttony and a debased polytheism. In Elizabethan homiletics and polemic, the gross body of the glutton is figured as a legible sign of the sin of intemperance and potentially a signifier of Eucharistic heresy. Indeed, because the body was both the site of possible signs and a hotbed of vice, the fulcrum of appetite and desire, it must have seemed to some at the extremity of reformist belief that it might be better to have no body at all.

This by no means exhausts the problem of Falstaff and consumption. As Dover Wilson observed, “we never see or hear of Falstaff eating, or desiring to eat, anything except Goodwife Keech’s dish of prawns and the capon, anchovies and halfpenny worth of bread recorded. . .in the bill found upon him when asleep. . .”<sup>23</sup> Instead, as Dover Wilson was well aware, the play deploys a tremendous amount of language that situates Falstaff himself as something to be

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<sup>20</sup> Foxe 1563, p. 1250-1.

<sup>21</sup> Foxe 1563, p. 688.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Dover Wilson, *The Fortunes of Falstaff* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943), p. 27

eaten.<sup>24</sup> He is of course the “roasted Manningtree ox” (1 Henry IV, 2.4.360), a “whoreson little tidy Bartholomew boar-pig” (2 Henry IV, 2.4.224-5), “chops” (1 Henry IV, 1.2.131, 2 Henry IV, 2.4.211), “sweet beef” (1 Henry IV, 3.3.176), and the catalogue could continue in this manner at great length. The trope of Falstaff as cooked flesh is of course related to recurring language in which he is figured as rendered fat, or burning in the form of a candle. His horse stolen, Hal observes,

Falstaff sweats to death,  
And lards the lean earth as he walks along:  
Were 't not for laughing, I should pity him. (Henry IV, 2.2)

There is a disturbing conjunction in these instances between the *dramatis persona* of Falstaff and the Oldcastle of Protestant hagiography, only partially mitigated by the translation of Oldcastle's heretic's pyre into a feast-day cooking-fire. The thirsty soil that drank the blood of the national martyrs that were her children has become a lean earth basted by the tallow of the fat knight. In this register, Falstaff is a feast in which all may partake, eating or being eaten as the case may be. In his treatment of the grotesquely exaggerated feasting surrounding the travail of Gargamelle in Rabelais' Pantagruel, Mikhail Bakhtin makes the apposite comment,

The limits between animal flesh and the consuming human flesh are dimmed, very nearly erased. The bodies are interwoven and begin to be fused in one grotesque image of a devoured and devouring world.<sup>25</sup>

Associated with the flesh of Christ in the host as understood from the perspective of reformists who rejected the Real Presence, Falstaff's body is the site of a perverse and uninhibited communion. In the flesh, he is a sort of anti-Eucharist.

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<sup>24</sup> “When. . . Shakespeare promises the audience. . . to continue with the story, with Sir John in it, ‘if you be not too much cloyed with fat meat’, the phrase sums up the prevailing image, constant in reference though every varying in form, which the physical characteristics of Falstaff presented to his mind's eye. Changes in London, and even more, changes in the language, have obliterated all this for the modern reader. . .” *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Bakhtin, p. 221.

One of the most difficult references for those who would read him as a fairly transparent representation of English Protestantism, either in the register of parody or in a manner comfortable to a Protestant self-conception, occurs in the question Poins asks of Falstaff's page: "And how doth the martlemas your master?" (2 Henry IV 2.2.78-9). Yet another allusion to Falstaff as flesh to be consumed in a sort of communal rite, here he is figured as Martlemas or Feast of St. Martin, which was observed beginning on the eleventh of November, coinciding with the large-scale slaughter of food animals for want of winter fodder. François Laroque has written, "Martinmas beef symbolized days of feasting in the popular English imagination, in the same way that pork products did for the villagers of mainland Europe."<sup>26</sup> The patron of the feast, St. Martin of Tours, enjoys strange affinities with certain representations of Oldcastle and emphatically with Falstaff. A soldier and the son of a Roman military officer, Martin was a patron saint of soldiers, as well as an interesting list of others: innkeepers, vintners, the growers of grape vines, drunkards, beggars, and shoemakers. In folk tradition, Martin was associated with charity and hospitality, as well as being a carnivalesque figure. In one anecdote, Martin transforms the devil into a donkey and rides him to Rome, goading him on with the sign of the cross.<sup>27</sup> The French song "*Saint Martin boit du vin*" details some of Martin's carnivalesque high-jinks:

Saint Martin drinks some wine,  
In the street of the Capuchins,  
He drank his dram,  
But didn't pay,  
So, with a slap of the broom,  
They sent him on his way.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> François Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World: Elizabethan seasonal entertainment and the professional stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 144-5.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Chambers, *The Book of Days, a miscellany of popular antiquities in connection with the calendar* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1873), p. 568.

<sup>28</sup> This is my rather free translation of  
*Saint Martin boit du vin*  
*Dans la rue des capucins.*

The associations between Martinmas and inebriation are legion, from Nashe's Pierce Penilesse, to Will Kempe's Nine Daies Wonder, to Shakespeare.<sup>29</sup> The Saint Martin who tore his cloak in half to share with a beggar and the one who enjoyed equal billing with the god Bacchus in the Hall of the Vintners' Company in London<sup>30</sup> were able to coexist in some fashion in traditional piety. With the coming of Tudor Protestantism, the economies punctuated by feast days were drawn into question, associated by reformists like Foxe with a materialized and ultimately idolatrous emphasis on eating:

In þ<sup>c</sup> Synode [of 1413] amōg other weyghty matters & ponderous, was determined: þ<sup>t</sup> the day of S. George, & also of S. Dūstane should be double feast, called Duplex festū in holy Kitchyng, in holy church I would say."<sup>31</sup>

The critique of Martlemas excess is picked up in the parade of the Seven Deadly Sins in Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, where Gluttony identifies "Sir Martin Martlemas-beefe" as one of his godfathers (2.1.160). The association of Martinmas with the "belly gods" of the church of Rome appears in Barnabe Googe's translation of The Popish Kingdome or reigne of Antichrist: "To belly cheare yet once againe doth Martin more encline, / Whom all the people worshipping, with roasted Geese and wine. . ." <sup>32</sup> Strangely, even in the polemic of his detractors, there is something appealing about St. Martin. In a curious historical note, when the monastery of St Martin was

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*Il a bu la goutte.  
Il l'a pas payee  
On l'a mis à la porte  
Avec un coup d'balai.*

<sup>29</sup> Martin W. Walsh, Medieval English 'Martinmesse': The Archaeology of a Forgotten Festival," Folklore, vol. 111, no. 2 (October, 2000), p. 235. This is an excellent general treatment of Martinmas, and makes the connection between Falstaff and Martlemas celebration, but does not develop this toward important issues of Falstaff's characterization or relationship to Oldcastle.

<sup>30</sup> Chambers, p. 568.

<sup>31</sup> Foxe 1563, p. 663.

<sup>32</sup> Barnabe Googe, The Popish Kingdome or reigne of Antichrist (London: Chiswick Press, 1880), quoted in Walsh, p. 236.

dissolved and its buildings destroyed in 1548 during the first wave of Edwardian reform, the west wing of the Church of St Martin Le Grand was re-consecrated as a huge tavern.<sup>33</sup>

The affinity of Martin for Falstaff and Oldcastle bridges the divide between the ascetic saint and the carnivalesque reveler. Having been enrolled in the Roman military from the age of fifteen, the St. Martin of the traditional martyrology felt he could no longer serve as a soldier after his conversion to Christianity, and was imprisoned for cowardice. Like Oldcastle, he occupied the apparently contradictory position of a career soldier who was an adherent to a faith that seemed to forbid the taking of life in war. Complicating the effort to understand Lollard knights who were an active part of a military aristocracy, a Lollard position on military service is elucidated in the “Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards,” a document with which Oldcastle may have been associated.<sup>34</sup> “manslaughter by battle or law of righteousness for temporal cause or spiritual with out special revelation is express contrary to the New Testament, which is a law of grace and full of mercy.”<sup>35</sup> As we shall see, the problem of Falstaff and Oldcastle with regard to military conduct in the Shakespeare plays is even more complicated than can be discussed fully at this point. It is important to note however that St. Martin, Falstaff and Oldcastle are epitomes of military service precisely because their relationships to their martial careers are transected by these seeming contradictions.<sup>36</sup>

As a figure circulating in Tudor culture, Oldcastle seems to have resonance with St. Martin as a figure of hospitality and in his capacity as the patron of innkeepers. We find in the 1604 play The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinarie the following reference:

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<sup>33</sup> Walsh, p. 236.

<sup>34</sup> J. G. Waller, “The Lords of Cobham, Their Monuments, and the Church,” Archaeologia Cantiana 11 (1877), p. 92, quoted in Scoufos, *n.* 327.

<sup>35</sup> H. S. Cronin, “The Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards,” The English Historical Review, Vol. 22, No. 86 (Apr., 1907), pp. 292-304.

<sup>36</sup> It may further be noted however that the character whose name comes to replace that of “Sir John Oldcastle” in 1 Henry IV, Shakespeare’s original “Sir John Falstaff,” is a coward who abandons Lord Talbot on a French battlefield in 1 Henry VI (3.2.104-9).

Shuttlecock: Now Signiors how like you mine host? Did I not tell you he was a madde round knave, and a merrie one too: and if you chaunce to talke of fatte Sir John Old-Castle, he wil tell you, he was his great Grandfather, and not much unlike him in paunch, if you mark him well by all descriptions.<sup>37</sup>

“Oldcastle’s” innkeeper grandson seems to weave together several of the threads of the Falstaff / St. Martin comparison, and while the Shakespeare’s Falstaff is not an innkeeper, he is the master of revels, the source of the carnival energy that emerges from the Boar’s Head.

## B. THIEVES AND THE RADICAL UTOPIA

It might be that the history play as represented by Richard II or Henry IV, concerned as they are with law, legitimacy, insurrection, and civil war, might have something to say to us about our own political moment; Ernst Kantorowicz certainly thought so. On the other hand, perhaps the concerns of these plays, properly understood, are so remote from our own historical place that they fail to resonate with our experience. As we have seen, the theological concerns raised by Oldcastle’s dramatization do not lie somehow outside of the political. Richard M. Eastman would place significant constraints on the scope of the political concerns the critic can bring to the plays. “What could Henry IV tell us, much as we care to know, about participatory democracy or international law? These concerns do not appear in Henry IV in any operative way.”<sup>38</sup> This claim is counterpoised to a broad critical effort to understand the Henry plays as producing a narrative of the populist education of the Prince of Wales. If Henry V becomes a man of his people, whence the people, and how are they represented?

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<sup>37</sup> Anonymous, The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinarie (London: T. C. for Mathew Lawe, 1604), p. 16 in Scoufos, p. 37.

<sup>38</sup> Richard M. Eastman, “Political Values in Henry IV, Part One: Liberal Humanism,” College English, vol. 33, no. 8 (May, 1972), p. 903.

Falstaff himself is a particularly thorny problem when it comes to class origins or class analysis. In the article “Falstaff and his Social Milieu,” the Marxist critic Paul N. Siegel describes Falstaff as a “degenerate descendent of the feudal gentry.”<sup>39</sup> In doing so, Siegel places himself in a critical genealogy tracing back through the British Marxist T. A. Jackson, and possibly to Engels himself.<sup>40</sup> For Jackson, Falstaff’s class origins are clear: “Shakespeare, in depicting Falstaff and his crew, depicted from life, in vivid truth, the phenomena [sic] of *decadence*, the degeneration and decomposition of an absolute class. . .”<sup>41</sup> Jackson’s flat and reductive reading of the carnival elements of Falstaff’s scene should raise some doubt about his conclusions, particularly in his misunderstanding of the popular element of carnival. The Russian critic M. Nechkina took a different view, this time claiming Marx as an authority: “Falstaff for Marx was ‘personified capital’ of the epoch of the dawn of capitalism. . .the fragments of feudal ideas are merely the building blocks for his new, bourgeois morality.”<sup>42</sup> Though Jackson expressly rejected it,<sup>43</sup> Nechkina’s reading is open to seeing Falstaff as a liminal character rather than a sort of over-determined send-up of the decrepitude of a class in eclipse.

Falstaff’s own account of his background is suggestive, but not definitive. In an ironic observation to the Lord Chief Justice, he says, “I was born about three of the clock in the afternoon, with a white head and something a round belly” (2 Henry IV, 1.2.516). Something more is revealed in the amicable resentment between Falstaff and Justice Shallow. In his reminiscences about his youth about the Inns of Court, Shallow says, “Then was Jack Falstaff, now Sir John, a boy, and page to Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk” (2 Henry IV, 3.2.20-1). It

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<sup>39</sup> Paul N. Siegel, “Falstaff and his Social Milieu,” Weapons of Criticism: Marxism in America and the Literary Tradition (Palo Alto: Ramparts, 1976), p. 164.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> M. Nechkina, “Shakespeare in Karl Marx’s *Capital*,” International Literature, vol. 3 (March, 1935), pp. 75-81, in Hugh G. Grady, The Modernist Shakespeare: Critical Texts in a Material World (London: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 9-10.

<sup>43</sup> Grady, p. 10.

would seem that Falstaff's knighthood is not hereditary, but of recent coinage. For his part, Falstaff describes Shallow as a "man made after supper of a cheese paring. . .and now is this Vice's dagger become a squire, and talks as familiarly of John a' Gaunt as if he had been sworn brother to him" (3.2.250-1, 258-60). By Sir John's own account, Falstaff and Shallow are both "made" men – and made recently—in the sense that, through distinct avenues, they have become "squire" on the one hand and "Sir John with all Europe" on the other. In the John of Gaunt anecdote, Falstaff marks himself as a competitor in Shallow's social climbing, with the status anxiety of a similarly rising man.

In the foundational article "Falstaff as a Parodist and Perhaps Holy Fool," Roy Battenhouse puts forward an incisive reading of Falstaff as a religiously-informed commentator on the Lancastrian state. Falstaff's "vocation" in this reading is an elaboration on the role of "politic fool" and moral instructor to the prince, but "such a vocation runs the risk of banishment at the hands of princes whose morals are those of worldly self-advantage and political expediency."<sup>44</sup> Here, Battenhouse plays upon the religious etymology of "vocation" (from the latin *vocationem* or "calling") in Falstaff's comment, "'tis no sin for a man to labor in his vocation" (Henry IV, 1.2.81-2) Fair enough, and indeed the secular use of the term "vocation" was an innovation of the Tudor historical moment.<sup>45</sup> The observation by Hal that prompts Falstaff's defense certainly tends to place this reply in a religious register, albeit an ironic one: "I see a good amendment of life in thee – from praying to purse taking" (1.2.79-80).

In point of fact, "vocation" is a rare word in Shakespeare, used only twice outside of this conversation between Hal and Falstaff, and always in a similar religious-political valence. In

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<sup>44</sup> Roy Battenhouse, "Falstaff as a Parodist and Perhaps Holy Fool," PMLA vol. 90, no. 1 (January, 1975), p. 32.

<sup>45</sup> OED.

The Second Part of Henry VI, we find this exchange between Bevis and John Holland, two followers in Jack Cade's peasant rebellion:

Bevis: Nay more, the King's council are no good workmen.

Holland: True; and yet it is said, labor in thy vocation;  
which is as much to say as, let the magistrates be  
laboring men; and therefore should we be magistrates (4.2.15-8)

Holland's understanding of the old saw is made to appear wonderfully incoherent: he employs "vocation" as a rationale for humble men like himself to rise beyond their places and their competence. This "calling" has the specific force of supplanting the law of the realm with a grotesque reflection, unlettered and anti-intellectual: the rebels kill a poor clerk for being able to sign his own name (4.2.85-110). Falstaff too imagines a new world in which "old father Antic the law" is suspended in favor of some new order (Henry IV, 1.2.47), imagines, like Holland, that he will serve as a judge (1.2.50).

The Jack Cade rising in Shakespeare is the site of an anachronistic telescoping of separate events. Cade instructs his followers, "Now go some and pull down the Savoy; others to the Inns of Court; down with them all" (2 Henry VI, 4.7.1-2). Shakespeare is not unique among his contemporaries in conflating the Cade rising with the 1381 Peasants' Revolt. In the 1593 Survey of the Pretended Holy Discipline Archbishop of Canterbury Richard Bancroft explores the connection between radical religious dissent and political revolution. He claims to find in a radical Protestant tract an acknowledgement of a position elucidated by Hooker in the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity: that the rule of the feudal aristocracy had its beginning in the acclamation of the people, a popular endorsement that social radicals of the underclass have forgotten:

They [the ancestors of the current nobility] revenged and delivered the oppressed people out of the hands of their governors who abused their authority and wickedly, cruelly, and tyrannously ruled over them, the people of a grateful and thankful mind gave them that estimation and honor. We live in a world, you know, that cryeth out: the first institution.

. . . The words be good if they be well applied. But something was amiss in the priest's application of his text, being such a like saying amongst a multitude of rebels, viz: When Adam digged and Eve span, who was then the gentleman.<sup>46</sup>

Brents Stirling has noted Bancroft's curious gloss on this passage. Opposite the text of the rebel priest's sermon is the note, "John Wall, or Ball in the time of Jack Cade's rebellion, in Rich. 2 days."<sup>47</sup> Stirling thus situates Shakespeare's conflation of Cade's rebellion and the 1381 rising in a more general identification of the two events in late-sixteenth-century English culture. For Bancroft, Lancastrian era popular radicalism was of a piece with the leveling tendencies of Anabaptists like John of Leyden, as well as the similar covert goals attributed to radical dissenters in England.<sup>48</sup> Bancroft was not inclined to throw Wyclif into the mix, but the cultural contest over his influence upon the 1381 rising and the radical aspirations of the commons in general was sufficiently well known that Thomas James felt compelled to defend him against the charge of Christian communism in his 1608 Apologie for John Wicliffe.<sup>49</sup> The stage representation of a disciple of Wyclif's, Falstaff's use of "vocation" points toward religiously-inspired social upheaval, the suspension of law, and communism.<sup>50</sup> The son of a plasterer who defends his humble station by observing "Adam was a gardener" (2 Henry VI, 4.2.134), Jack Cade declares, "henceforward all things shall be in common" (2 Henry VI, 4.7.18-9). Each in a distinct way, in voicing their ambition to supplant the place of the judges and magistrates of the realm, Cade's follower John Holland and the Prince's companion John Falstaff dramatize Tudor

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<sup>46</sup> Richard Bancroft, A Survey of the Pretended Holy Discipline (London, 1593), pp. 8-9, quoted in Brents Stirling, The Populace in Shakespeare (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), p. 135.

<sup>47</sup> Bancroft, p. 135.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, pp 97-121.

<sup>49</sup> Stirling, p. 141.

<sup>50</sup> The remaining instance of the use of "vocation" in Shakespeare is on the part of Joan de la Pucelle, who uses the term in the context of God's calling her from her humble station in life to "free my country from calamity" by taking up the sword against the English (Henry VI, 1.2). Note that all three characters are opponents of the Lancastrian regime from the lowest social stratum.

Protestant anxieties about the radical content of Protestantism commonly projected on contemporary movements like Anabaptism:

The Anabaptists say that in Christ's and in the Apostle's time there was no Christian magistrate. . .and what does this differ from the assertion. . .[that] the Church of God was perfect in all her regiment before there was any Christian prince?<sup>51</sup>

For a Tudor apologist like John Bridges, the calling that summons the unwashed out of their places threatens every aspect of the edifice of Christian government. On opposite sides of this representational conflict, the law is seen as either the guarantor of social stability or a particular goad with which the commons are kept down.

This having been said, Eastman's claims about Shakespeare's liberal legacy are interesting even if they have proved untenable:

To the argument that Shakespeare could not foresee rebellion in its modern, apocalyptic dimension, the humanist must assent. Probably no Elizabethan could take seriously the radical dream that men might found a counter-world-order with a new humanity and a new legitimacy."<sup>52</sup>

That this is not the case, that Shakespeare has depicted in the bleakest palette a threat from socially-leveling influences both near at hand and socially remote, is perhaps not as useful here as the question of "taking seriously" such things. In their stark reality, the revolutionary tendencies of Cade or Ball appear in Shakespeare as loathsome, but modulated into the comic register, they can be accommodated, put in their place, even if the comic moment is a brittle and anxious one; perhaps especially so.

The projection upon Falstaff of "Anabaptist" or other revolutionary reformist positions, often presented from the perspective their detractors, complicates the approach to Falstaff as a

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<sup>51</sup> John Bridges, A Defence of the Government Established in the Church of Englande for Ecclesiasticall Matters (London, 1587), p. 134, quoted in Stirling, p. 108.

<sup>52</sup> Eastman, p. 907.

“holy fool” suggested by Battenhouse.<sup>53</sup> His analysis seems to suggest that, if we read closely enough through a Christian hermeneutic, we find that the play endorses the moral critique of the house of Lancaster by Falstaff. There is justice to this position, but it runs aground at the conjunction of Cade, Oldcastle, and Falstaff. If we look at the way in which Oldcastle’s potentially radical-reformist positions are translated into the comic register, we see how this complicates the privileging of Falstaff’s religious-political intervention as suggested by Battenhouse.

We return to Falstaff’s disclaimer, “’Tis no sin for a man to labor at his vocation.” In his first scene, Falstaff acknowledges that his calling is as a thief and taker of purses. In the person of Falstaff, theft is elevated to an aesthetic undertaking of the first rank. He imagines a new order in which this labor is given its fitting place:

Marry, then, sweet wag, when thou art king, let us not that are the squires of the night’s body be called thieves of the day’s beauty. Let us be Diana’s<sup>54</sup> foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon; and let men say we be men of good government, being governed, as the sea is, by our noble and chaste mistress the moon, under whose countenance we steal. (1.2.19-24)

The theft to which an aestheticized moral sanction attaches under Henry IV – “thieves of the day’s beauty” – will become something else under his son, or so Falstaff imagines. There is an interesting play upon “countenance” in this passage. In effect, Falstaff first asks the Prince of Wales to countenance theft in his future reign. By the end of his speech, that countenance has been transferred from Hal (who consistently associates himself with the Lancastrian solar

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<sup>53</sup> Indeed, this is one of the key distinctions between this work and Janet Marie Spencer’s similar work, The Politics of Mixed Genre Drama: The Comic Treatment of Punishment Spectacles in Shakespeare. While this work discovers in Falstaff a strong and consistent identification with the most politically unsettling articulations of reform, Spencer discovers in Shakespeare a sort of liberal mediator between religious positions: “By representing both images of Oldcastle as a Lollard martyr and heretical traitor only to reject them, the Falstaff scenes undermine the polemicization of piety by both Protestants and Catholics, depoliticizing. . .the rhetoric of martyrdom” p. 146.

<sup>54</sup> Among the great number of references that tie Falstaff to the Mass, it should be noted that Foxe attributes to Tyndale an association between the idolatry of the Sacrament of the Altar and the worship of the “idol” Diana by the inhabitants of Ephesus. Foxe, 1563, 519.

metaphor) to the moon. Falstaff's "men of good government" will not be governed at all, or at least not by a king. Characteristically, Hal draws this back to a normative position: governed like the tides by the moon, Falstaff's utopian thieves will rise, "now in as low an ebb as the foot of the ladder and by and by in as high a flow as the ridge of the gallows" (1.2.29-31). That contemporary Englishmen understood a radically-egalitarian referent to Falstaff's musings upon a thieves' Land of Cockaigne is borne out in the polemic of Samuel Rowlands. In his Martin Mark-all, Beadle of Bridewell, a chorus of rogues makes this defense of their manner of living:

If there be any in our vocation or calling that live disorderly and out of compass, what trade can you name that do not do the like. If we sometimes lay with our neighbors' wives, is it not usual elsewhere? (Nay herein by your favor, we do best point out that the Family of Love, who do not stick but have all things in common).<sup>55</sup>

Not only does Rowlands place "all notorious rogues and vagabonds"<sup>56</sup> in a genealogy with Jack Cade himself, or associate theft and wantonness with the utopian communism and radical Protestantism of the Family of Love, he does all this with what appears to be a paraphrase of Falstaff's language in Act 3 of Henry IV: "now I live out of all order, out of all reasonable compass" (3.3.14-5). Once again, through his conjunction with Oldcastle in his ambivalence as Protestant saint or Lancastrian traitor, Falstaff finds himself in the proximity of that other Shakespearean rebel, Jack Cade.

The question of the relationship between rebellions of the commons and disruptions of property illuminates Shakespeare's dramatization of Cade. Critics have noted that the depiction of the Jack Cade of 2 Henry VI as crude and illiterate runs counter to the chronicle accounts that

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<sup>55</sup> Samuel Rowlands, Martin Mark-all, Beadle of Bridewell, His Defence and Answer to the Belman of London (London, 1610), sig. B2r, quoted in Stirling, p. 131. While Stirling remarks cogently upon the similarity between Shakespeare and Rowlands in their treatment of scenes of popular uprising, I have found no instance in which he makes the connection to Falstaff and Oldcastle.

<sup>56</sup> Stirling, p. 131.

were his likely sources.<sup>57</sup> While in no wise endorsing his rebellion, Holinshed records that Cade was “sober in talk and wise in reasoning”<sup>58</sup>, and possessed of “right pregnant wit.”<sup>59</sup> In treating of the death of Cade at the hands of the Kentish gentleman Alexander Iden (or “Eden”), the play takes pains to portray the rebel in the least flattering light. As Lucille King has noted, Shakespeare appears to have used Hall’s disparaging account of Cade’s death rather than that found in Holinshed.<sup>60</sup> In Holinshed, Eden confronts Cade deliberately, with the intention of killing him and collecting a reward. In 2 Henry VI, Cade sneaks into Iden’s garden, driven by hunger and the collapse of his revolutionary aspirations:

. . .now am I so hungry that, if I might have a lease of my life for a thousand years, I could stay no longer. Wherefore, on a brick wall I have climb’d into this garden, to see if I can eat grass, or pick a sallet another while. . .(4.10.4-8)

Stephen Greenblatt has pointed out the way in which ideas of property pervade this scene. As the bucolic knight Iden enters, expostulating on the joys of a country life, Cade says, “Here’s the lord of the soil come to seize me for a stray, for entering his fee-simple without leave” (4.10.24-5). The fault is placed unambiguously on Cade’s side as Iden is confronted by a violent trespasser threatening him ill. The clearly-wronged knight asks,

. . .why then should I betray thee?  
Is’t not enough to break into my garden  
And like a thief to come to rob my grounds,  
Climbing my walls in spite of me the owner,  
But wilt thou brave me with these saucy terms? (4.10.32-6)

Not knowing that he confronts the notorious leader of the rebel host, Iden is forced to kill Cade.

As Greenblatt has observed, this is configured not as the putting down of the rebel commons, but

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<sup>57</sup> See, for instance, Stirling, pp. 23-3, Lucille King, “The Use of Hall’s Chronicles in the Folio and Quarto Texts of Henry VI,” *Philological Quarterly* 13 (October, 1934), pp. 321-332.

<sup>58</sup> Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (London, 1808), vol. III, p. 220, quoted in Stirling, p. 24.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p. 224, Stirling p. 24.

<sup>60</sup> King, p. 325.

as the defense of property against theft, specifically “enclosed private property”<sup>61</sup> vested in the person of a virtuous country knight: “I den perceives Cade not as a social rebel but as a belligerent thief who has tried to steal a salad; theirs is a contest not between an aristocrat and a churl but between a well-fed owner of property and a ‘poor famished man.’”<sup>62</sup>

This plays out in the religious dimensions that we have examined. In a refiguring of the radical appropriation of Genesis in the familiar “When Adam delved and Eve span. . .,” Jack Cade, the heir of Adam, steals into the Garden of Iden to discover that relations of property have been inscribed even there. Of course it is Cade who brings to this idyllic space both violence against the peaceful esquire of Kent and, of course, theft. Revolution is continuous with theft, and both of these things with perversions of belief. In a comic register, but always threatening to expand outwards, Falstaff is cousin to Jack Cade, and each of them resonant with the dangers of radical Protestantism as a threat to church, king, property, and the entire moral order. In this regard, Hal’s quip about Falstaff’s progression “from praying to purse taking” may be *causal*; Falstaff’s dubious religiosity has led to his criminality.

The putative dangers of radical Protestantism were the site of a significant textual production, in England and on the continent. One chronicle account concerning the Anabaptists driven out of Constance in 1527 commented upon their moral extremity: “Some hold that all Christians should have all things in common, including women; some say that nothing is sinful for them, neither whoring, gambling, warfare, homicide, nor anything else, for they are dead to the flesh.”<sup>63</sup> Falstaff’s social milieu can be understood as a comic realization of this stilted

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<sup>61</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, “Murdering Peasants: Status, Genre, and the Representation of Rebellion,” Representations, no. 1 (Feb., 1983), p. 24.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>63</sup> Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer. 4: Baden und Pfalz (Gütersloh, 1951), p. 452, lines 15-17, in Bob Scribner, “Practical Utopias: Pre-Modern Communism and the Reformation,” Comparative Studies in Society and History, vol. 36, no. 4 (October, 1994), p. 746.

understanding of the social vision of the most radical elements in Protestantism, where “goods in common” has become theft, the plural marriage of which John of Leyden was accused has become whoremongering, and so on. In fact, as a professed thief, Falstaff apprehends himself in the very categories in which social power as constituted within the play would understand him. This is an area where Battenhouse’s account of Falstaff’s anti-Lancastrian critique must be amended. Falstaff’s representations, emerging from the social *mélange* of thieves, rebels and Anabaptists, are so situated that it is doubly hard for them to make a moral claim on us. Even the language with which he speaks of himself is, in a sense, the language of the enemy. This is not to say that he is incapable of acute indictments of the world in which he finds himself, in part because certain “intestine shocks” in that world have placed all of law, property and legitimacy in question.

### C. THE BOAR’S HEAD

The tavern in which Sir John Falstaff holds court is a liminal space, an island of comedy amidst the serious business of history and national myth. More important, it is a place that stands somehow aloof of history: the site of a particular sort of anachronism. In the 15<sup>th</sup>-century dramatic world of Henry IV, the inn is a superposition of Lancastrian and Elizabethan elements. As the meeting place of the future Henry V and a fictionalized John Oldcastle, the tavern is insulated to some extent from the very history of which they are a part. This having been said, that history intrudes itself into this space in the form of discordant reminders. In these metadramatic intrusions of events from national myth, the Henry plays keep always before us the

prospect that some historical events will impose themselves on the dramatic scene. When Falstaff says, “I’ll be a traitor then, when thou art king” (1.2.133), it is the specter of popular rebellion that is raised, of the St. Giles’ Fields rising superimposed upon the militancy of the commons both in this moment and in times remote. In the same manner, when Hal tells Falstaff, “thou shalt have the hanging of the thieves, and so become a rare hangman” (1.2.51-2), it suggests the younger Henry’s agency in the execution of the historical Oldcastle. Nowhere is the play’s strange relationship with history more patently exhibited than in its taunting evocations of events that remain outside of its own narrative. When we consider the production and dissemination of historical discourses that claim either Henry V or Oldcastle or *both* as the templates for our subjectivities as loyal Tudor Protestants, what may be most interesting is our unwillingness to consider what might have happened at the conjunction of these two figures. Indeed, what instance could better illuminate Slavoj Žižek’s claim, in relation to Althusser’s category of “interpellation,” that “identification with community is ultimately always based upon some shared guilt or, more precisely, upon the *fetishistic disavowal* of this guilt”?<sup>64</sup> The dramatic engagement of these two figures threatens to cause a fracture or, more properly, to reveal the fracture that is already present in such a subjectivity. Žižek’s reading of Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Emperor’s New Clothes” is relevant to this argument: just as everyone knows, and explicitly denies, that the emperor is naked, everyone knows that Henry V burned Oldcastle, just as everyone knows that Oldcastle was a traitor. To bring these things to explicit consciousness is to challenge the ideological underpinning of our existence. Of course, the drama never stages that particular betrayal, but only approaches this point, destabilizing the subjectivity of the audience toward the promise of some further reconfiguration.

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<sup>64</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (New York: Verso, 1994), p. 57.

The highway robbery at Gad's Hill is the defining comic action of the tavern scenes of Henry IV, particularly important in developing the relationship between Falstaff and the Prince of Wales. In the conception of the robbery, it is of dramatic import that neither Hal nor Falstaff is its original author. Ned Poins suggests the occasion and the place, where "there are pilgrims going to Canterbury with rich offerings and traders riding to London with fat purses" (1.2.96-7), an exploit in contempt of both property and piety. Falstaff threatens, "Hear ye, Yedward, if I tarry at home and go not, I'll hang you for going" (1.2.102-3). When Hal expresses his own reluctance, he picks up on Falstaff's language, "Well, come what will, I'll tarry at home" (1.2.112). The Prince is distanced from responsibility for the most culpable aspect of the deed, and his involvement is translated into that area of moral quandary, "cozening the devil." He and Poins rob the thieves less for profit than for the comic theater anticipated by Poins, the "incomprehensible lies" Falstaff will be compelled to produce.

The initial robbery is played out in a set of grotesque inversions: the disguised Falstaff describes his victims as "fat chuffs" and "bacons," his compatriots and himself as "us youth" (2.272, 73, 69). As Paul N. Siegel has observed, the scene hangs upon certain class concerns: the travelers are franklins, commercial farmers profiting from the displacement or feudal agricultural labor.<sup>65</sup> If Falstaff himself can be described as a sort of social parasite, the franklins are "caterpillars" of another sort; if his denouncement of them plays upon a comic irony, it is one that cuts both ways. The class instability inherent in his characterization puts Falstaff at once above and below the franklins in the social order.<sup>66</sup> His resentment of the new money of the franklins is consistent with his general disdain for the current "costermonger's times" of the emerging money economy, vented on another occasion at Puritan city tradesman:

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<sup>65</sup> Siegel, p. 170.

<sup>66</sup> Understanding Falstaff as a hereditary gentleman, Siegel sees Falstaff's comments to the travelers as "associating himself with Bohemian youth against the fat, comfortable bourgeois" (p. 171).

The whoreson smoothy-pates do now wear nothing but high shoes and bunches of keys at their girdles, and if a man is through with them in honest taking up, then they must stand upon security. (2 Henry IV, 1.2.28-31)<sup>67</sup>

A late-feudal figure, Falstaff is adrift in the world of debit and credit, but a place has been provided for him, as debtor and thief. Thief he is without a doubt, but he understands himself as functioning in a world of thefts large and small.

That the second Lancastrian cycle contains a sustained commentary on theft at all levels has been commented upon by Harold Goddard, who observes, “we see that from the moment when Henry Bolingbroke usurped a throne, stealing has been a main theme of the tetralogy.”<sup>68</sup> This work has been expanded upon by Robert Hapgood, who has mapped the language of theft throughout the second Henriad. While theft informs many aspects of the play, including the king’s relationship with the Percies, who helped him take the throne of Richard II, a crucial observation of Hapgood’s is that Hal’s implication in the Gad’s Hill robbery is analogous to his moral entanglement in his father’s usurpation: in both cases, he is potentially the beneficiary of a theft committed by another.<sup>69</sup> In the instance of the Gad’s hill robbery, this is one of any number of ways in which Falstaff is constructed as a comment on Hal’s father. The parallel between the robbery at Gad’s Hill and the theft of crown and realm by Henry IV functions as a sort of defamiliarization whereby the authority of the Lancastrian state as arbiter of the moral world is drawn into question.

The comic dispute over the events that follow the initial robbery of the travelers is in a sense a struggle over dramatic priority in the tavern world of the play. The comic irony in play is that Poins, who has scripted these events from the first suggestion, has already determined Falstaff’s part:

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<sup>67</sup> An interesting comment, coming from a character described as a “stage Puritan.”

<sup>68</sup> Harold Clarke Goddard, The Meaning of Shakespeare (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 211.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Hapgood, “Falstaff’s Vocation,” Shakespeare Quarterly vol. 16, no. 1 (Winter, 1965), p. 96

The virtue of this jest will be the incomprehensible lies that this same fat rogue will tell us when we meet at supper – how thirty at least he fought with, what wards, what blows, what extremities he endured; and in the reproof of this lives the jest. (1.2.141-4)

Critically, our understanding of this scene hangs upon the question of what sort of dramatic interiority can be ascribed to Falstaff. Poins' framing of the action in advance makes it preposterous in the extreme that the audience identify with Falstaff; we are situated in the perspective of the Prince and Poins in their privileged knowledge. The questions raised by Falstaff's response are twofold: is his performance simply a desperate attempt to recover his vanity, or is there an element of self-conscious comic play? Further, is the comic-rhetorical victory of the prince as much a forgone conclusion in the tavern as was his martial victory on Gad's Hill, or can Falstaff contrive some sort of rhetorical escape? Without a doubt vanity – perhaps even the capital-v Vanity of the morality play – is at stake in this scene, as some critics have suggested.<sup>70</sup> In the unremittingly male gender economy of the tavern scenes, it must be said, the sort of abject stripping of Falstaff's pretensions at which Hal and Poins aim might be a violence that the drama cannot support. The audience is spared this at the very moment that it seems inevitable, when the prince reveals that he and Poins robbed Falstaff and his companions.

The solution Falstaff contrives is of course a wonderful improvisation:

Why, hear you, my masters, was it for me to kill the heir apparent? Should I turn upon the true prince? Why, thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules, but beware instinct. The lion will not touch the true prince. (2.4.213-6)

Picking up on the discourses of legitimacy mobilized around the Lancastrians' contested claim to the throne, Falstaff manages to couple his own martial prowess to Hal's claim to be the divinely-

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<sup>70</sup> See, for instance, Eben Bass, "Falstaff and the Succession," *College English*, vol. 24, no. 7 (April, 1963), pp. 502-6. Bass argues that Vanity in the form represented in Skelton's *Magnificence* is the signal moral failing in the second Lancastrian cycle, being a component of the fall of Richard II, as well as personified in Falstaff, who must in turn be rejected by the prince.

ordained successor, sanctioned by the very state of nature.<sup>71</sup> This represents an interesting escalation on Falstaff's part when we consider its refutation. Falstaff's repeated claim, "Thou art essentially made without seeming so" (2.4.394), has the same force: he gives lip service to Hal as a prince "instinct," even if his current entertainments and habitués tend to obscure that fact. This is drawn into an ironic register by the fact that we know Falstaff to have acted the coward in some fashion.<sup>72</sup> In a comic dispute that could only take place in a play that dramatized the dubious credibility of Lancastrian pretensions, Falstaff is threatening Hal with the suggestion that he understands the manner in which the prince's "natural" majesty may be every bit as performed as Falstaff's courage<sup>73</sup>—an insight that almost seems privy to Hal's soliloquizing on his future "reformation." It is no surprise that the "play extempore" that follows should raise the same sort of questions.

Assuming the role of Henry IV in the play within act 2, scene 4, Falstaff even more aligns himself with Hal's father. As James Winney has argued, the props Falstaff uses in his travesty of Henry are a pointed satire on Bolingbroke's illegitimacy.<sup>74</sup> The prince comments, "Thy state is taken for a joint stool, thy golden scepter for a leaden dagger, and thy precious rich crown for a pitiful bald crown" (2.4.303-4). Battenhouse would read this as an instance of the prince's "damnable iteration": his inclination to repeat and re-contextualize the statements of others. If Falstaff is "enacting a figure of Henry's makeshift royalty" with these work-worn

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<sup>71</sup> Henry Hitch Adams observes this in "Falstaff's Instinct," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Spring, 1954), pp. 208-9.

<sup>72</sup> Criticism has struggled with Falstaff's behavior in this scene at least since Maurice Morgann, but it seems that even Falstaff himself needs to deploy a rationale for his conduct on Gad's Hill.

<sup>73</sup> Adams comes quite close to this conclusion, but runs aground on Hal's essential kingship. Stephen Greenblatt is much closer to this reading in his assertion that "Both claims. . . are, the lines darkly imply, of equal merit," *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p. 46.

<sup>74</sup> James Winney, *The Player King: A theme of Shakespeare's Histories* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1968), pp. 106-7.

stage properties, Hal makes a point of rejecting the implied comment.<sup>75</sup> Falstaff's euphuistic depiction of the elder Henry is not only a critique of the Lancastrian moment on several levels, but an example of his command of a variety of rhetorical modes, seasoned always by his perverse self-reference. These tendencies are particularly evident in the mock-king's reflections on his wayward heir:

That thou art my son I have partly thy mother's word, partly my own opinion, but chiefly a villainous trick of thine eye and a foolish hanging of thy nether lip that doth warrant me. If then thou be son to me, here lies the point: why, being son to me, art thou so pointed at? (2.4.321-5)

Falstaff astutely notes the king's concern with the manner in which appearances impinge on the performance of majesty. This is tied to a seeming *non sequitur*: the bawdy play on Hal's paternity. In fact, this is a fugue on a theme we have already heard the king sound in the first act, when he wished he could imagine that Harry Percy were his son. The reference to "thy mother" is important here, for in the imagined world of the play Hal has no mother to speak of except in a small number of comic references—no mother but the figure of England evoked in the play's first lines. The legitimacy at stake here is not that implicated in the question of whether Hal is a bastard, but once again that of whether he is by grace and (problematically) by birthright to be king, the proper child of England. Falstaff translates that sacramentalized political question into his own social world with an ironic self-reference that travesties these grave matters of state.

Falstaff's impersonation of the king, properly understood, is a send-up of the self-understanding of Henry IV. In his bombastic speech, Henry (like the Falstaff who plays him) seems to reveal himself unknowingly. Of Hal's associates, the mock-king says,

There is a thing, Harry, which thou hast often heard of, and it is known by many in our land by the name of pitch. This pitch, as ancient writers do report, doth defile; so doth the company thou keepest (2.4.327-30)

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<sup>75</sup> Battenhouse, p. 39.

With his citation of “ancient writers,” the king seems to be ignorant of the biblical provenance to this reference to pitch. Battenhouse refers us to its source in Ecclesiasticus, where he discovers that the scripture is concerned not with the evils of vulgar company but with the dangers that inhere in the friendship of the proud:

1. He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled with it: and he that is familiar with the proude shall be like unto him.
2. The riche dealeth unrighteously, and threateneth with all: but the poore being oppressed must intreat: if the riche have done wrong, he must yet be intreated: but if the poore have done it. He shal straight way be threatned. . . .
13. He is unmerciful & kepeth not promises: he will not spare to do thee hurt, and put thee in prison.<sup>76</sup>

Battenhouse reveals incisively that, all unknowing, the play-king’s criticism redounds upon himself. The force of the “ancient writers” warning goes not to the squalid company that Hal keeps at the Boar’s Head, but is a critique of the real Henry, a powerful man who ill requites his benefactors.<sup>77</sup> Where Battenhouse could go further would be to carry this commentary to the general rhetoric of thievery in the play, of which he demonstrates an awareness at other moments.<sup>78</sup> In this scriptural passage, justice seems to follow, not the law, but wealth. In class terms, Ecclesiasticus is suggesting that normative moral values are determined by social relations of power.

If the strength of Battenhouse is in unfolding some of the elegance of Falstaff’s criticism of Lancaster, his weakness is in understanding how Falstaff’s religious-political commentary is situated within the play. Morally, we are not perfectly free to accept Falstaff’s critique because of its source, the compromised ethos of “plump Jack.” Falstaff himself seems to undermine his own moral authority, even when he acts as his own advocate. Defending “Falstaff, that old

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<sup>76</sup> Geneva Bible, in Battenhouse, p. 38.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>78</sup> “In Henry’s case, readers who remember his practices during his rise to power ought to realize how little right he has to lecture against thievery,” Battenhouse, pp. 37-8.

white-bearded Satan” (2.4.368-9) while taking the role of the prince before his father, Falstaff makes the tautological and finally neutral claim that “to say I know more harm in him than in myself were to say more than I know” (2.4.372-3). His *apologium* seems to stumble into unintended self-indictment when he says, “That he is old, the more the pity, his white hairs do witness it; but that he is, saving your reverence, a whoremaster, that I utterly deny” (2.4.373-5). Has Falstaff all unknowing blundered by denying a charge that has not been raised against him, or is this a deliberate comic undermining of himself? The difficulty in answering this question points to the problem of claims about Falstaff’s subjectivity, his moral-self knowledge.

Falstaff’s view of himself is not in some imagined place outside of ideological construction. With his notion of Falstaff as a sort of moral measure, Battenhouse locates Falstaff with regard to religious commentary in a position similar to where Hugh Grady would place him with regard to the critique of state power. Grady has described Falstaff as “an experiment in a kind of imagined autonomous, autotelic subjectivity”<sup>79</sup> who “seems to embody a constant resistance to interpellation.”<sup>80</sup> That he is a figure of a sort of resistance notwithstanding, in crucial ways, Falstaff *has* been interpellated into dominant ideological modes; Indeed, the call of “Stop, thief!” would doubtless set him quaking in his boots. In identifying himself in the roles in which radical reform has been constructed, as thief or “whoremaster,” Falstaff’s representations emerge from a place already de-legitimized, even in his own eyes. It is from this compromised, hybrid subjectivity that his critique emerges, not from without the ideology of Lancastrian England, but from the fractures within.

As Falstaff operates within Lancastrian ideology, so is he cultivated within Lancastrian power. That he is a client of the prince is clear; he depends upon Hal’s purse-strings to the point

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<sup>79</sup> Hugh Grady, “Falstaff: Subjectivity Between the Carnival and the Aesthetic,” *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 96, no. 3 (July, 2001), p. 610.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, p. 612.

that “were it not here apparent that thou art heir apparent” (1.2.24-5), Falstaff’s creditors could not be kept at bay. The extent to which Falstaff is under the aegis of the prince is developed in act 2, scene 4, when the Sheriff and his watch arrive at the tavern immediately after the Gad’s Hill robbery. Greeted by the prince, the Sheriff says, “First, pardon me, my lord. A Hue and cry / Hath followed certain men unto this house” (2.4.405-6). In one of those moments revealing a precise legal understanding, the Sheriff’s statement is a claim of legal authority. “Hue and cry” is a term of art, denoting the immediacy of accusation when a crime has been committed. The Sheriff is asserting the legal principle that sets aside the necessity of a search warrant when “exigent circumstances” require immediate action, known in common-law as the “hot pursuit” exception. That the prince understands this is clear from his response:

The man, I do assure you, is not here,  
For I, myself, at this time have employed him.  
And, Sheriff, I will engage my word to thee  
That I will, by tomorrow dinnertime,  
Send him to answer thee, or any man,  
For anything he shall be charged withal;  
And so let me entreat you leave this house. (2.4.410-16)

In the little commonwealth that is the tavern, the law confronts its limit and retreats. In matters both commercial and legal, Falstaff functions under the prince’s license. The prince seems to claim the authority of Agamben’s “sovereign exception,” of action outside the law, and in fact he succeeds.

As a preserve created by the prince’s exercise of sovereign privilege, the inn is the site of anachronism and the point of intersection of different modes of time. Falstaff enters the play the query, “Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?” (1.2.1). This provokes from Hal an extended comment on the utility of time to such a one as Sir John:

What a devil hast thou to do with the time of day? Unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds, and dials the signs of leaping houses,

and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-colored taffeta, I see no reason why thou shouldst be so superfluous to demand the time of day. (1.2.2-9)

There is an ongoing banter about time among the flyting company in the tavern. That there is a Puritan inflection to this sort of rhetoric may be a fair claim, and the effort to attach this observation to a reductive understanding of Falstaff's / Oldcastle's religiosity has led at least one critic to attribute these lines of Hal's to Sir John.<sup>81</sup> This much is sure; Falstaff's soul is implicated in his relationship to time. Hal's quip on Falstaff's precarious balance between two modes of damnation in act 1, scene 2, is a reference to the proverb "He must rise betimes that will cozen the devil"<sup>82</sup> Moral action, for Falstaff, seems always to be problematized to extinction before it can take place; salvation seems to have caught him napping before his first scene has even begun. The prince is capable of a profoundly different relationship with time, "redeeming time" through patient anticipation and strategic action. This redemption is imbricated in a general language of repentance and reformation that pervades the play cycle. "I'll repent, and suddenly, while I am in some liking" Falstaff says (3.3.3-4), an opportunist even with regard to his soul.

Hal, of course, is "killing time,"<sup>83</sup> cooling his heels while he waits for his moment, and possibly the death of his natural father. In this way, he associates himself with Falstaff's holiday moment. After the Gad's Hill robbery, the prince makes the strong claim, "I am now of all humors that have showed themselves humors since the old days of Goodman Adam to the pupil age of this present twelve o'clock at midnight" (2.4.78-80). The Prince of Wales is never more resonant with the sort of carnival time in which Falstaff exists than at this moment, when he

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<sup>81</sup> ". . . He [Falstaff] pays mock tribute to the Puritan virtue of earnest hard work. Likewise his comments on time (I.ii.1-12) may very well be a take-off on Puritan views of the proper use of time." Eben Bass, "Falstaff and the Succession," *College English*, vol. 24, no. 7 (April, 1963), p. 505.

<sup>82</sup> Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1950).

<sup>83</sup> I borrow this characterization from Laroque, "Shakespeare's Battle of Carnival and Lent," p. 84.

appears to have replaced Falstaff as the master of revels. This is signaled by Hal's question, "What's o'clock, Francis?" – an echo of Falstaff's first dramatic line, the suggestion that these revels occur in some tangential relationship to pragmatic time; it is of course midnight, an hour dramatically associated with Falstaff. Not only is all of time compressed into one evening, but the prince refers to "Goodman Adam" as if he was a farmer of his acquaintance. Falstaff, like the plebian participants in the Cade rebellion, has a special relationship with Adam: "Thou knowest in the state of innocency Adam fell; and what should poor Jack Falstaff do in the days of villainy?" (3.3.130-1). Laroque and others have claimed, fairly enough, that Hal is a "Lenten body"<sup>84</sup> as he is limned by Falstaff's images of the prince as an "eel," a "bull's pizzle," or a "stockfish," but he claims for himself the highest place in the commonwealth of the tavern. Of his successes as a man of his people, Hal observes to Poins, "I have sounded the very bass string of humility. Sirrah, I am sworn brother to a leash of drawers; and can call them all by their Christian names, as Tom, Dick, and Francis" (2.4.5-7). Ironically excluding "Harry" from this list, the prince keeps rhetorically aloof of his new brothers, and those who wish to find in Hal the seeds of a liberal sensibility need to look elsewhere.

The contest between Hal and Falstaff is, on one level, a struggle for the hearts and minds of the people, and Francis is their exemplar in this dramatic world. For Francis, there will never be enough time, as is demonstrated by his perpetual chorus of "Anon, sir." Time and labor are united in Francis, who we learn has five years to serve on his indenture. When the prince taunts the drawer with the possibility of breaking his contract, he employs the familiar language theft: "Wilt thou rob this leather-jerkin, crystal-button, not-pated, agate ring, puke-stocking, caddis-garter, smooth tongue, Spanish-pouch –" (2.4.58), that is to say, his master. As a "revolted

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<sup>84</sup> For Spencer, Hal is a figure of "Lenten denial" who "cannot reject Falstaff until his own identity and authority have been securely validated" (p. 173).

apprentice” in the idiom of the times, Francis would be stealing himself. Taking place in the moments after the robbing of the carriers, Hal draws Francis into the questions of theft and intrinsic worth that have been so significant a concern of the play. In the prince’s conceit, Francis is value, commodity, money. In this sense, he is one of the distorted reflections of the prince, who is figured repeatedly as a coin, a “royal,” a lean young man who does what is expected of him, or does not. This is why Hal, while cultivating Francis on one level, takes such pains to distinguish himself from the drawer: “His industry is upstairs and downstairs, his eloquence the parcel of a reckoning” (2.4.84-5). Preoccupied as he is with work and the toting-up of bills, Francis seems to be linked explicitly in the prince’s mind to his rival Harry Percy, and on another level to the monetarist notion of royalty he has got second-hand from his father. Francis, for his own part, seems well disposed toward the prince, to whom he has given a penny’s worth of sugar, meant to represent a certain generosity on the part of the impoverished laborer. As the prince reports, Francis and his fellow drawers

. . . take it already upon their salvation that, though I be but Prince of Wales, yet I am the king of courtesy, and tell me flatly that I am no proud Jack like Falstaff, but a Corinthian, a lad of mettle, a good boy. . .” (2.4.7-10)

If the tavern is one site of Hal’s populist education,<sup>85</sup> his ironizing of his relationship with that people is a product of smug aristocratic superiority. The drawers’ denouncement of Falstaff as a “proud Jack” is a moment of populist victory for Hal. In the persons of Francis and his laboring cohort, the *vox populi* is almost mute, limited to parrot-like exclamations and, crucially, the endorsement of the heir apparent.

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<sup>85</sup> “Hal retains important, politically valuable, qualities he has learned in association with fat Jack, especially how to project a democratic image that will ‘allow him to command all the good lads at Eastcheap’” William B. Stone, “Literature and Class Ideology: Henry IV, part one,” *College English*, vol. 33, no. 8 (May, 1972), p. 893.

Francis offers neither the troublesome hybridity of class nor the destabilizing political perspective realized in Falstaff. In spite of the fact that he is mocked by Hal and Poins, the play seems to insist that there is something pure about Francis. He is the labor upon which the festive world of the inn is supported, and it is *real* labor. Falstaff often uses the word “labor,” inevitably associating it with theft or cozenage. “O, I do not like that paying back,” he says of Hal returning the proceeds of the Gad’s Hill robbery, “’tis a double labor” (3.3.142). Falstaff is not even a pure sinner, as his occasional dalliance with repentance suggests (no more is he invested in the Calvinist or Wycliffite doctrine of election). His ironic public representations of his moral rectitude – “there is virtue in that Falstaff” (2.4.340-1)—are the corollary of his candor about his actions in soliloquy – “I have misused the king’s press damnably” (4.2.9-10). Tellingly, only in the most Calvinist register could we consider Falstaff damned. The Martin Luther who made the carnivalesque proposal to give the devil “a fart for a staff” reports of an interview with that august personage,

When I awoke last night, the Devil came and wanted to debate with me; he rebuked and reproached me, arguing that I was a sinner. To this I replied: Tell me something new, Devil! I already know that perfectly well; I have committed many a solid and real sin. Indeed there must be good honest sins – not fabricated and invented ones – for God to forgive for His beloved Son’s sake. . .<sup>86</sup>

Falstaff shares more with Luther than their common, sinful humanity or their carnivalesque habitus. In the person of Falstaff, sin is blatant and material. The prince says of Falstaff, “These lies are like their father that begets them; gross as a mountain, open, palpable” (2.4.183-4). For all of his rhetorical sophistication, Falstaff is a strangely innocent sort of sinner, with none of the tactical sophistication of a Richard III or, in the comic mode, a Don John. The role of the deliberate and sophisticated internal dramatist is reserved, in these plays, for the Prince of Wales.

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<sup>86</sup> Quoted in Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 77.

In contemplating a personal reformation, Falstaff is constructed in some relationship to Hal, who says in his well-known soliloquy,

I know you all, and will a while uphold  
The unyoked humor of your idleness.  
Yet herein will I imitate the sun,  
Who doth permit the base contagious clouds  
To smother up his beauty from the world,  
That when he please again to be himself,  
Being wanted he may be more wondered at  
By breaking through the foul and ugly mists  
Of vapors that did seem to strangle him. (1.3.148-56)

However much some critics would like to warn us away from readings that find in Hal a sort of Lancastrian manipulator, his aside is meant to separate him from the popular world of the tavern in a manner that is revealing. In a sense, Falstaff is continuous with his retinue, he generates (in a bourgeois-realist sense, he cultivates) the grotesque quality of Bardolph, or of his diminutive page in 2 Henry IV, who appears to be at once a child and an adult. When Hal reflects on his future reformation, he asserts a Vitruvian separation between himself and the denizens of the Boar's Head. Not simply a metadramatic intrusion demonstrating Hal's special relationship with providence, it is his ability to contain, to contextualize the carnival moment in another perception of time that is the performance of his own completeness.<sup>87</sup> As Joan Rees has observed, Falstaff's repeated flirtations with repentance can only tend to destabilize our perception of Hal's eminently Lancastrian management of his own moral-political narrative.<sup>88</sup> The strange quality of Hal's essential majesty is that it requires such careful stage management. What marks Hal with the grace of the future king is a set of contrasts:

If all the year were playing holidays,

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<sup>87</sup> See, for instance, Harold E. Toliver, "Falstaff, the Prince, and the History Play," Shakespeare Quarterly, vol. 16, no. 1 (Winter, 1965), p. 68: "The prince's control over impulses of the minute comes primarily through his capacity to see history as a continuous succession of events linking present to past and future."

<sup>88</sup> Joan Rees, "Falstaff, St. Paul, and the Hangman," The Review of English Studies, New Series, vol. 38, no. 149 (February 1987), p. 15.

To sport would be as tedious as to work;  
But when they seldom come, they wished for come,  
And nothing pleaseth but rare accidents. (1.3.157-60)

By figuring himself as a holiday, Hal understands himself in contrast to the perpetual, excessive feast symbolically associated with Falstaff and his carnivalesque time.

The drama has put forth a number of competing bodies to claim the place of England's legitimate child, with Harry Percy and the Prince of Wales at the forefront. Falstaff's relationship to this birth appears to be something in the nature of an alternative parent, the parallel to Hal's father or perhaps his mother, recalling Falstaff's exclamation "my womb, my womb" (2 Henry IV, 4.3). In either case, Falstaff is figured not as a rival claimant, but as an alternative England, whether as the travesty of Henry IV, as the counterpart of the English soil, or as a carnivalesque version of communion. In a manner that cannot but reflect on Hal, Falstaff can make no claim to essential qualities that is not undermined by the drama. "Never call a true piece of gold a counterfeit. Thou art essentially made without seeming so" he enjoins the prince (2.4.393-4). That the prince is "royal," a good coin, is drawn into question by the drama; that Falstaff is "true" seems out of the question. The drawer Francis appears to be such a good coin, a laboring son of England who endorses the heir apparent, and yet occupies the unstable place of the potentially revolted apprentice, the urban counterpart of the sort of rebellion figured in the followers of Jack Cade. It remains for the next chapter to explore what will occur when the drama emerges from the already-tainted primordial innocence of the tavern.

What was humankind in the innocence before the Fall? Like the Alexander Iden episode in 2 Henry VI, the Elizabethan "Homily Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion" is a counter-discourse to the revolutionary slogans of the risen commons, attempting to legitimize contemporary relations of power by inscribing them on the Garden of Eden:

So here appeareth the originalle kingdome of GOD ouer Angels and man, and vniversally ouer all things, and of man ouer earthly creatures which GOD had made subiect vnto him, and with all the felicity and blessed state, which Angels, man, and all creatures had remained in, had they continued in due obedience vnto GOD their king. . . . Thus doe you see, that neither heauen nor paradise could suffer any rebellion in them, neither be any places for rebels to remaine in. Thus became rebellion, as you see, both the first and the greatest, and the very foot of all other sinnes, and the first and principall cause, both of all worldly and bodily miseries, sorrowes, diseases. . . the very cause of death and damnation eternall also.<sup>89</sup>

In the Tudor answer to John Ball's "When Adam delved and Eve span," social hierarchy had been set in place by the creator, and its circumvention was the beginning of sin. In this homily, the Church of England argues that the Bible, properly understood, insists on social relations of power (already contested in the contemporary world). And yet the homily warns that "religioun now of late beginneth to bee a colour of rebellion" (II.21.4-966-7). Evidently the scriptures are vulnerable to dissident readings, generating rude shocks in the edifice of state. Tudor Protestantism was threatened by "Catholic" popular resistance in forms like that of the Pilgrimage of Grace from one side and the potential of the more horrifying Anabaptist antinomianism on the other. The seemingly magnanimous (if brief) repeal of the heresy statute *De haeretico comburendo* under Edward VI did not extend to Anabaptists.<sup>90</sup>

The possibility that a radical religious consciousness was neither foreign nor novel, that it had an English pedigree as legitimate as that of the established church or more so, is the anxiety that the homily suggests even as it would deny it. The dramatization of Oldcastle in Falstaff is a comic exploration of that anxiety, an attack on a historicism that sees in the Lollard martyr its own reflection. While a parodist of a legion of discourses, Falstaff as *dramatis persona* functions through a particular mode of alienation, refusing to be recognized as what he ought to

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<sup>89</sup> "The Homily Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion," from Short-Title Catalogue 13675. Renaissance Electronic Texts 1.2. © 1994, 1997 Ian Lancashire (ed.) University of Toronto, <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/ret/homilies/bk2hom21.html>, II.21.1.21-26, 55-61.

<sup>90</sup> William Haller, *The Elect Nation: The Meaning and Relevance of Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 43.

be. This is what displaces him from being a parody in himself: successful parody requires just the sort of recognition, of stability within the role that is travestied, that Falstaff repeatedly denies us. What is “made strange” in this dramatic project is the nature of the primordial religion. When the prince, in 2 Henry IV, asks Falstaff’s page about his master’s current companions, he describes them as “Ephesians, my lord, of the old church” (2 Henry IV, 2.2.142). The steward Harpoole of The First Part of Sir John Oldcastle is a character strongly identified with his own master, the eponymous Oldcastle, and in acts such as his assault on the process-server sent to give his master a summons from the “Romish” archbishop, he is the repository of the anger of persecuted reform. He describes himself in some familiar language:

I am neither heretic nor Puritan, but of the old church. I’ll swear, drink ale, kiss a wench, go to mass, eat fish all Lent, and fast Fridays with cakes and wine, fruit and spicery, shrive me of my old sins afore Easter, and begin new afore Whitsuntide. (1 Sir John Oldcastle, 13.129-33)

This speech is the most ambiguous confession of belief in a play redolent of Protestant orthodoxy, and this is what is appealing about Harpoole. Falstaff’s page, perhaps ironically, associates his master’s circle with members of the primitive church of St. Paul’s time, while Hal takes him to mean the “pagan[s]” given to sin who are criticized in Ephesians, chapter 5.<sup>91</sup> Harpoole’s gloss on this exchange associates the “old church” with the unblemished English church of the “beleaguered isle,” as distinct from both precisians and heretics. If Falstaff’s company represents in some manner the same sort of English past, seen from the perspective of the Prince of Wales, the adherents of the “old church” are no longer recognizably Christians.

The radically egalitarian political claims of the genealogy of which Falstaff is the comic representative are so situated in the drama that they no longer appear to be political, but have been displaced into a moral register where they can only be found wanting, but is there some

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<sup>91</sup> Rees, p. 22. Curiously, this is one of the texts in which Tyndale interpolated a reference to idolatrous “images.”

residue? Do Falstaff's revels make some political claim on us? The intuitive answer is that they cannot, that the loyal labor represented by the drawer Francis is so valorized even in our own experience that it represents the fundamental sacrifice that guarantees the most basic conception of the social world. Both the political right and left tend to revere labor to the extent that its alternative can only be named in terms already undermined: laziness, sloth, malingering. Falstaff and his company are defined both by their distance from productive labor and their pursuit of the basest, most carnal forms of pleasure. In fact, John Bailey's claim about the relationship between Hal and Falstaff's crew has some justice on its side :

The truth is that from first to last he [Hal] is not only a prince among adventurers but a man among animals. Of these animals one has one human gift, that of speech, to a degree which has never been surpassed.<sup>92</sup>

The life that Falstaff is called to represent has been stripped of its political claims, and yet a residue remains that has a relationship to the “animal,” just as Falstaff straddles the divide between the animal and the human. In the work of Giorgio Agamben, a distinction is developed between *bios*, the human as the subject of the modern state and Foucauldian “biopower,” and *zoē*, the excess of human experience not reduced to that subjection, with its linguistic root in the *zōon* or animal. He relates this to Walter Benjamin's category of the “bare life”:

Both Benjamin and Schmitt. . . point to life (“bare life” in Benjamin and, in Schmitt, the “real life” that “breaks the crust of a mechanism rigidified through repetition”) as the element that, in the exception, finds itself in the most intimate relation with sovereignty.<sup>93</sup>

*Zoē* in Agamben's work seems to have a dual quality of both life stripped of the juridical trappings that adhere to *bios* and life as it unfolds itself in the “beautiful day”—a simple and seemingly pre-political life:

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<sup>92</sup> John Bailey, *Shakespeare* (New York: Longmans, 1929), p. 132, in Dover Wilson, p. 38.

<sup>93</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 67.

Bare life remains included in politics in the form of the exception, that is, as something that is included solely through an exclusion. How is it possible to “politicize” the “natural sweetness” of *zoē*? And first of all, does *zoē* really need to be politicized, or is politics already contained in *zoē* as its most precious center?<sup>94</sup>

In the affinity between carnival and *zoē*, many of the qualities of Oldcastle’s characterization in Falstaff are interrogated by Agamben’s question. At the crux is the problem of whether the politics that produces the representation of the fat knight can be extracted from the reified categories in which he must be apprehended. The politicization of the *zoē* has been attempted, but with dubious success. Paul Lafargue’s call for a “Right to be Lazy” ends with this invocation:

If, uprooting from its heart the vice which dominates it and degrades its nature, the working class were to arise in its terrible strength, not to demand the Rights of Man, which are but the rights of capitalist exploitation, not to demand the Right to Work which is but the right to misery, but to forge a brazen law forbidding any man to work more than three hours a day, the earth, the old earth, trembling with joy would feel a new universe leaping within her. But how should we ask a proletariat corrupted by capitalist ethics, to take a manly resolution. . .?<sup>95</sup>

From either side of the historical ascendancy of capital, Falstaff and Lafargue call for a seeming destruction of the moral world from its foundation, offering in its place a strange birth. The invocation of such a new world seems to demand that we speak in a language constituted by the enemy, if indeed we are permitted to speak at all.

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<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>95</sup> Paul Lafargue, *The Right to be Lazy* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1989), p. 68.

## VI. "BANISH PLUMP JACK": THE RESSURECTION AND DEATH OF SIR JOHN FALSTAFF

Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,  
Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

--Ephesians 5:14-16, The King James Version

### A. CONSTITUTING POWER

Shakespeare's second Lancastrian cycle explores a world in which the ultimate springs of all value have been drawn into question by a fundamental sin, the usurpation of the crown by Henry Bolingbroke. Like the medieval "realist" world that John Wyclif wished to recover, this dramatic world has been tainted by nominalism, by the possibility that language and other forms of signification have been radically sundered from the world and from history. The possibility of moral action is significantly problematized in such a world, as *dramatis personae* act on the basis of unreliable information, of "rumor, painted with tongues," toward selfish ends dressed in the best of rhetoric. The problem of "redeeming time" is very much the problem of "cozening the devil," the effort to build value on these undermined foundations. The problem of royal authority in this dramatic world explores the distinction between "constituting power" and

“sovereign power” discussed by Antonio Negri and others. For Negri, sovereign power, potentially including its juridical and legislative functions, cannot enact itself *ex nihilo*:

The truth of constituting power is not the one that can (in any way whatsoever) be attributed to the concept of sovereignty. This is not the truth of constituting power not only because constituting power is not (as is obvious) an emanation of constituted power, but also because constituting power is not the institution of constituted power: it is the act of choice, the punctual determination that opens a horizon, the radical enacting of something that didn't exist before and whose conditions of existence stipulate that the creative act cannot lose its characteristics in creating.<sup>1</sup>

In taking the crown in contempt of right descent, Henry IV lays claim to a power that he does not have, a power that may not even inhere in the crown that he is claiming. The question of Henry's legitimacy poses a vital problem, for the crisis of constitutive authority cannot be simply undone,<sup>2</sup> for instance, by shuffling Edmund Mortimer onto the throne.

Henry's admonishment to the Prince of Wales cannot be read simply as a lesson in the Lancastrian performance of kingly majesty, but reveals the tensions that the king must negotiate. Henry's cultivation of himself is developed in contrast to Richard, “The skipping king,” (3.2.60), extending his displacement of Richard as rightful king backward into his predecessor's reign:

By being seldom seen, I could not stir  
But like a comet I was wondered at,  
The men would tell their children, “This is he!”  
Others would say, “Where, which is Bolingbroke?”  
And then I stole all courtesy from heaven,  
And dressed myself in such humility  
That I did pluck allegiance from men's hearts,  
Loud shouts and salutations from their mouths,  
Even in the presence of the crowned King.  
Thus did I keep my person fresh and new,  
My presence, like a robe pontifical,  
Ne'er seen but wondered at; and so my state,  
Seldom but sumptuous, showed like a feast

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<sup>1</sup> Antonio Negri, *Il potere costituente: Saggio sulle alternative del moderno* (Milan: SugarCo, 1992), p 31, quoted in Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> The adept critic Sigurd Burkhardt sees the problem raised by Henry's usurpation as “irreversible,” *Shakespearean Meanings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 164.

And won by rareness such solemnity. (3.2.46-59).

The king picks up on the holiday trope already employed by the prince in contrasting himself to Falstaff; whatever comment is being made on Henry, Hal is implicated in it to some extent. As Sigurd Burckhardt has observed, the copious religious language employed by Henry and his sons is always secularized, assimilated to their state.<sup>3</sup> Like the play-king portrayed by Falstaff, Henry has a tendency to reveal himself even in his most narcissistic reflections. He imagines that, even before his accession, his manner was “a robe pontifical,” surely a loaded phrase in Tudor-Protestant England. As vicar of Christ, the Pope is a middle case, his authority having been constituted by the original contract with God as represented in the papal keys. Of course, in a manner particularly relevant to English Protestantism, the Pope claimed both a sovereign and a constitutive authority, the right to excommunicate and even depose secular monarchs. In the eyes of Protestants of many stripes, both of these claims were false: the Pope was “Bishop of Rome” only, and arrogated to himself these singular powers. Though illegitimate from their perspective, the Pope seemed to claim a pure authority, self-authorizing (if we reject the supposed contract with God through Peter) and by that nature suspect. In sundering the English church from Rome, Tudor monarchs could not avoid being implicated in the same sort of double-bind. Henry remarks that he “stole all courtesy from heaven,” a critical instance of the language of theft in Henry IV.<sup>4</sup> Henry seems to betray that there is something questionable about his self-authorized sovereignty, but attempts to dispel this anxiety in the retrospective judgment that he bore the marks of the true monarch even before Richard was forced to step down.

That Henry couches the distinction between himself and Richard in terms of performance is undeniable, and demonstrates his disdain for Richard’s brand of populism, the king who

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p. 154.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Hapgood, “Falstaff’s Vocation,” Shakespeare Quarterly vol. 16, no. 1 (Winter, 1965), p. 95.

“Grew a companion to the common streets,” and “Enfoeffed himself to popularity”<sup>5</sup> (3.2.68-9).

His situation compared to that of Richard, the prince promises, “I shall hereafter, my thrice-gracious lord, / Be more myself” (3.2.92-3). Stephen Greenblatt has commented on this exchange,

“To be oneself” here means to perform one’s part in the scheme of power rather than to manifest one’s natural disposition, or what we would normally designate as the very core of the self. Indeed, it is by no means clear that such a thing exists in the play except as a theatrical fiction. . . .<sup>6</sup>

As appealing as this claim might be to our critical inclinations as students of the linguistic turn, Greenblatt has the tendency to make the very real fact of theatricality as political praxis all-encompassing, the spring of all value. Opposed to this broad understanding of power is the way in which “To be myself” in the context of the play has been manifestly connected to the prince’s promise shortly thereafter to “be bold to tell you that I am your son” (3.2.134), and is a claim situated within the play’s conflux of sacramental language and the metaphorical displacement of royal legitimacy onto legitimacy of parentage – Falstaff is right again.<sup>7</sup> The prince does not understand being himself as an instance of a society-wide performance of social roles, but as potentially the revelation of an innate nature complete with the stigmata of “a garment all of blood” and a “bloody mask” (3.2.135-6), signifiers of his *unique* position. Ideological this certainly is, but even though we cannot know whether the Lancastrian regime bears the chrism of God’s election, both king and prince are invested in the notion that it exists as the final endorsement of their authority. The legitimacy of Henry is both bolstered and undermined by

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<sup>5</sup> This is often taken to mean that Richard cultivated a popular endorsement for his rule that was later transferred to Bolingbroke, and this is a fair reading, but it has another valence: that Richard “enfoeffed” or created new baronies for his cronies, a practice for which he was criticized by Bolingbroke, and one that stands in contrast to the more centralized monarchy of his Lancastrian successors.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> It is important to remember that this is a metaphorical relationship; as we shall see, the drama works to de-emphasize the notion that the crown belongs to Hal by unalloyed lineal descent.

the performance that has become inseparable from it, by the Protagorean notion that the rhetor can better perform the discourses of a profession than its own practitioners.

Both Richard II and Henry IV are implicated in the notion that contemporary political power is somehow beholden to the people, to fickle “opinion,” each attributing certain populist strategies to his opponent. Richard describes how he and his cronies

Observed [Henry’s] courtship to the common people;  
How he did seem to dive into their hearts  
With humble and familiar courtesy,  
What reverence he did throw away on slaves,  
 Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles  
And patient underbearing of his fortune, . . .  
. . . Off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench;  
A brace of draymen bid God speed him well  
And had the tribute of his supple knee,  
With ‘Thanks, my countrymen, my loving friends’;  
As were our England in reversion his,  
And he our subjects' next degree in hope. (Richard II, 4.1. )

In describing one another, each projects upon his rival a cultivation of the commons that he is inclined to deny in himself. Henry’s description notwithstanding, it is hard to imagine the dramatic Richard II conceding that some aspect of his legitimacy is contingent on the support of the commons – it may well be that his political collapse is due in part to his *inability* to imagine this. Projected by Richard on the person of Bolingbroke, populism has the quality of “reverence. . . [thrown] away on slaves,” a distasteful mixing of the dignity that inheres in God’s vicar and the abjection of the unwashed masses, with something of the same quality of *lèse majesté* that Henry attributes to the Prince of Wales when he accuses him of “vile participation” (Henry IV 3.2.87). The inflection of the categories such as “participation” and “community” is so negative in these passages that, in the words of Graham Holderness, “It is ironical to reflect how these very words have become the common currency of political language in democratic

societies.”<sup>8</sup> In the ideology of Lancastrian rule, the will of the people is a sort of necessary evil, whose pathological manifestations range from disruptions of social position to open revolt.

## B. “A CONFUSION OF KNAVES AND FOOLS”

The explosion of the insulated time associated with Falstaff and the tavern and the historical time to which it is opposed takes place in the context of war. Bakhtin has identified war as “for a long time the central and almost sole theme of historical narrative,” a concern “fundamentally historical” and opposed to “private life” with which it seeks an accommodation without success.<sup>9</sup> War is the confrontation of “brittle life” with forces that rend and destroy it. War is a fundamental function of the state; the calling of parliaments, signifying limited monarchy and representative government to moderns like ourselves, was often done to secure funding for war. Richard II alienated the nation in part by the depths to which he would stoop to fund his martial projects. It can be fairly claimed that the Peasants’ Uprising itself was caused by John of Gaunt’s taxing of the commons to bankroll his military campaign on the Iberian peninsula. The historical Oldcastle, a Lancastrian client, was defined by war, serving at Shrewsbury, suppressing regional political ambitions in the Welsh hinterlands, and serving in the Burgundian conflict in support of the Prince of Wales against the political designs of his father, Henry IV. Of course, Oldcastle is defined by his presence or absence at the “Lollard” uprising at St. Giles’ Fields.

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<sup>8</sup> Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare Recycled: The Making of Historical Drama* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 100.

<sup>9</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 217.

Whatever else he may be, Falstaff is a soldier, though he may not endorse our favored notions of what a soldier should be. This has led critics like James Black to identify Falstaff as a “counterfeit soldier,” opposed to the heroic ideal realized in the Price of Wales.<sup>10</sup> The notion of the feigned soldier as a source of social instability has a distinctly Elizabethan resonance. In Maitland’s History and Survey of London, we find it reported that social disruptions in the form of various “assemblies and routs” are caused by a familiar list of unsavory types, including malcontents “colouring their wandering by the name of soldiers returning from the wars.”<sup>11</sup> This “feigned soldier” is a construction of an ideology that refused to admit of the social displacement of those, like Ralph in Dekker’s Shoemaker’s Holiday, who returned from the wars not ennobled but maimed, impoverished, and cast socially adrift. John W. Draper has recognized the manner in which Sir John is an anachronistically Elizabethan military officer, operating in an historically transitional economy:

Army life was on a very low plane, partly because the organization and method of recruiting were changing from the feudal to the modern professionalized system, and partly because Renaissance society, without the organized capital of modern industrialism, could hardly finance this new system that necessity imposed.<sup>12</sup>

War is the locus of new modes of exchange, and opportunities for those of a pragmatic bent. When news of revolt reaches the inn, Falstaff declares, “You may buy land now as cheap as stinking mackerel” (2.4.286-7), though it is definitive of Falstaff that he is never understood to own land. Hal, for his part, observes, “we shall buy maidenheads as they buy hobnails, by the hundreds” (2.4.289-90). There are wartime economies, and both Hal and Falstaff are poised to

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<sup>10</sup> “In accusing Feeble of cowardice. . . [Falstaff] himself speaks as a counterfeit, in this case a counterfeit soldier.” James Black, “Counterfeits of Soldiership in Henry IV,” Shakespeare Quarterly, vol. 24, no. 4 (Autumn, 1973), pp. 372-382.

<sup>11</sup> Maitland, History and Survey of London (London, 1756), p. 278, in Frederick Tupper, Jr., “The Shakespearean Mob,” PMLA, vol. 27, no. 4 (1912), p. 491.

<sup>12</sup> John W. Draper, “Sir John Falstaff,” The Review of English Studies, vol. 8, no. 32 (October, 1932), p. 416

exploit them. The prince anticipates a personal contest with his image, Harry Percy, who Hal claims

. . . is but my factor. . .  
To engross up glorious deeds on my behalf;  
and I will call him to so strict account,  
That he shall render every glory up,  
Yea, even the slightest worship of his time,  
Or I will tear the reckoning from his heart. (3.2.147-52)

In a characteristically Lancastrian manner, Hal understands chivalric endeavor in economic terms, only one instance of the way in which Bolingbroke and his sons articulate an understanding of the marketplace and a “new, mercantile world of exchange.”<sup>13</sup> Falstaff’s initiative is monetary less in metaphor than in fact, and reveals the sort of debased professionalism that nevertheless marks him as an experienced officer:

I have misused the king’s press damnably. . . . I pressed me none but such toasts-and-butter, with hearts in their bellies no bigger than pins’ heads, and they have bought out their services; and now my whole charge consists of ancients, corporals, lieutenants, gentlemen of companies – slaves as ragged as Lazarus in the painted cloth. . . (4.3.10, 16-20).

Confounding the chivalric claims that inform the preparation for the conflict at Shrewsbury, Falstaff unflinchingly reveals the methods by which officers were able to exploit their position, including padding the muster-rolls, skimping on clothes and equipment, and drawing “dead pay” for soldiers killed in action.<sup>14</sup> Without doubt, Falstaff’s “command of foot” carries with it certain class connotations. “Chivalry,” by its nature, is *cavalry* service, the literally elevated plane of aristocratic warfare on horseback. It is as if two battles take place at Shrewsbury: one decided more or less by single combat between aristocrats, and another in which infantry are

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<sup>13</sup> Sandra K. Fischer, “‘He Means to Pay’: Value and Metaphor in the Lancastrian Tetralogy,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 2 (Summer, 1989), p. 152. Robert Ornstein has also explored the commodification of chivalric honor in the play in his *A Kingdom for a Stage: The Achievement of Shakespeare’s History Plays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), particularly pp. 144-9.

<sup>14</sup> Draper, p. 418-9.

decimated by artillery. Falstaff's admonition to Westmorland "Tut, tut, good enough to toss; food for powder, food for powder" (4.2.49) is endorsed by subsequent events, and what is interesting is that Westmorland concedes the point (4.2.51). If Falstaff is the voice of a cold-blooded pragmatism, it is one upon which the entire military project depends, and he is not only the voice of experience. In Falstaff, old Westmorland encounters the future of English warfare.

The exemplar of the soldier, the most representative example of any category, is not necessarily that which is most effectively idealized or assimilated to ideology. This is particularly true in the Christian register. Paul is an exemplary Christian *because* he was Saul, the persecutor of Christians. St. Martin of Tours was a patron of soldiers because his military record was tainted with the accusation of cowardice. Transparency is not the logic of religious representation; the Christian is she who can see the truth behind the appearance – this is a logic endorsed in different ways by both iconophile and iconoclast. The image of St. Martin of Tours as a soldier cutting his cloak in half to share with a beggar is his traditional icon, and is still reproduced on Catholic "holy cards." The story of St. Martin's cloak requires that we see the episode as the witnesses to the events themselves could not:

. . .at a certain period, when he had nothing except his arms and his simple military dress, in the middle of winter. . . he happened to meet at the gate of the city of Amiens a poor man destitute of clothing. He was entreating those that passed by to have compassion upon him, but all passed the wretched man without notice, when Martin, that man full of God, recognized that a being to whom others showed no pity, was, in that respect, left to him. Yet, what should he do? He had nothing except the cloak in which he was clad. . . Taking, therefore, his sword with which he was girt, he divided his cloak into two equal parts, and gave one part to the poor man, while he again clothed himself with the remainder. Upon this, some of the by-standers laughed, because he was now an unsightly object, and stood out as but partly dressed.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Sulpitius Severus, "On the Life of St. Martin," A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, Volume 11, <http://www.users.csbsju.edu/~eknuth/npnf2-11/sulpitiu/lifeofst.html#4>

In a dream that night, Martin sees Christ dressed in his torn cloak, telling the heavenly court, "Martin, who is still but a catechumen, clothed me with this robe."<sup>16</sup> What had appeared ridiculous to those who saw this episode in its banal aspect is revealed as something of cosmic significance. In certain versions of the story, Martin later finds the cloak made miraculously whole. The making whole of Martin's robe is a miracle of plentitude, in the manner of the loaves and fishes in the Gospel of Mark. The sword, an instrument of war, becomes in Martin's hands an instrument of charity.

Falstaff approaches war as an opportunity, an economy in which he can truly prosper. Note that for Sir John, war is not at all about political conflict. He emphatically refuses to make normative judgments about the nature of rebellion. Instead, he says, "God be thanked for these rebels, they offend none but the virtuous; I laud them, I praise them" (3.3.150-1). It is on the campaign against the Percy rebellion that Falstaff shows the greatest affinity for his sainted cousins. One miracle of plentitude in the acts of St. Falstaff's hinges upon a repeated figure of the drama, turning bodies into money: "I have got, in exchange of a hundred and fifty soldiers, three hundred and odd pounds" (4.3.11). Another debauched miracle, one just as relevant to the dramatization of the potentially religious figure of Oldcastle in Falstaff, concerns the clothing of his motley command:

There's not a shirt and a half in all my company, and the half shirt is two napkins tacked together and thrown over the shoulders like a herald's coat without sleeves; and the shirt, to say the truth, stolen from my host at Saint Albans. . . (4.3.31-5).

Where St. Martin split his cloak to share with a beggar to later find it miraculously made whole, under Falstaff's command, "a shirt and a half" clothes all of his soldiers, or comically fails to do so. In his candid self-indictment, Falstaff invokes the parable of Lazarus and Dives from the gospel of Luke. In a distorted reflection of the story of St. Martin, the richly-clothed Dives

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

spurns Lazarus, the beggar at his gates, to the injury of his own soul. Falstaff, the consummate military man, finds an eminently practical third alternative, and conscripts the near-naked beggar. When Westmoreland comments on the impoverished appearance of Falstaff's soldiers, he replies, "Faith, for their poverty, I know not where they had that, and for their bareness, I am sure they never learned that of me" (4.3.53-4). Though it is he who draws moral theology into the fray, it is clear that Falstaff himself is to be morally condemned. Then again, he has already stipulated to this, and a social critique can be understood here nevertheless. While the seeds of rebellion are understood to have been planted by magnates like the Earl of Northumberland, revolt has a more general, popular aspect. In parley with Westmoreland, the king responds to his account of the rebels' grievances as follows,

These things indeed you have articulate,  
Proclaimed at market crosses, read in churches,  
To face the garment of rebellion  
With some fine color that may please the eye  
Of fickle changelings and poor discontents,  
Which gape and rub the elbow at the news  
Of hurly-burly innovation.  
And never yet did insurrection want  
Such water-colors to impaint his cause,  
Nor moody beggars, starving for a time  
Of pell-mell havoc and confusion. (5.1.72-82).

There is a sub-stratum to aristocratic rebellion without which it could not thrive: the "popularity" that Henry was able to exploit in his own rise to power, as awkward as his relationship to his own populism might be. The rebel barons have mined this seam of discontent; the political agency here, the guiding consciousness, is that of the aristocrats. Typically, Henry is able to disclaim responsibility for grievances on all levels. In this instance, what is interesting is the manner in which the language of a real, material poverty is transformed through metaphor into a familiar anti-popular discourse: "Moody beggars" starve not for want of food, but out of a

hunger for social disruption, “pell-mell havoc and confusion.” What Falstaff and his company of gallows-birds make material and visible is this under-stratum of poverty and discontent. The king’s haughty disclaimer of responsibility for widespread dissatisfaction in his realm is the counterpart to Falstaff’s offhanded “Faith, for their poverty, I know not where they had that,” and is similarly a denial of the manner in which he is morally implicated.

The disaffection of the commons is a fact that many note but for which none assume the responsibility. Silent until they erupt in civil broils, they are at once without a will of their own and the site of utopian desires better not contemplated. Is there a locus of subaltern class consciousness, of political will in the commons? In 2 Henry VI, the possibility is both held out to us and flaunted. The rising of the commons has the earmarks of a popular uprising on the model of the Peasants’ Rebellion, deploying the familiar radical-egalitarian discourses. Cade declares,

I thank you, good people: there shall be no money, all shall eat and drink on my score; and I will apparel them all in one livery, that they may agree like brothers and worship me their lord. (4.2.)

Jack Cade expresses the same egalitarian vision as his humble followers, and in the same language. Members of the risen mob, George Bevis observes to his companion John Holland, “Jack Cade the clothier means to dress the commonwealth, and turn it, and set a new nap on it” (2.2). This is a dramatic representation of the political discourses of subaltern dissidence, recorded in Henry Knighton’s chronicle in the epistle of “Jack Miller”:

Jack Miller asks for help to turn his mill aright. He hath ground things small, and small. The King’s Son of Heaven shall pay for all. Take care that your mill turns well. . .let might help right, and skill go before will, and right before might, and then our mill will go aright. For if might go before right, and will before skill, then our mill will not go well.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Henry Knighton, Knighton’s Chronicle: 1337-1396 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 223.

Miller's epistle is not an endorsement of inarticulate force, but a careful statement, a demand for social equity grounded in the homespun metaphor that invokes the patient labor at the base of the social world. In the words of Cade, these expressions of a political consciousness on the part of the commons are made to sound perfectly incoherent: there will be no money, but "all shall eat and drink on my score," no social hierarchy, but he will be king. Even this might be acceptable, given an understanding that the king, as Vicar of God, might be the guarantor of egalitarian utopia, but of course, the audience has known since the third act that the commons really act out of the will of Richard of York, who says,

I have seduced a headstrong Kentishman,  
John Cade of Ashord,  
To make commotion, as full well he can,  
Under the title of John Mortimer. (2 Henry VI, 2.1)

It is definitive of Cade that he is a creature of Richard, not the commons that he claims to champion. Surprisingly, Michael Drayton's The First Part of Sir John Oldcastle, a play that would recover the Lollard martyr from the perceived injustice done him in Shakespeare's Lancastrian cycle, expresses a remarkably consistent attitude toward risings of the commons. The agency of the humblest classes in their own political action is never admitted. Instead, subaltern revolt is actually the visible result of the surreptitious acts of their betters, the result of mixing the ambitions of the great with the ready disaffection of the humble. A co-conspirator of Lord Scroop and Sir Thomas Gray in their plot to depose Henry V, the Earl of Cambridge observes, "The commons likewise, as we hear, pretend / A sudden tumult; we will join with them" (1 Sir John Oldcastle, 7.152-3).

For a Protestant document, Sir John Oldcastle makes the strange choice of dramatizing the Lollard uprising at Fickett's field, rebellion in this case commanded by Sir Roger Acton and bankrolled by William Murley, a Dunstable brewer. The characterization of Murley is relevant to

the question of class relations in the play. Though presumably united by their common Lollardy, the relationship of Acton and the Lollard Priest Beverly to Murley is almost purely exploitative. A comic figure, Murley is characterized by a sociolect of singsong lines and repeated phatic exclamations, “dainty my dear,” “In and out, to and fro,” that mark him as a bourgeois tradesmen. Urging his men forward “for the honor of meal-men, millers and malt men,” (I SJO, 8.3-4) he has many of the qualities of Simon Eyre, the benevolent master shoemaker of Dekker’s Shoemaker’s Holiday. His initial motivation appears to have been a pure one, drawn to the conspiracy as he was because it has the feigned endorsement of a figure he clearly respects, “Sir John Oldcastle, that noble alms-giver, housekeeper, virtuous religious gentleman” (5.35-6). The influence of the Lollard knights on Murley appears to be a corrosive one. In an early meeting to cement their conspiracy, Murley politely objects to the title of “Master” ascribed to him by

Acton:

No master, good Sir Roger Acton, knight, Master Bourne and Master Beverly, esquires, gentlemen and justices of the peace, no master I, but plain William Murley, the brewer of Dunstable, your honest neighbor, and your friend, if ye be men of my profession. (I SJO, 5.4-8)

“Profession” in this context has the familiar double valence of “vocation”: the religious quality of shared reformist inclination, coupled with Murley’s powerful identification with his trade and the community of labor, into which he would draw his Lollard friends. It is he who raises the problem that attaches to his role as a leader of the insurrection:

Lord have mercy upon us! What a world is this! Sir Roger Acton, I am but a Dunstable man, a plain brewer, ye know. Will lusty cavaliering captains, gentlemen, come at my calling, go at my bidding? (5.22-4)

His co-conspirators have a ready answer: Oldcastle will make Murley a knight, a usurping of royal prerogative that hints at the conspirators’ aims. From the moment of this devil’s compact, Murley’s inclination to Christian fellowship gives way to his ambition to rise to nobility. “Were

you not in election to be shrieve? / Have ye not passed all offices but that?" Master Bourne asks Murley (5.29-30). Murley's corruption is telegraphed by the incoherence that appears in what earlier was an earnest language: "Fellow, Sir Roger Acton, knight, all fellows, I mean in arms. . ." (5.41).

In Sir John Oldcastle, revolt is heteroclete and incoherent. Lollards of bad intent foment "reformation," taking the field with bourgeois climbers and "the commons," represented directly in the drama only through Murley's followers:

John and Tom, and Dick and Hodge,  
And Rafe and Robin, William and George,  
And all my knaves shall fight like men,  
At Fickett Field, on Friday next. (5.73-6)

In a specifically Tudor mix, vilified Catholicism may even join hands in treason with extreme elements in radical Protestantism. Lords Scroop and Gray offer to seal their treasonous compact with the upright Oldcastle by swearing on the sacrament, a symbolic association of treason, hypocrisy and the tainted mass. In both an unwillingness to be forsworn and a likely reference to Oldcastle's presumed "Protestant" position on the sacrament, he refuses. While Catholics stray, the good Lollard Oldcastle is loyal even at the risk of his life, and bad Lollards are associated with precisians and class instability, possibly excusing the king for his sometime hostility toward the "new sect."

The possibility that Protestantism itself is implicated in political instability, emerging historically from Wyclif's writings on dominion, is both considered and rejected by the play. Radical-Protestant revolt must be staged so that it can be defeated, something that would prove more tractable on the dramatic than the historical stage. This having been said, the necessity of presenting the dissatisfaction of the commons leads the drama to certain concessions. The poor soldier-beggars at the gate of Oldcastle's gate lament, "I'll with the King into France if I can but

crawl a-ship-board. I had rather be slain in France than starve in England” (3.17-9), and “There’s laws for punishing, But there’s no law for our necessity” (3.2-3). Harpoole, Oldcastle’s cryptic steward, tacitly sympathizes with the plight of the friendless veterans, but expressly voices the familiar law-and-order discourses: “Hang you, rogues, hang you. There’s nothing but misery amongst you; you fear no law, you” (3.80-1).

The threat of a genuinely radical political vision of the part of the commons is similarly staged and rejected in Shakespeare’s 2 Henry VI. Cade’s follower Bevis announces, “I tell thee, Jack Cade the clothier means to dress the commonwealth, and turn it, and set a new nap upon it. . .for ‘tis threadbare” (2 Henry VI, 4.2.4-6). “I will apparel them all in one livery” Cade himself declares (4.2.71). There is of course a leveling, egalitarian quality to these claims: the erasure of sumptuary distinction under Cade’s new order. As Ronald Knowles has pointed out, the dissident language of clothing in 2 Henry VI is also a burlesque of the sumptuary exceptions granted the retainers of Elizabethan nobility.<sup>18</sup> Cade, the spokesperson of the commons, claims to be no commoner at all. “My father was a Mortimer. . . .My mother a Plantagenet,” Cade declares (4.2.39, 42), and with a preposterous story about having been stolen from the cradle, makes his claim to the throne. From the discourse of primordial equality, Cade delivers us to the extremes of absolute power, outside the restraint of law and legislature: “I have thought upon it, it shall be so. Away, burn all the records of the realm, my mouth shall be the parliament of England” (4.7.13-5). The ambitions of the commons are made to appear preposterous and inconsistent in Cade,<sup>19</sup> who would at once abolish property and claim the *droit du seigneur*, which is easily situated in the context of the purportedly “Anabaptist” practice of having wives in

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<sup>18</sup> Ronald Knowles, “Miracle, Combat, and Rebellion in 2 Henry VI,” The Yearbook of English Studies, vol. 21, Politics, Patronage, and Literature in England: 1558-1658 Special Number (1991), p. 179.

<sup>19</sup> “As if to surrender subversion to inconsistency, to surrender the social critic to the anarchic clown, Shakespeare. . . shows Cade as a feudal monarch manqué,” *ibid.*, p. 181

common (4.7.124-5). In a medieval “year zero,” history will be erased, and all things either granted or denied at the whim of the “stinking” mouth of Cade (4.7.11). The egalitarian pretensions of a preposterous subaltern consciousness are revealed for what they have always been, a recipe for a new social hierarchy based on pure force, theft, and ignorance.

Annabel Patterson has argued for a reading of 2 Henry VI in which a sort of popular political expression is valorized in the person of the Earl of Salisbury. Intervening on behalf of the commons angered at the murder of the “genuinely popular” leader, the duke of Gloucester, Salisbury functions as “the people’s spokesman” to the king:<sup>20</sup>

Dread lord, the commons sends you word by me,  
Unless false Suffolk straight be done to death,  
Or Banished fair England’s territories,  
They will by violence tear him from your palace  
And torture him with grievous ling’ring death.  
They say, by him the good Duke Humphrey died;  
They say, in him they fear your highness’ death. . . (2.2.241-7)

Patterson’s reading of a legitimated popular political agency hangs upon her reading of the mechanism of “ventriloquism”: “The rhetorical ‘they say’ formula identifies Salisbury as ventriloquist, while the dramatic situation ensures his recognition as the people’s sincere advocate.”<sup>21</sup> A problem with Salisbury’s throne-room intervention as a mode of “popular protest” is that it is difficult to imagine as “protest” at all, but is rather an aristocratic mediation under the threat of the commons acting “by violence” of their own agency, a mediation terribly seductive to liberal notions of political representation. “Ventriloquism” is used here to connote transparency, the selfless fidelity with which Salisbury can speak for the people. In recent critical discourse, in the work of Guyatri Spivak, Susan Ritchie and others, “ventriloquism” is a category employed not to simplify but to complicate the notion of mediation. Ventriloquism in

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<sup>20</sup> Annabel Patterson, Shakespeare and the Popular Voice (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 48.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

this sense is the assimilation of discourses by some form of social power that “speaks” on behalf of some excluded and subaltern constituency; speaks, it must be said, in its own registers, and often to its own concerns. In the case of the Earl of Salisbury, the relevant axis of power is surely social class, and the absence of the actual voices of the commons is not irrelevant. Donna Haraway has argued that, from the perspective of dominant power, the desirable constituent is the one who *requires* that mediation: “Permanently speechless, forever requiring the services of a ventriloquist, never forcing a recall vote, in each case the object or ground of representation is the realization of the representative's fondest dream.”<sup>22</sup> Once again, Francis the drawer, having “fewer words than a parrot, and yet the son of woman” (1 Henry IV, 2.4) approaches being the ideal subject.

What do the commons say when they speak in their own voice? As Phyllis Rackin has observed, there is a significant consistency in the radical-egalitarian language of Cade and that of his followers. While Patterson endorses the “natural” quality of the “real popular consciousness” in the mouth of John Holland, the ideological position that endorsed Salisbury as voice of the commons would have greeted Holland’s pronouncement “Let the magistrates be working men” (4.2.17) with the same disdain that was evoked by Cade’s promised abolition of private property. Indeed, a common thread in narratives of civil rebellion is the way in which the ambition to supplant the officer of law, from magistrate to Lord Chief Justice, appears repeatedly as a trope of misrule.

The social problem realized in Cade is a dramatization of a certain sort of mixing. Cade is an “impostor aristocrat” and a “traitor to his class,”<sup>23</sup> to which treason those of his class are strangely indifferent. Apparently, a mixing of this sort is not as damning a fault when viewed

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<sup>22</sup> Donna Haraway, “Promises of Monsters,” Cultural Studies (New York: Routledge 1992), p. 311.

<sup>23</sup> Patterson, p. 49.

from the bottom of the social hierarchy.<sup>24</sup> Dramatically undermined before his own entrance on the scene, it is Cade's strangely familiar ambition to create a mongrel aristocracy to replace a legitimate one based on a documented inheritance. Salisbury represents the legitimacy of blood to which Cade cannot even aspire, and his political language is laudably free of the troublesome leveling discourses of the risen commons. William Murley, Jack Cade, and John Falstaff are alike in the manner in which they threaten a contamination of the aristocracy with the consciousness of alien classes. After the rout at Fickett's Field in Sir John Oldcastle, the victorious Henry V tells Sir Roger Acton, "Gentry is divine, / But thou has made it more than popular" (12.7-8). Murley, who has had a pair of golden spurs worked up in anticipation of his coming knighthood, will be hung with them around his neck as a signifier of his class ambitions.

What is erased in the persons of Murley and Cade is the possibility that the radical consciousness of the commons really aspires to a new, egalitarian society. While the plays are concerned with right rule, and even the plight alienated sectors of Lancastrian and Tudor society, the discourses of radical egalitarianism are dramatically undermined. If enclosure as an emerging locus of private property is put under scrutiny in the policy of Suffolk in 2 Henry VI, it is re-invoked as natural law in the conflict between Jack Cade and Alexander Iden. As a risen man who casts his lot with landed property, Iden is a measure of what landless Falstaff is not, perfectly assimilated to property, loyal and satisfied with his humble lot, employing martial violence in the service of his king or by instinct in the dispatching of revolted Cade.

That anti-popular discourse seizes not simply on forms of subalterity but on forbidden *mixtures* can be seen in Sir Thomas Brown's Vulgar Errors:

Their individual imperfections being great, they are moreover enlarged by their aggregation; and being erroneous in their single numbers, once huddled together, they will

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<sup>24</sup> This asymmetry in attitudes toward hybridity from different perspectives among social relations of power remains true in discourses of miscegenation, or in the language politics of bilingual education.

be Error it self. For being a confusion of knaves and fools, and a farraginous concurrence of all conditions, tempers, sexes, and ages; it is but natural if their determinations be monstrous, and many waies inconsistent with Truth. And therefore wise men have alwaies applauded their own judgment, in the contradiction of that of the People.<sup>25</sup>

It is not simply the unwashed commons of themselves, but the breakdown of the distinctions between classes, sexes and ages that produces the popular monstrosity. In his problematic class affiliation, Falstaff embodies this very mixing. Falstaff's comic diatribe over the delivery of his satin cloak and breeches (2 Henry IV, 1.2.21-36) functions as a familiar sartorial sign of class transgression: the "two-and-twenty yards of satin" withheld by the reviled Puritan tailor are needed not simply to clothe the "true knight" Falstaff, but to further his imposture of knighthood. The early performance history of Shakespeare's Lancastrian cycle may be relevant to this question of class hybridity. Will Kempe, the actor who with the Lord Chamberlain's Men first portrayed Falstaff, is associated primarily with lower-class characters, notably Dogberry in Much Ado About Nothing and Lancelot Gobbo in The Merchant of Venice. Ronald Knowles makes the persuasive argument that Kempe played Cade during his stint with Lord Strange's men, and that this suggests a carnivalesque dimension to his characterization.<sup>26</sup> Cade and Falstaff further share the function of debased reflections of their aristocratic betters: David Riggs has argued persuasively that Cade is intended as a lampoon of the Duke of York.<sup>27</sup>

Is there a conjunction between the historical Oldcastle and the scenes of revolt and martial conflict of the Henry plays? Falstaff's attitude toward rebellion is a curious one, echoing patrician attitudes toward the instability of the commons like a cracked bell. Greeted in the street by a servant of the Lord Chief Justice, Falstaff observes,

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas Brown, Pseudodoxia Epidemica (London, 1672), Bk. 1, ch. 3, p. 9-10, appears in partial form in Frederick Tupper, Jr., "The Shakespearean Mob," PMLA, vol. 27, no. 4 (1912), p. 499

<sup>26</sup> Knowles, p. 181.

<sup>27</sup> David Riggs, Shakespeare's Heroical Histories: Henry VI and Its Literary Tradition (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 124, quoted in Knowles, p. 184.

What? A young knave and begging? Is there not wars? Is there not employment? Doth not the king lack subjects? Do not the rebels need soldiers? Though it be a shame to be on any side but one, it is worse shame to beg than to be on the worst side, were it worse than the name of Rebellion can tell how to make it. (2 Henry IV, 1.2.58-62)

Rebellion is a social evil, perhaps, but it is not the worst one, and it may serve a laudable purpose. Falstaff's observations are perhaps even more interesting because they are intended to be overheard by the Lord Chief Justice. Though ever a Lancastrian loyalist, Falstaff has an easygoing relationship with civil strife. His greatest failures as a subject of Henry IV amount to thefts and derelictions of duty, but of course treason is always in the offing. It has been suggested that Falstaff's command at Shrewsbury is directly related to the historical Oldcastle. In this reading, Falstaff's tattered soldiers are a reference to the mob of petty tradesmen and laborers who passed the abbey of St. Albans on their way to join the Oldcastle rebellion as recorded in Walsingham.<sup>28</sup> The evidence for this is suggestive rather than compelling, but interesting nonetheless. In the heat of the battle, Falstaff says,

Though I could scape shot-free at London, I fear the shot here; here's no scoring but upon the pate. . . . I have led my ragamuffins where they are peppered. There's not three of my hundred and fifty left alive, and they are for the town's end, to beg during life. (1 Henry IV, 5.3.30-1, 34-6)

Dramatically, Falstaff is a coward, but a cowardly *soldier* who puts himself in harms way because it is there that opportunity lies. Like Oldcastle at St. Giles' Fields, he is both present and absent, the leader and the master of the pragmatic escape. Like St. Martin, he goes forth at the head of the host, but doesn't fight.<sup>29</sup> Cowardice, like so many of the elements that make up Falstaff's moral "character," is a comic accommodation to the anxiety produced by the socially hybrid figures whose very embodiment seems to threaten social upheaval.

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<sup>28</sup> Scoufos, p. 78.

<sup>29</sup> The incident in 1 Henry IV, 5.3, in which the prince asks for Falstaff's sword only to be handed a bottle of sack has the ring of another St. Martin reference: next in popularity in to the image of Martin dividing his cloak to share with the beggar is the depiction of Martin renouncing the instruments of war, for example, Simone Martini's St. Martin Renounces Arms (~1315) in the Chapel of St. Martin in Assisi.

### C. "THE IMMORTAL PART NEEDS A PHYSICIAN": FALSTAFF AND THE BODY OF THE KING

The second Lancastrian cycle is full of a monstrous, grotesque language of the body, most often recognized in Falstaff, who says of himself, "Banish plump Jack, and banish all the world" (1 Henry IV, 2.4.525-6). Sir John *is* the world in the carnivalesque register: he is all flesh, "Out of all compass," and he has (to borrow from Thomas Brown) the worldly quality of *farrago*, the mixing of classes, genders and other social tendencies ("farrago" is of course an apt metaphor drawn from food: "a mixed fodder for cattle").<sup>30</sup> While Jack Falstaff understandably occludes the greater part of our carnival vision, it is characteristic of his monstrosity that it is almost impossible to contain; it infects those in his vicinity, and even those at what ought to be a hygienic distance. The primary grotesque identification with Falstaff is not with one of his circle either in the tavern world or among his Gloucestershire habitués. It is Henry IV himself, whom his one-time supporter the Earl of Worcester describes on the eve of Shrewsbury in the following manner:

. . . being fed by us, you used us so  
As that ungentle gull, the cuckoo's bird,  
Useth the sparrow; did oppress our nest,  
Grew by our feeding to so great a bulk  
That even our love durst not come near your sight  
For fear of swallowing. (1 Henry IV, 5.2.59-64)

The king is figured as a giant creature of insatiable appetite, endangering the most sacred of familial relations, and is resonant with Falstaff's own self-description to his page, "I do walk before thee like a sow that hath overwhelmed all her litter but one" (2 Henry IV, 1.2). Further, as an interloper placed in a nest of proper chicks, the cuckoo is a conventional figure of illegitimacy, the bastardy in whose terms Falstaffian discourse repeatedly understands the

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<sup>30</sup> OED, s.v. "farrago."

Lancastrian monarchy. The materialized affinity between Falstaff and the king is developed in The Second Part of Henry the Fourth, where it is articulated in figures of illness and death.

Fretted with poor health and insomnia, the king observes to the Earl of Warwick,

Then you perceive the body of our kingdom,  
How foul it is, what rank diseases grow  
And what danger near the heart of it. (2 Henry IV, 3.1.37-9)

In this instance, the king is willing to grant the nature of the affliction that unites his own body with that of the commonwealth. Closeted with the loyal Warwick, the king states a position usually taken by his political opponents, and one that will be echoed by the rebellious Archbishop of York in the next act:

. . .we are all diseased,  
And with our surfeiting and wanton hours,  
Have brought ourselves into a burning fever,  
And we must bleed for it; of which disease,  
Our late King Richard, being infected, died. (2 Henry IV, 4.1.54-8)

The nation suffers from a common malady because it bears a common shame, the deposition and murder of its legitimate ruler. By the third play in the cycle, even Henry IV can look back on Richard's prophecy and see the manner in which it has been fulfilled in himself and his nation: "The time will come that foul sin, gathering head, / Shall break into corruption" (3.1.75-6).

This contagion has spread through the metaphysic of kingship. We of course recall that extract from Plowden's *Reports*, so important to Kantorowicz' exposition of the juridical concept of the two-bodied king:

For the King has in him two Bodies, viz., a Body natural, and a Body politic. His Body natural. . .is a Body mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident. . . .But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government. . .and this body is utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to. . .<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ernst H. Kantorowicz, The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 7.

In the dramatization of the first Lancastrian king, the juridical distinction makes way for artistic necessity. The commonwealth is infected through Henry's sin.<sup>32</sup> The location of the source of this general malaise in the king's illegitimacy is at work in the comic report of one of Falstaff's recruits, Bullcalf, who arrives for muster before the "battle" at Gaultree Forest in poor health: "A whoreson cold, sir, a cough, sir, which I caught with ringing in the king's affairs upon his coronation day, sir." (2 Henry IV, 3.2.147). The anniversary of the king's self-coronation brings not health and wholeness, but continuing civil war and runny noses. Strangely, it would have to be granted that in this metaphysical sense, Henry IV *must be the king*. The visiting of his error on the kingdom demands this sort of political/theological essentialism. It is the dramatic inversion of the theological argument of "touching for the King's Evil": the very touch of God's anointed in his purity could drive out the taint of scrofula – a belief endorsed by the Anglican Book of Common Prayer.<sup>33</sup> Shakespeare was aware of this tradition, mentioned in Macbeth, in a conversation between Malcolm, MacDuff, and a physician, who stand in the precincts of the palace of Edward the Confessor, where a queue of the afflicted await the ministrations of that sanctified king:

‘Tis called the evil;  
 A most miraculous work in this good king,  
 Which often, since my here-remain in England,  
 I have seen him do. How he solicits heaven,  
 Himself best knows; but strangely-visited people,  
 All swol’n and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye,  
 The mere despair of surgery, he cures,  
 . . .and ‘tis spoken,  
 To the succeeding royalty he leaves,  
 The healing benediction. (Macbeth, 4.3.148-56)

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<sup>32</sup> This relationship has been critically misunderstood at times. Edgar Schell has written, "Henry, having symbolically gathered the sickness of his newly purged nation into himself, is ready to die." "Prince Hal's Second 'Reformation'" Shakespeare Quarterly, vol. 21, no. 1 (Winter, 1970), p. 15.

<sup>33</sup> The definitive work on this subject is R. H. P. Crawford's The King's Evil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911). For a treatment of the dramatization of the King's Evil in Shakespeare and its relation to the reign of Charles I, see M. R. Toynbee, "Charles I and the King's Evil," Folklore, vol. 61, no. 1 (March, 1950), pp. 1-14.

It is significant that this royal capacity is understood as an inheritance. The genealogically indirect manner in which Henry has taken the crown is a disruption of the miraculous qualities of the English king, but something of that metaphysic is nevertheless in play. The commonwealth cannot be isolated from the stain on Henry in his royal body. While royal majesty in the drama may have significant theatrical aspects, it remains nevertheless essential and embodied, even in its aberrations.

The Archbishop of York has associated the national malaise with a sybaritic, Falstaffian excess, “our surfeiting and wanton hours.” The relationship of Falstaff to the worsening condition of king and nation develops the metaphoric of royal legitimacy that we have encountered already. Falstaff demands of his tiny page, “Sirrah, you giant, what says the doctor to my water?” The page replies, “He said, sir, that the water itself was a good healthy water, but for the party that owned it, he might have moe diseases than he knew for” (1.2.1-3). If Hal’s legitimacy as God’s anointed “true prince” is drawn into question by Falstaff through the metaphor of bastardy, the king’s terminal affliction of troubled legitimacy is similarly translated into Bakhtin’s lower bodily stratum, materialized in Falstaff as venereal disease.

Falstaff raises the issue of the king’s illness in an attempt to divert the Lord Chief Justice from a discussion of his own legal troubles (rhetorically, once again a displacement of denied crime onto the royal body). Speaking as an authority, he says,

This apoplexy, as I take it, is a kind of lethargy, and ’t please your lordship, a kind of sleeping in the blood, a whoreson tingling. . . .It hath is original from much grief, from study and perturbation of the brain. I have read the cause of his effects in Galen, it is a kind of deafness. (2 Henry IV, 1.2.88-90, 91-3)

As is often the case, Falstaff’s statement conceals an insightful commentary on his grotesque double. On the one hand, it expresses Henry’s self-conception as someone troubled to the point

of illness by the problems of his realm. On the other, it attributes to Henry a “deafness” familiar to his critics: an inability to hear the complaints of those who, however much they may have helped him in times past, are aggrieved as subjects of his rule. The Lord Chief Justice may not be inclined to register this critique, but he reasons well when he tells Falstaff, “I think you are fallen into the disease, for you hear not what I say to you” (1.2.93-4). In this case, the relationship between Henry and Falstaff works by inversion: Henry will not hear voices from below him in social power, Falstaff will not mark the voice of Lord Chief Justice from above. Falstaff’s refusal to heed the man whom he hopes to displace will not be without consequences.

It would be easy to understand the Prince of Wales as a “Lenten body,” singular and closed, constructed in perfect opposition to Falstaffian excess, and there would be a certain justice to this characterization. He is of course associated with Lenten figures, an “eel-skin,” a “bull’s pizzle,” a “tailor’s yard,” and the drama understands him as an alternative to the self-contained, laboring masculinity of Harry Percy. Michael Bristol has suggested that he plays “Jack-a-Lent,” the embodiment of Lent within carnival.<sup>34</sup> Existing within the time constituted by his seeming opposite as Hal does in Falstaff’s tavern world, Jack-a-Lent is at least a potentially grotesque figure. Given the infectious quality of monstrosity in the drama, it would be quite singular if Hal proved exempt. In fact, the nature of his own monstrosity devolves from the relationship between Falstaff and the king: the Prince of Wales is bifurcated at the root, the “son” of two fathers. In addition to his many references to Hal’s metaphorical bastardy,<sup>35</sup> Falstaff describes the prince as a “whoreson mad compound of majesty” (2.4.239). To Sir John the prince is a “compound,” a mixture, a claim in some tension with his assertion that the prince is “essentially made.” Of course, as Falstaff’s figurative son, the prince can inherit nothing but

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<sup>34</sup> Michael Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 206

<sup>35</sup> e.g., “A bastard son of the king’s” (2 *Henry IV*, 2.4.231).

his father's hybrid nature; as the king's son, his is the legacy of a disrupted succession. If the prince is implicated in Falstaff's recurrent invocations of the story of the prodigal son, the drama puts Hal in the difficult position of choosing between two comparably tainted fathers.

The sickness of the realm is not wholly contained in the corporal register, for we have seen that its symptoms include continuing revolt, and even in the register of military conflict, it suggests the moral shortcomings of the house of Lancaster. In the Second Part of Henry IV, the conflict at Gaultree Forest is the debased reiteration of the chivalric conflict at Shrewsbury. As Sigurd Burckhardt has noted, the events at Gaultree Forest are an *intentional* dramatic frustration of the desire to see the new revolt decided through the "plain shock and even play of battle."<sup>36</sup> The prince's brother John leads the king's forces, and he is magnified from his historical source, presented in the drama as Duke of Lancaster (4.1.435-6), a title actually held by the Prince of Wales.<sup>37</sup> That the king has perceived in John the character seemingly lacking in the prince is emphasized in part one, where we learn that he has replaced Hal in the king's council (1 Henry IV, 3.2.32-3). John of Lancaster is dramatized as the heir to certain qualities dramatically associated with Lancaster. In parley with Westmorland and the Archbishop of York, John seems inclined to rapprochement, responding in this way to the grievances of the revolted lords:

I like them all, and do allow them well,  
And swear here by the honour of my blood,  
My father's purposes have been mistook. . .  
My lord, these griefs shall be with speed redressed,  
Upon my soul they shall. (2 Henry IV, 4.1.282-4, 87-8)

When the rebel troops have been disbanded, John shows himself perfectly willing to break a vow sworn on "the honour of my blood," and to do so with a narrowly contractual and commercial

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<sup>36</sup> Burckhardt, p. 156.

<sup>37</sup> See Richard Dutton, "Shakespeare and Lancaster," Shakespeare Quarterly, vol. 49, no. 1 (Spring, 1998), p. 19. Dutton notes that the play ahistorically puts John of Lancaster in command of the king's forces; he was actually 15 at that time.

rejoinder. When York challenges him, “Will you thus break your faith?” John replies with, “I pawned thee none” (4.1.339-40), and some less-than-compelling equivocations about precisely what he has sworn. He has no qualms about dressing his low stratagem in a providential language: “Strike up our drums, pursue the scattered stray: / God, and not we, hath safely fought today” (4.1.348-9).

Harry Percy is in an important way the one known quantity in the algebra of male bodies as they are calculated in 1 Henry IV. Put forward as the seemingly legitimate child of mother England, his is an almost solipsistically complete, individuated self. While Hal describes himself as a “truant to chivalry” in comparison (1 Henry IV, 5.1.94), he associates Hotspur with appropriate, even excessive, aristocratic labor: “I am not yet of this Percy’s mind. . . he that kills me some six of seven dozens of Scots at a breakfast, washes his hands, and says to his wife, ‘Fie upon this quiet life, I want work’” (1 Henry IV, 2.4.85-88). Though a rebel who is disinclined to look critically at his own motivations, Percy is quintessentially English, and it is from his English body and egoism that he snipes at the claim that Owen Glendower’s supposedly “portentous” birth marks him in some way uncanny:

Diseased nature oftentimes breaks forth  
In strange eruptions; oft the teeming earth  
Is with a kind of colic pinch’d and vex’d  
By the imprisoning of unruly wind  
Within her womb; which, for enlargement striving,  
Shakes the old beldam earth and topples down  
Steeple and moss-grown towers. At your birth,  
Our grandam earth, having this distemperature,  
In passion shook. (3.1.25-33)

Percy translates Glendower’s birth into the lower bodily stratum, as a fart expelled by our common mother. The comic representation of the emblematic Welsh Nationalist Owain Glyndŵr, he is completely subordinated to witty Percy, and with him his dissident claims to the

intrinsic worth of Welsh culture, art, and language. “Now I perceive the devil understands Welsh,” Percy observes (3.1.226). The Welsh, aspiring to self-determination in Glendower, are a monstrosity. Percy’s body may be singular, but his political program is incoherent. While rhetorically dominating Glendower, he is perfectly willing to see Wales (and Scotland, too) sundered from England.

#### D. REPENTANCE AND REFORMATION

The positive religious content of the second Lancastrian cycle represents a critical problem that does not allow of an answer in comfortably determinate categories. The representation of religion in these plays is thrown into significant relief by its dramatization in Drayton’s The First Part of Sir John Oldcastle. The Oldcastle play is very much a Protestant document, both in its polemical ends and in the way that it attempts to read itself out in an overdetermined manner. This is articulated in the play’s anachronistic and instantly legible religious categories. The naughty, emphatically Catholic cleric Sir John of Wrotham comments on the followers of Wyclif,

Was ever heard, my lord, the like till now?  
That thieves and rebels—‘sblood, heretics!  
Plain heretics, I’ll stand to’t to their teeth—  
Should have to colour their vile practices  
A title of such worth as Protestant? (1 Sir John Oldcastle, 2.22-6)

The valorization of “Protestant” is emphasized by its source, the tippling, criminal, generally amoral Catholic priest. As Benjamin Griffin has discussed, Wrotham is so dramatized to make

his recognition as a version of Falstaff unavoidable.<sup>38</sup> Faced with the problem of responding to the perceived slight on Oldcastle in the *Henriad*, Drayton and his collaborators have attempted to keep the comparison between virtuous Lollard and dissipated rogue *internal* to their drama, packaged in categories ready to hand. Griffin recognizes the manner in which the Protestant drama attempts to forestall dissident readings: “The Admiral’s Men’s text alludes to Shakespeare’s, preempting the audience’s analogizing, directing and glossing it.”<sup>39</sup>

There is another splitting off in the characterization of the eponymous Oldcastle that Griffin has not recognized. Oldcastle’s steward Rafe Harpoole is a commentator on his master’s piety, and is understood in the drama as a sort of reflection of John of Wrotham, even competing with the bawdy cleric for the affections of his “Doll.”<sup>40</sup> In his professed adherence to the “old church,” he is the single point of doctrinal obscurity that guarantees the play’s black-and-white religious categories. Harpoole is a necessary fission, the repository of the denied anger of militant Protestantism, in contrast to the tediously unflappable Oldcastle. It is Harpoole who forces the summoner sent by the Bishop of Rochester to eat the parchment bearing the written process intended for Oldcastle: “Feed, feed! ‘tis wholesome, rogue, wholesome! . . . ’S’blood, if thy seal were as broad as the lead that covers Rochester church, thou shouldst eat it” (4.59, 62-3). It is Harpoole who, albeit comically, draws the drama into the sort of apocalyptic historical vision associated with Protestant writers like Bale. The eating of the summons would appear to be a reference to Revelation 10, in which the speaker is ordered by an angel bearing a scroll to “Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as

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<sup>38</sup> Benjamin Griffin, “Marring and Mending: Treacherous Likeness in Two Renaissance Controversies,” *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 4 (1997), p. 373.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> One could conjecture that *Harpoole* or “Half-pole” is related to “False-staff.”

honey.”<sup>41</sup> “The purest of the honey!” Harpoole exclaims as he force-feeds the summoner, “Tough wax is the purest of the honey” (4.56-7).

From his indeterminate position in the “old church,” Harpoole critiques his master’s professed faith. Of the beggars who come to Oldcastle’s gate, Harpoole asks,

What should I give them? You are grown so beggarly you have scarce a bite of bread to give at your door. You talk of your religion so long that you have banished charity from amongst you; a man may make a flax-shop in your kitchen for any fire there is stirring. (3.60-4)

The steward’s complaint seems to be a straightforward send-up of the Protestant rejection of works piety. Damning, if taken as a fair critique of Oldcastle’s home, but of course this is situated in the ongoing banter between Harpoole and his master, each accusing the other of encouraging beggary, each demonstrating a rare sympathy toward the wretches at the gate. An old pensioner says, “we are now come to the good Lord Cobham’s, to the best man to the poor that is in all Kent” (2.21-2). Harpoole’s comments are ultimately more a comment on the austere life of the godly Lollard than the failure of his charity.

Oldcastle’s modest means, bestowed on the commons, are understood in contrast to the wealth of the Romish church. The same bishop of Rochester who persecutes Oldcastle is more than willing to hand over “a full thousand angels” to finance the king’s expedition to France (2.54), but the Pope’s bishop marshals his angels to a purpose: the suppression of Lollardy. The historical position of English reform or schism in the Oldcastle play is an interesting one. When the king asks, apropos of Rochester’s clergy, whether there is “any new rupture to disquiet them” (2.79), the Earl of Suffolk replies,

No new, my lord; the old is great enough,  
And so increasing as, if not cut down,  
Will breed a scandal to your royal state  
And set your kingdom quickly in an uproar. (2.80-3)

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<sup>41</sup> KJV.

The status of the reformist movement is ambivalent, both an “upstart new religion” and the beleaguered faith of England itself. It is as if, finding new strength under the aegis of the sympathetic Lollard knight, the old English faith asserts itself against Rome. While not an adherent to the thread of reform associated with Oldcastle, the king himself consistently asserts a position on royal supremacy consistent with the Tudor settlement.<sup>42</sup> When the Bishop of Rochester asserts that Oldcastle can be tried for heresy exclusively under ecclesiastical jurisdiction, without recourse to an appeal to the king, Henry V says,

I took it always that ourself stood on't  
As a sufficient refuge, unto whom  
Not any but might lawfully appeal;  
But we'll not argue now upon that point (2.119-22).

Henry seems to defend an established royal supremacy against the imposition of novelties by the foreign church, supported as it is by unctuous Catholic magnates like the Earl of Suffolk.

Similarly, when Acton asserts that his rising sought “reformation of religion,” the king replies,

Reform religion? Was it that ye sought?  
I pray who gave you that authority?  
Belike then, we do hold the scepter up  
And sit within the throne but for a cipher.  
Time was, good subjects would make known their grief,  
And pray amendment, not enforce the same (12.17-22)

Mary Grace Muse Adkins has argued that the “Lollard” uprising against the king reflects a moderate Protestant position on the possibly radical consequences of the Presbyterian theological understanding of the unalloyed sovereignty of God,<sup>43</sup> attributing to radical sixteenth-century reform a position inferred by some commentators from Wyclif’s own writings on sovereignty.

In the same foregrounded manner, Griffin has observed how the Oldcastle play associates the

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<sup>42</sup> Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge, eds., *The Oldcastle Controversy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), n. p. 51)

<sup>43</sup> Mary Grace Muse Adkins, “Sixteenth-century Religious and Political implications in *Sir John Oldcastle*,” *University of Texas Studies in English*, vol. 22 (1942), pp. 94-5.

revolted Lollards with a “precisian” distaste for traditional feast days<sup>44</sup>, one that might have come from Jonson’s *Tribulation Wholesome*:

Nay. . . if you observe such days,  
We make some question of your constancy.  
All days are like to men resolved in right. (5.61-3)

The rigidly-policed religious categories of Sir John Oldcastle are a useful antidote to critics who would seek in the *Henriad* an uncomplicated inscription of the Tudor-Protestant moment on the fifteenth century. In the two parts of Henry IV, what the “old church” might have been is not only unfamiliar but contested in the rhetorical struggle between Falstaff and the Prince of Wales. Do references to positive religious doctrine remain? One could easily bring the question of works piety to a situation like that of Falstaff’s relationship to his beggarly command; such a comment seems to speak to the text, but does not necessarily lend itself to a reductive categorization in terms of Protestant or Catholic. In a more interesting critical intervention, Alice Lyle Scoufos finds a comment on Lollard sacramental theology in the tavern-reckoning that the prince discovers in the pocket of Falstaff, who has fallen asleep behind an arras. “Oh, monstrous!” the prince exclaims, “But one halfpennyworth of bread to this intolerable deal of sack?” (2.4.436). Scoufos would read this as consistent with a Lollard position on transubstantiation: “The Lollards insisted that the bread remained bread, becoming after consecration the symbol of Christ’s body. . . . The Falstaff-Oldcastle figure carries only a symbolic amount of bread.”<sup>45</sup> This reading, although interesting, hangs upon a misunderstanding of the Lollard position on transubstantiation as “symbol.” Although historically associated with the Protestant appropriation of Oldcastle, this misreading claims a theological position that Oldcastle never professed. What Wyclif and his followers objected to

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<sup>44</sup> Griffin, p. 375.

<sup>45</sup> Scoufos, p. 78.

was the *annihilation* of the substance of the bread, the doctrine of “accidents without a subject.” If a play on Lollard sacramental beliefs is at work here, it is more complex than the one Scoufos identifies. As we have seen, Falstaff is repeatedly associated with cooked flesh, flesh to be devoured in a carnivalesque reflection of communion. The quibble on the miniscule scrap of bread reported by the prince in this scene plays on the trope of not seeing the mountain for the great mass of stone. Falstaff needs no bread because he was made from it; puddings, with which he has been identified, can be a compound of meat and bread, or they may *not* be. Similarly, Falstaff either contains bread, or he doesn’t, he is all flesh. The theological question about Falstaff’s substance, like a sort of medieval Schrödinger’s cat, cannot be decided objectively. In testimony to his grotesque, subversive incarnation, all we have is the scriptural trace in the bill, which is just grapheme: no substance there.

In substance, Falstaff’s resurrection on the fields of Shrewsbury in act five of 1 Henry IV is a dramatic enigma in part because, dramatically, it works. Critically, it is a bit more difficult to understand, though not for want of effort. Michael Bristol has argued that Sir John’s rising from the dead is an instance of the principle of *dignitas non moritur*, “the king’s mystical identity or dignity never dies.”<sup>46</sup> This is perfectly consistent with the understanding of Falstaff in an embodied identification with the king, though a bit intellectually abstruse for most audiences. In the religious register, Falstaff’s death in fact refers us once again to the prince’s comic play on the Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, with its possibly more earnest undercurrent. The epigraph to this chapter, drawn from Ephesians (5:14-16), lies at the conjunction of the prince’s soliloquy and Falstaff’s resurrection, “redeeming [the] time” in terms of his personal “reformation” with God’s admonition to “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and

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<sup>46</sup> Bristol, p. 183. Bristol’s reference here is to Kantorowicz.

Christ shall give thee light.”<sup>47</sup> Here then the meeting place of Hal’s redemption, and Falstaff’s. In the epistle, “light” takes the specific meaning of a potentially omniscient moral vision, making all things visible, “For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret, But all things that are reprov’d are made manifest by the light” (Ephesians 5.12-3).

Looking at the dead on the field of Shrewsbury, it would at first appear that such a vision is denied us. We see two equivalently dead theatrical bodies, Percy and Falstaff, side by side. One of them unexpectedly rises. In Falstaff, the metaphorical, *spiritual* resurrection appealed to in Paul’s epistle, “you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1), is (typically) materialized. Sir John manages the feat of rising from death without the promised repentance, suggesting for a moment that perhaps one *can* get to heaven on roller skates, cozening God and the devil in one stroke. Apparently a reader of St. Paul just as the prince is, Falstaff is a legalistic, Pharisaical exegete of this text. Dying as a stratagem, called back to life in body if not in spirit, Falstaff is now in a position to take advantage of Percy’s more permanent condition.

In similar ways, Sigurd Burckhardt, James Calderwood and others have suggested that Falstaff’s resurrection is a break in the mimetic fabric of the play, an intrusion of the “reality principle.”<sup>48</sup> For Calderwood, “With the illusion of heroic life shattered, we are left with the trumpery of theater – costumes, actors, props, stage, words issuing from a script instead of from men’s mouths.”<sup>49</sup> In readings that emphasize the metadramatic quality of this scene, Falstaff’s resurrection seems to suggest that anything goes, that Percy might rise too, and help Sir John put away the flats. But of course, Percy does not rise. Even at what has been put forward as the fracture that might presage the collapse of the dramatic illusion, Percy’s body remains as a sort

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<sup>47</sup> This is the text from which is drawn Bach’s cantata “*Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*” or “Sleepers Awake.”

<sup>48</sup> Burckhardt, p. 149.

<sup>49</sup> James Calderwood, *Metadrama in Shakespeare’s Henriad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 79.

of guarantee of the dramatic fiction. While by no means denying the flexible metadramatic registers in which Falstaff moves, let us consider an alternative way of understanding this scene. Falstaff's stage presence has been a sort of evolving metadramatic contract between himself and the audience that works in a number of ways. When first we encounter him in the events leading up to the Gad's Hill robbery, he is enclosed by the dramatic action while we, sharing the privileged perspective of Poins and (in particular) Hal, see him improvise his rhetorical defense in a situation in which everyone seems to know more than he.

As we approach the battle of Shrewsbury, all of this changes. In a series of soliloquies, we are increasingly drawn into Falstaff's perspective, even if we cannot share the moral/political positions he takes; aligning the audience through perspective effects with characters whose moral vision they cannot share has been a part of the dramatic method in Shakespeare's histories since Richard III, if not before. Falstaff asks,

What is honor? A word. What is in that word "honor"? What is that "honor"? Air. A trim reckoning. Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible, then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honor is a mere scutcheon. And so ends my catechism.<sup>50</sup> (5.1.132-7)

Falstaff can speak dissident truths, but always from that hybrid body and discourse, already undermined by the dominant ideological positions of the play. The term "scutcheon" is resonant with the language of "counterfeit" and "image" in Falstaff's post-resurrection soliloquy, a set of suspect visual categories, icons with no tangible referent. It is at this point of greatest intimacy and perspective alignment with Falstaff that he is "killed" by the termagant Scot, Douglas.

When Falstaff rises, the joke is on us. For the first time, in his most profound improvisation, all are fooled, prince and audience alike. Falstaff cheats his own algebra of chivalric honor: he robs Percy of it through a staged death. While comically successful, Falstaff

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<sup>50</sup> I know of no critic who has seized upon this use of "catechism" to claim that Falstaff is Catholic.

at this moment is at his most compromised, cheating at a game he has disdained to play before because at the moment of opportunity no one is watching – except the audience, whose perspective alignment with Falstaff has undergone a rupture. Falstaff has attempted to draw all visual perception into a broken tautology, “To die is to be a counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man; but to counterfeit dying, when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit but the true and perfect image of life indeed” (5.4.114-7). In fact, our confidence in the visual mode is not utterly defeated: it can be recuperated through a vantage point that remains. Alienated from Falstaff, but not perfectly expelled from the drama, the audience is now situated in the sort of privileged moral perspective described by St. Paul. Of particular importance in appreciating this is Falstaff’s comment on the expediency of acts done surreptitiously: “Nothing confutes me but eyes, and nobody sees me” he says (5.5.122-3), stabbing Percy in the thigh. Falstaff, an image of the iconoclastic Oldcastle, endorses the notion of images as fundamentally deceptive, and it is from this undermined position that the drama recovers vision as a privileged mode of moral insight, “for whatsoever doth make manifest is light” (Ephesians 5.13).

The body of Harry Percy retains a material significance in the immediate aftermath of his death, to which the prince attests:

When that this body did contain a spirit,  
A kingdom for it was too small a bound;  
but now two paces of the vilest earth  
Is room enough. This earth that bears thee dead  
Bears not alive so stout a gentleman. (5.4.88-92)

This is a development of the king’s *vierge ouvrante* figure, the Christ-like sons of England sacrificed to the martial national character. The earth that “bears thee dead” once again functions as womb and grave of a sort of national saint. In a play that often holds out the possibility of

expiatory sacrifice, this may be the only instance in which it is unambiguously consummated. While the prince treats Percy's body as something of a relic, Falstaff works upon it a callous act of desecration. C. G. Thayer has understood the wound to Percy's thigh as a "symbolic castration,"<sup>51</sup> Gerard H. Cox as a more literal one.<sup>52</sup> Even in death, Percy's body is the source of an excess that informs other bodies. In the moral vision that Ephesians asks of us, Percy is recuperated as a quasi-religious national icon at one moment, and in the next debased by Falstaff's mutilation. We should note that Ephesians has placed particular emphasis on the moral import of private acts. In this case, as in a small set of others, the drama directs our attention to omissions or commissions that take place absent any particular public component.<sup>53</sup>

Hal proves himself perfectly willing to surrender to Falstaff the "proud titles" he has won from Harry Percy, a "commodity of names" for the fat knight to trade upon. Dover Wilson has taken this to be a revelation of the prince's "selflessness and generosity," his "native magnanimity."<sup>54</sup> Problematically, this hangs upon the notion that Hal has been invested in the sort of commodification of chivalric virtue which is now associated with Falstaff. Textually, this is correct: even Percy seems to have endorsed such a notion (5.4.80). Has the prince really given away all of his gains? He has not. In the dramatic emphasis placed on his seemingly unobserved conduct toward Percy when compared to that of Falstaff a moment later, the prince has been given an opportunity to explore his own essential majesty against the measure of dead Percy, his

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<sup>51</sup> C. G. Thayer, Shakespearean Politics: Government and Misgovernment in the Great Histories (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1983), p. 114.

<sup>52</sup> Gerard H. Cox, "'Like a Price indeed': Hal's Triumph of Honor in 1 Henry IV," Pageantry in the Shakespearean Theater (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1985), p. 144.

<sup>53</sup> The distinction that the play draws between the iconoclastic attitude and intentional dissimulations of Falstaff and the recuperation of sight in the essentially iconophilic spectatorship demanded of the audience has been missed by many workers. Thus, in Janet Marie Spencer, "Falstaff counterfeits death to avoid the real thing; he counterfeits his resurrection to be "the true and perfect image of life indeed". . . these plays. . . teach the skepticism of all representations—all counterfeits. . ." The Politics of Mixed-Genre Drama: The Comic Treatment of Punishment Scenes in Shakespeare (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1990), p. 157.

<sup>54</sup> Dover Wilson, p. 68.

sometime altar-ego, his distorted image. The prince seems willing to keep the results of that measurement to himself through most of 2 Henry IV. Through the prince, the sacrifice of Christ-like Percy is purified and assimilated:<sup>55</sup> “Thy ignominy sleep with thee in thy grave, / But not remembered in thy epitaph!” (5.4.100-1). Unlike the debased figures of subaltern revolt, Percy is elevated through sharing an essence with Hal, where even his own father may not.

#### E. WHIPPING ADAM OUT OF THE GARDEN

Once again “between two deaths,” the Falstaff of The Second Part of Henry IV is dramatized as emphatically marked for death, the counterpart of the ailing king. His representation in the play is resonant of the *calaca* tableaux of the Days of the Dead in which skeletal figures, unaware that they are already dead, go about their daily activities, plying their trades or flaunting death and judgment in adulterous trysts, a New World counterpart to the 15<sup>th</sup>-century *Danse macabre nouvelle* or Holbein’s 16<sup>th</sup>-century *Les simulacres & historiees faces de la mort*. The companions of Falstaff’s country revels, Justices Shallow and Silence are comic allegories of impending death. As Rees has observed, “They are the most amiable, silly death’s-heads imaginable, but they make an effective *momento mori* all the same.”<sup>56</sup> The dramatic presence of the prostitute Doll Tearsheet, the first real evidence of Falstaff’s “lechery,” suggests the ultimate sterility of Falstaff’s way of living. Falstaff is faced not simply with death, but with a sort of

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<sup>55</sup> Harold E. Toliver makes a similar claim: “As he helps defeat the rebels, he takes over their powers in the manner of the morality play hero and consigns to the grave their unredeemable qualities,” “Falstaff, The Prince, and the History Play,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Winter, 1965), p. 70.

<sup>56</sup> Rees, pp. 17-18.

extinction through his lack of progeny. We are reminded of another valence of the expression “Martlemas Beef”: preserved meat that, as winter wears on, is no longer desirable.

There are two ways in which Falstaff might be redeemed. One is the promised repentance, problematic in Falstaff’s case because to renounce the flesh may literally be to renounce himself, to break the original comic contract with the audience. Failing this, the remaining locus of possibility that might recover Falstaff from that oblivion is the Prince of Wales, in many ways the most enigmatic figure of the drama. The dramatic nature of Hal’s trajectory through the drama is by no means a settled manner. Dover Wilson is within a critical genealogy that understands the drama as representing a nearly novelistic character development, a progressive maturation in Hal:<sup>57</sup> “This [the playwright] is at pains to make reasonable and human, and he does so by marking it off... into various stages, thereby accustoming the audience more and more to the notion of it and giving an impression of a gradual development of character.”<sup>58</sup> In order to produce this development, Dover Wilson is forced to dismiss Hal’s soliloquy as “a piece of dramatic convention, common in the Elizabethan theatre. . . .It’s function was to convey information to the audience about the general drift of the play, much as a prologue did.”<sup>59</sup> Dover Wilson is able to extract Hal’s authority from this statement, though it is perfectly consistent with his reply to Falstaff’s “banish plump Jack”: “I do, I will.” Poised against the critical narrative of Hal’s development as future king or simply human being is the remarkable consistency of his characterization, his unerring anticipation of his future acts.

It has been argued by some critics that the drama eschews the opportunity to develop Hal as a character, particularly in 2 Henry IV. As Burckhardt emphasizes, with regard to matters of

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<sup>57</sup> See, for instance, Warren M. Howe, “The Rejection and regeneration of Falstaff in ‘1 Henry IV,’” The Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature, vol. 34, no. 4 (Autumn, 1980), pp. 217-27.

<sup>58</sup> Dover Wilson, p. 69.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p. 41.

state, and significantly with regard to the comic action, “Hal is quite deliberately being kept out of the play.”<sup>60</sup> In fact, the prince is held in part 2 in a sort of limbo, even a regression from the point at which we might expect to find him after Shrewsbury. What role for the prince?

Burckhardt claims,

Clearly the theory that in Part II Hal proves himself just (as in Part I he proved himself valorous), while it has a certain *a priori* plausibility, is sadly lacking in dramatic substance. . . .Hal has one role only – That of heir, of successor.<sup>61</sup>

This may be where Burckhardt’s reading needs to be complicated. The drama has done a great deal to problematize the notion that Hal will have the crown from Henry in an uncomplicated genealogical handover. This is attested to by Hal’s continuing alienation from his father’s court, and by his brother John’s dramatization as a Lancastrian heir, just as it will shortly be figured in the manner of his acquisition of the crown.

If there is an instability in Hal as a *dramatis persona*, it may be that between his less than candid motives, desires, or intentions and those imputed to him, notably by Falstaff. Sir John appears sincerely to believe that the Prince has long heeded his politic advice concerning the government of the realm when he succeeds his father. This is developed tangibly in part 2 through Falstaff’s relationship to the Lord Chief Justice. In their first confrontation, Falstaff recalls an extra-dramatic event:

For the box of th’ear that the prince gave you, he gave it like a rude prince, and you took it like a sensible lord. I have checked him for it, and the young lion repents – marry, not in ashes and sackcloth, but in new silk and old sack. (1.2.152-5)

Falstaff relishes the memory of the prince’s most significant flaunting of his father’s law, which suggests to him that Hal has taken to heart the notion of a future England in which social power is significantly redistributed. The incident of the prince’s striking the Lord Chief Justice appears

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<sup>60</sup> Burckhardt, p. 158.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p. 161.

on stage not in Shakespeare's Henry plays but in one of his sources, the anonymous Famous Victories of Henry V. This Prince of Wales is more directly and willfully involved in theft and other sorts of misconduct, and voices a familiar political discourse in anticipation of his accession:

But here's such ado nowadays, here's prisoning, here's hanging, whipping, and the devil and all! But I tell you sirs, when I am king we will have no such things. But, my lads, if the old king, my father, were dead, we would all be kings. . . .But, Ned, so soon as I am king, the first thing I will do shall be to put my Lord Chief Justice out of office, and thou shalt be my Lord Chief Justice of England (The Famous Victories of Henry V, 5.10-13, 15-7)

Here it is the prince himself who is the mouthpiece for the sort of leveling, anti-authoritarian utopianism that has been associated with Jack Cade, Falstaff, and a gallery of subaltern figures. D. B. Landt has argued that, in adapting the materials of The Famous Victories to his own purposes, Shakespeare has displaced Hal's morally suspect or politically unsettling acts and attitudes onto Falstaff, who becomes the principal opponent of the Lord Chief Justice.<sup>62</sup> The characterization of Hal as a rogue and potential radical is modified, while metadramatic echoes of incidents like Hal's imprisonment remain, as does Falstaff's persistent impression that the prince shares his plans for the future. The prince's "when I am king" becomes Falstaff's repeated "when thou art king,"<sup>63</sup> and Falstaff takes as irony or fails to notice as the prince candidly and consistently asserts that in the new order, thieves will be hung and Falstaff banished.

Compared with the sanguine calculation of the Prince of Wales, there is something innocent about Falstaff's skewed perception of events. Of course, there is something of calculation in his use of Percy's dead body to promote his own reputation, but there is a sense in

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<sup>62</sup> D.B. Landt, "The Ancestry of Sir John Falstaff," Shakespeare Quarterly, vol. 17, no. 1 (Winter, 1966), pp 74-6.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p. 74.

which Falstaff himself is a victim of his own abuse of history. David M. Bergeron<sup>64</sup> has made the connection between Falstaff, who has “a whole school of tongues in this belly” (2 Henry IV, 4.3.18) and the grotesque personification of Rumour, “*painted full of tongues.*” In this reading, Falstaff is “ahistory,” a subversive force destabilizing Shakespeare’s literary intervention into national history. His exploitation of dead Percy, as a sort of embodied empirical fact, dramatizes his own distorting effect.<sup>65</sup> What needs to be emphasized here is not so much, as Bergeron says, “the difficulty of establishing credible history,”<sup>66</sup> but the problem of history as a rhetorical product, founded in desires and bodies as much as the historical record. Falstaff, ever a hybrid, collective persona, stands in for what have been called “standpoint epistemologies,” critical processes situated in subject positions, often subaltern ones. Against the grand strategies of the Lancastrian historical machine, Falstaff offers tactical critiques, local interventions, all informed by a utopian social vision, and all of this rendered through the perspective of the social power it would challenge. Of course, in the eyes of the drama, Falstaff is fundamentally wrong; his misunderstanding of the prince is a failure of his own utopian historical sensibility.

The questions of history, theft, essence and sovereignty are crystallized in the scene of Hal’s self-coronation. Like the first dramatic audience between the prince and his father in 1 Henry IV 3.2, this scene has an earlier echo in a tavern exchange between Hal and Falstaff. In this their final encounter, the prince finds the king asleep and, first addressing the crown, places it on his own head and leaves the room, only to have his father awaken and find the crown “stolen.” This is the dramatic twin to the picking of the sleeping Falstaff’s pockets, through which Sir John claims he has lost “Three or four bonds of forty pound apiece and a seal ring of

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<sup>64</sup> David M. Bergeron, “Shakespeare Makes History: 2 Henry IV,” Studies in English Literature: 1500-1900, vol. 31, no. 2, Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama (Spring, 1991), p. 240.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, p. 240.

my grandfather's" (1 Henry IV, 3.3.80-1). The seal ring is a particular marker of identity, presumably even Falstaff's identity as a knight – always an unstable proposition in the play. This is supported by the prince's assessment of its value, "A trifle, some eightpenny matter" (3.3.82) and "I say 'tis copper" (3.3.115). Falstaff's dubious patrimony is base metal, while the English crown is, in Hal's words, a "golden rigol" or circle. Then again, Falstaff's ring may well have belonged to his grandfather, while Hal cannot make the same claim.

"Thou hast stol'n that which after some few hours / Were thine without offence" the king says in his final conversation with his son. This is the cycle of robberies come full circle: Hal's taking of the crown is made to be the perfect analogy of the Gad's Hill robbery: the prince steals the proceeds of an earlier robbery from the original thief.<sup>67</sup> He symbolically disrupts the principle of primogeniture, "This lineal honor," even as he verbally invokes it (4.2.176). Indeed, this action cannot help but recall his father's taking the crown in the deposition of Richard II. Further, it is a metadramatic echo of the prince in The Famous Victories, where the specter of parricide is raised when the prince approaches his father with a drawn dagger, only to excuse his own conduct with skillful rhetoric (The Famous Victories, 6.1-30). All of this suggests what is never stated between Henry IV and his son: the problem of the broken succession, the king's culpability in the state of the realm, the rift in their own relationship.

The prince rescues the situation through a similarly adept and perhaps entirely sincere exercise of rhetoric:

I spake unto this crown as having sense,  
And this upbraided it: 'The care on thee depending  
Hath fed on the body of my father;  
Therefore thou best of gold art worse than gold,  
Other, less fine, in carat more precious,  
Preserving life in med'cine potable;

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<sup>67</sup> This is quite close to Hapgood's understanding, p. 96, but Hapgood does not really understand why this final theft is necessary to the play's construction of Henry V's legitimacy.

But thou, most fine, most honored, most renowned,  
Hast eat thy bearer up.' Thus, my most royal liege,  
Accusing it, I put it on my head,  
To try with it, as with an enemy  
That had before my face murdered my father,  
The quarrel of a true inheritor. (4.2.286-297)

It is clear that the prince speaks here from the heart of Lancastrian ideology. The sickness of the king and realm, whose cause has been located in Henry's usurpation, is displaced on the crown, the crime of the thief turned on the object of the theft. Emphasis is placed on the onus of kingship, assumed as an obligation by reluctant sons of Lancaster, consistent with the king's own favored understanding of his accession:

Though then, God knows, I had no such intent  
But that necessity so bowed the state  
That I and greatness were compelled to kiss. (3.1.71-3)

Hal's defense of his conduct wins over his father through its articulation of the fundamental tenets of Lancastrian dogma. If it is a Falstaffian improvisation, it is one in the service of dominant ideology, not in contest against it. It is effective and affecting *because* of its erasures: the king is willing to grant precisely what the prince has excluded, the "indirect, crooked ways / I met this crown" (4.2.312-3), but only to suggest that the guilt that his politic son dares not speak will be cleansed by his own expiatory sacrifice, "For all the soil of the achievement goes / With me into the earth" (4.2.317-8). This is hardly a principle of law, and this quasi-religious claim is complicated by the action that follows. On the brink of death, the king asks the name of the room where he had collapsed, and is told that it is named "Jerusalem":

Laud be to God, even there my life must end.  
It hath been prophesied to me, many years,  
I should not die but in Jerusalem,  
Which vainly I supposed the Holy Land.  
But bear me to that chamber, there I'll lie:  
In that Jerusalem shall Harry die. (4.2.362-7)

In the dramatization of Henry's death, the Jerusalem room has been transferred from Westminster Abbey, where it is located by Holinshed, to the royal palace.<sup>68</sup> This assimilation to the nation of traditionally religious signifiers occurs again and again in Shakespeare's representation of the Lancastrian kings. In a dramatic inversion of the usually-understood nature of secularization, the Henries have endeavored to consecrate their state. There is an ambivalence to Henry's death in the "Jerusalem" room: either it is the failure of the king's dream of crusade and a self-sacrifice that would cleanse him of his guilt with regard to Richard, or it is the peripatetic culmination of that desire in a new Jerusalem.

If the prince's rationale for his actions is suspect because of its perfect congruence with Lancastrian discourses of their own legitimacy already questioned by the drama, there must be some other way of accounting for the staging of seeming theft and self-coronation. Leonard Tennenhouse would situate Hal's theft in the dramatization of the performed acts of power in which "authority goes to the contender who can seize hold of the symbols and signs legitimizing authority and wrest them from his rivals to make them serve his own interests."<sup>69</sup> The prince's act is perfectly symmetrical with that of his father's usurpation, demonstrating, "that power is an inversion of legitimate authority which gains possession, as such, of the means of self-authorization."<sup>70</sup> Such an understanding of a "self-authorizing" power has what is probably an untenable corollary, for it invests the usurper Henry IV with a legitimacy that has been extensively contested at many social levels in the drama, even tacitly by his own son.

The problem addressed by Hal's theft is precisely the one raised by the question of "self-authorization": whether sovereign power actually contains Negri's "constituting power," the

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<sup>68</sup> Giorgio Melchiori, ed., *The New Cambridge Shakespeare: The Second Part of Henry IV* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), n. p. 151.

<sup>69</sup> Leonard Tennenhouse, *Power on Display: The politics of Shakespeares' Genres* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 83

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*

sempiternal force authorizing rule. Giorgio Agamben has argued that it must,<sup>71</sup> the New Historicist emphasis on power as fundamentally a performance requires that this be the case. If the prince's taking of the crown is an act of legitimization, why seize it in a manner that complicates the argument from lineal descent? It can only be because that descent has been tainted, that it has a residue of illegitimacy, the metaphorical bastardy repeatedly invoked by Falstaff and others. In this instance, the prince has the crown not through his father but through his mother, the *vierge ouvrante*, the England of which he has shown himself the proper son. What happens when Hal puts on the crown is the sort of constituting moment described by Negri, "the act of choice, the punctual determination that opens a horizon, the radical enacting of something that did not exist before. . ."<sup>72</sup> Hal's self-coronation is a new covenant that, in this tainted historical moment, could only be accomplished by a final theft, a last cozening of the devil. Thus, his father is partly right when he says that "God put in thy mind to take it hence" (4.2.306). In what is fundamentally a private act, like Hal's magnanimity toward Harry Percy, value is recuperated not through inheritance or public performance but through essence. The fact that Hal is perfectly willing to hand the crown back to his father makes no difference here. The tangible crown, "best of gold," has an intangible part of greater consequence. In this respect, the drama seems to be playing on that theoretical corollary of the king's two bodies, the doctrine of the "invisible crown":

There was a visible, material, exterior gold circle or diadem with which the prince was vested and adorned at his coronation; and there was an invisible and immaterial crown—encompassing all the royal rights and privileges indispensable for the government of the body politic—which was perpetual and descended either from God directly or by the dynastic right of inheritance.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Agamben, p. 43.

<sup>72</sup> Negri, p. 31.

<sup>73</sup> Kantorowicz, p. 337.

Trivially, Hal returns the material crown to his father, but he cannot return its invisible twin because it has already passed to him.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, the failure of the metaphysical aspect of the crown that should function as “medicine potable” may be implicated in the sickness the king shares with his realm. From the point of view of a mythologized national history, we know without doubt that the relationship of Henry V to that crown will be of a different order. The difficulty for the performance model of power invoked by Tennenhouse is the private nature of Hal’s taking of the crown, which is public only in the sense that it takes place within the gaze of the audience. The strange fact is that we endorse Hal’s theft of the crown, though it is outside the law, outside of unblemished succession, outside of participatory institutions. This is not a moment of representative government, but a reinstatement of the divine guarantee. Henry V will recuperate the “lineal honor” with regard to the Lancastrian dynasty, but in the future.

The transfer of the crown is marked by a change in the realm. Since A. C. Bradley at least, the critical intervention into the rejection of Falstaff by the new king has emphasized affect and audience response. Bradley himself thought the rejection of Falstaff just and proper, yet asked, “What do we feel, and what are we meant to feel, as we witness this scene?”<sup>75</sup> For Dover Wilson, the rejection of Falstaff is not only “fine and appropriate,”<sup>76</sup> but partakes of the sort of gradual development that he locates in the character of Hal, though “in the end he springs it upon [the audience] in the most striking and unexpected fashion possible.”<sup>77</sup> The question of the dramatic, moral or historical rightness of this rejection seems to elide important questions of

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<sup>74</sup> Hapgood misunderstands the import of this scene arguing “Hal does not keep what he has taken; He of course gives back the crown” (p. 96), by implication one instance of Hal’s returning his seeming thefts “with advantage” (p. 94). Fischer argues that Hal has always had “intrinsic worth” associated with “inheriting nobility and right rule from his father” (p. 162). Fischer’s reading of Hal as intrinsic value calls upon Falstaff of all people as a credible endorser of that value, even though Henry V clearly is not what Falstaff has expected at all.

<sup>75</sup> A. C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London: MacMillan, 1909), p. 249.

<sup>76</sup> Dover Wilson, p. 122.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, p. 123.

agency raised by a character like the prince, who seems to embody at different times both carnival and calculation, to exist both in a given dramatic moment and in his own future state.

Further, the question of rejection demands an assessment of just what is rejected. Falstaff has been celebrating with his Gloucestershire death's-heads, Justices Silence and Shallow. Trading on his recent good fortune, Falstaff has graduated from corrupt officer to influence peddler. Falstaff clearly expects a dilation of his opportunities with the accession of his protégé, the Prince of Wales, and greets the news of the king's death with delight:

Master Shallow, my Lord Shallow, be what thou wilt: I am fortune's steward. . . .  
Boot, boot, Master Shallow! I know the young king is sick for me. Let us take any man's horses, the laws of England are at my commandment. Blessed are they that have been my friends, and woe to my Lord Chief Justice! (5.3.106-7, 110-3).

In the context of this play, the language of sickness is no accident; in a sense, Falstaff *is* the prince's sickness. Falstaff's speech is an incoherent but familiar mixture. There is the echo of Christian communism dramatized as theft, "Take any man's horses," the ambition to displace the magistrate, in this case, the chief judge of England. The egalitarian inclination of earlier speeches is translated into the familiar trope of the corruption of the aristocracy with unworthy types like Shallow, a taint already figured in Falstaff's risen status after Shrewsbury. Jack Falstaff's "The laws of England are at my commandment" has more than a little resonance with Jack Cade's "my mouth shall be the parliament of England." Then again, Falstaff is not Cade, not an advocate of violent revolt. His crimes may involve a culpable degree of *lèse-majesté*, but he remains in spirit a Lancastrian loyalist. With regard to the house of Lancaster, Jack Cade and Falstaff represent two points of equilibrium within an instability analogous to that of the historical Oldcastle: can the egalitarian utopia of Christian fellowship be achieved through a benevolent sovereign as the Vicar of God, or must it be seized by violent revolutionary means?

Hal's accession *is* a sort of revolution, albeit a conservative one, representing a fundamental change in the commonwealth as a body in its relationship the body of its king. One of the reagents of this alchemy, still incomplete when the prince crowns himself, is the Lord Chief Justice. His *apologium* to the new king is a point of conjunction between the discourses of the body in the Henry plays and the recurrent metadramatic references to another dramatic Henry, the Prince of Wales from The Famous Victories. Here, Lord Chief Justice:

. . .Whiles I was busy for the commonwealth,  
Your highness pleased to forget my place,  
The majesty and power of law and justice,  
The image of the king whom I presented,  
And struck me in my very seat of judgment;  
Whereon, as an offender to your father,  
I gave bold way to my authority  
And did commit you. If the deed were ill,  
Be you contented, wearing now the garland,  
To have a son set your decrees at nought?  
To pluck down justice from your awful bench? . . .  
Nay, more, to spurn at your most royal image,  
And mock your workings in a second body? (2 Henry IV 5.2. 75-85, 88-9)

For the Lord Chief Justice, juridical power is subordinated to the king, it is his image and acts only in his interest. It is interesting to note the extent to which justice is assimilated to “power” and “authority” without dilution from concepts like equity or common law. We should further note that “image” in this passage is not immaterial and visual, the ocular phantasm of iconoclastic discourses. Image is *embodied*, both in the Lord Chief Justice and the prince as images of the king. The incoherence of the hierarchal relationship between king, the law embodied in the Lord Chief Justice, and the prince is figured as a confusion of bodies. This is picked up in the splendid ambiguity of the clause “[to] mock your workings in a second body.” Is that body the prince or the Lord Chief Justice, the agent of the mockery or its object? It is

both: the dispersal of unitary majesty into a grotesque knot of conflicting bodies; indeed, it is only a bit of a stretch to imagine Falstaff somewhere in the scrum.

The dramatic choice between the Lord Chief Justice and Falstaff is a choice between two competing modes of social existence for the nation. Claire McEachern invites us to read the Prince of Wales less as a modern, psychologically “deep” character and more as the locus of larger social collectivities,

Henry’s characterization, “the ‘person-ality’ of Henry as sharing in the Elizabethan personification of the crown, sharing not so much in a discourse of personal subjectivity as in the tropes of subjectivity used to produce a particular Elizabethan political affect – that of corporate identity, of what we might call ‘the nation.’”<sup>78</sup>

Falstaff too has this larger-than-individual quality, an essentially plebian character associated with “the world” who “multiples and refracts his identity to blend with ‘every man jack.’”<sup>79</sup> The Henry plays have posed the problem of a choice between two alternative fathers, both them tainted, as alternative images of the nation.

The solution for the new king is the reinstatement of law in the person of the Lord Chief Justice, but in a different relationship with sovereignty:

. . . There is my hand:  
You shall be as father to my youth,  
My voice shall sound as you do prompt mine ear,  
And I will stoop and humble my intents  
To your well-practised wise directions. . . (5.2.116-20)

In the Lord Chief Justice, Hal is offered a purified image of his father, “Th’unstained sword” (5.2.113), authority without the taint of Henry’s sin.<sup>80</sup> This is clear from the new relationship

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<sup>78</sup> Claire McEachern, “Henry V and the Paradox of the Body Politic,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 45, no. 1 (Spring, 1994), p. 35.

<sup>79</sup> Bristol, p. 205.

<sup>80</sup> The distinction between Henry IV and the Lord Chief Justice is his perfect image is a crucial one marking off the new regime in its own character. This is why the claim of this work is distinct from, e.g., Thayer’s claim that, “Justice. . . had resided with the dead king; it now resides with the Lord Chief Justice; it will reside with the new king if he wishes it to. . .” C.G. Thayer, *Shakespearean Politics: Government and Misgovernment in the Great Histories* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1983), p. 96.

between law and sovereignty that the new king proposes. While in the old regime law was an extension of the king's power, in the new there will be reciprocity, the king placing himself under a law that is theoretically his own image. The curious extra-legal manner of the prince's self-coronation stands in a peculiar relationship to this invocation of law, resonant with Agamben's reflections on that relationship:

The paradox of sovereignty consists in the fact that the sovereign is, at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order. . . . This means that the paradox can also be formulated in this way: "the law is outside itself," or : "I, the sovereign, who am outside the law, declare that there is nothing outside the law. . . ."<sup>81</sup>

Henry V ultimately places himself on the side of law and property against the threat to those things embodied in Falstaff. This is posed as a sort of radical choice, constitutive of the new king, disentangling him from his grotesque connections, his metaphorical bastardy. Falstaff repeated chorus of "when thou art king—" constructs sovereignty as a perfect, almost anarchic agency. The new king seizes upon a characteristically Pauline alternative. Writing to his fellow Christians from prison, the Paul of the epistles styles himself a "prisoner of Christ":<sup>82</sup> "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Ephesians 4:1). The strictures of earthly life are redeemed by a vision that places them in the context of the eternal. The rejection of the "Martin drunk" pseudo-saint that is Falstaff may be an exercise more of such constraints than of the king's unencumbered agency.

The treatment of Falstaff reflects the imposition of a new, Pauline order. In Ephesians, St. Paul is the voice of a hierarchal social vision in family and the larger social world: "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ" (6:5). Mundane social relations are enforced with divine sanction under the light that makes manifest. The new king means to put everything and

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<sup>81</sup> Agamben, p. 15.

<sup>82</sup> See Ephesians 3:1, 4:1, Philemon 1:1, etc.

everyone in its place. In the prince's dispensation, Falstaff is not to be hung for the robbery at Gad's Hill. His status is set forth specifically: banished from the king's company, but maintained on an austere allowance (5.5.59-63). He is placed under the power of his rival, the Lord Chief Justice, who says, "Go carry Sir John Falstaff to the Fleet, / Take all his company along with him" (5.5.84-5). Their incarceration has as its explicit aim the correction of their *behavior*. As John of Lancaster observes, "all are banished till their conversation / Appear more wise and modest to the world" (5.5.93-4). For those who cannot implement a Pauline moral vision for themselves, it will be imposed in the form of moral surveillance from the organs of justice. In strange consistency with the prince's essentially comic action after the double robbery at Gad's Hill, Falstaff will be fundamentally undone by the prince's making everything manifest and visible. Where Falstaff once resisted providing an account of himself "upon compulsion" (1 Henry IV, 2.4.191-4), it is on this basis that he will be forced to reform. Such reformation is understood almost completely in terms of deportment, "Reply to me not with a fool-born jest," and "leave gourmandizing" (2 Henry IV 5.5.51, 48). Conduct and proper deference to authority appear more important here than intangibles like souls.

Falstaff's political status with regard to the sovereign has been changed. Where earlier he existed in an extension of the sovereign exception, potentially outside of law under the license of the prince, he is now to be maintained in the custodial capacity of that very law, in a sort of extra-legal confinement. Of all the rebels in the Henry plays, Falstaff in his abasement is the other who defines the new state, translated into a status that Agamben has identified with the "sovereign ban":

This relation is more original than the . . . opposition between friend and enemy, fellow citizen and foreigner. The 'estrarity' of the person held in the sovereign ban is more intimate and primary than the extraneousness of the foreigner. . . The ban is the force of simultaneous attraction and repulsion that ties together the two poles of the sovereign

exception. . . .Because of this alone can the ban signify both the insignia of sovereignty. . .  
.and expulsion from community.<sup>83</sup>

The banishment of Falstaff is a more fundamental act than the choosing of the Lord Chief Justice as a new father; really, the latter act is the mechanism by which Falstaff's dénouement is made possible, which accounts for the fact that the Lord Chief Justice ceases to exist dramatically after this scene.<sup>84</sup> The possibility of a certain mode of communal life, devalued from the outset, has been disciplined. In this connection, G. C. Thayer is correct in the claim that "Shakespeare often asks us to imagine an England ruled, improbably, by that Lord of Misrule. . ."<sup>85</sup> The rejection of witty, iconoclastic, hybrid Falstaff is a rejection of the "popularity" of which he is the embodiment. In contemplating the nature of his new state, Henry V says,

Let us choose such limbs of noble counsel,  
That the great body of our state may go,  
In equal rank with the best governed nation. . . (2 Henry IV 5.2.134-6)

In its emphasis on nobility and rank, Henry's is the most conservative possible revolution, a ruling class purged of Falstaff's hybridity. It is a vision of the commonwealth perfectly consistent with Paul's image of the Church as the body of Christ:

. . .the head, even Christ,  
From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every  
joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh  
increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.  
(Ephesians 4:15-6)

As the nation goes, so goes its metaphysical counterpart, the body of the king. In Henry V, the archbishop of Canterbury offers a retrospective account of the prince's transformation:

Consideration like an angel came,

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<sup>83</sup> Agamben, 110-1.

<sup>84</sup> This fact catches Hapgood's critical eye: "The same moral dubieties surround Hal's choosing of the Lord Chief Justice and rejecting Falstaff. At the time, his choice seems a commendable attempt to break out of the everlasting circle of thefts – royal and otherwise – to institute a rule of law. . . .And yet we see no more of the Lord Chief Justice. . ." Hapgood, p. 97. In this instance, the "rule of law" clearly does not impose a limit on sovereign power, which can still determine those acts and persons outside of the law.

<sup>85</sup> Thayer, p. 96.

And whipp'd th' offending Adam out of him,  
Leaving his body as a paradise,  
To envelop and contain celestial spirits.  
Never was such a sudden scholar made;  
Never came reformation in a flood,  
With such a heady currance, scouring faults;  
Nor never Hydra-headed willfulness  
So soon did lose his seat—and all at once—  
As in this king. (Henry V, 1.1.28-37)

Why should it be that the prince's former misconduct should be figured as "Hydra-headed" willfulness? In the Lancastrian cycle, Hydra is associated with uprising, specifically in its spontaneous, popular dimension. It is to this sense that the Archbishop of York appeals when he says,

The time misordered doth, in common sense,  
Crowd us and crush us to this monstrous form. . .  
Whereon this Hydra son of war is born (2 Henry IV, 4.2)<sup>86</sup>

This is one of the monstrous births, and it spawns a true grotesque: a mass of humanity acting with a common purpose. The figure of Hydra, as Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker have argued in a later historical context,<sup>87</sup> is the specter of a subaltern political consciousness become action, as seen from the perspective of dominant social power. Since such an organizing popular consciousness cannot even be imagined to exist from the heights of social power, it must be translated into the action of a single grotesque organism. Thus in Heywood's Appius and Virginia (a play that contains a direct reference to Falstaff),

The world is chang'd now. All damnations  
Seize on the Hydra-headed multitude,  
That only gape on innovation.  
O, who would trust a people? (Appius and Virginia, 5.3)

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<sup>86</sup> Of course, the Archbishop is disclaiming much of his own agency in this "spontaneous" rebellion; it is not an act of an individual but something produced by an aberrant history

<sup>87</sup> Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic (New York: Beacon Press, 2001).

In Canterbury's plaudit, the young Henry is associated with Hydra through his improper mixing with drawers and thieves, a "vile participation" that carries the threat that the social order will be overturned in the new reign by a sovereign who is the voice of the wrong social strata. Small wonder that Canterbury associates this figure with Adam, that ancestor of Cade, Ball and Falstaff, who must be whipped out of the Eden that the king's body has become. Like the mob in Brown's Pseudodoxia, the Hydra body is multiple, "farraginous," transected by various axes of difference. The sacramental royal body is pure, "double" perhaps in Kantorowicz' sense yet un-mixed, the polar opposite to Falstaff's hybridity. What Canterbury celebrates is the purifying away of that tendency in the prince that would incline him to be the agent of a "ventriloquism" of the vulgar mob, for "who would trust a people?" "Innovation," in the form of a renegotiation of relations of power and property, will not be contemplated. Of course, such an assertion requires an ideological denial, conditioned as it is by a historical moment when such relations were in flux.

Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield have argued that Shakespeare's Henry V is not a seamless argument for the sort of royal prerogative that it represents: "Henry V can be read to reveal not only the strategies of power but also the anxieties informing both them and their ideological representation."<sup>88</sup> If Shakespeare's Henry V, striving for a monologism that endorses the legitimacy of Lancastrian rule, cannot help but enact critiques of the power that it promotes, the farrago of the two parts of Henry IV, deeply imperfect in this sense if artistically superior, can ultimately certify that power in the body of the king only at the price of a fracture of the social body. This crack may not be new, but it is reified in the body of the new king, just

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<sup>88</sup> Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, "History and Ideology: The instance of Henry V," Alternative Shakespeares (London: Routledge, 1985), p. 231.

as it is conceptually in ourselves, insofar as we celebrate Henry's reformation, whatever our own social positions may be.

What Henry V cannot tolerate, it would seem, is the intrusion of Sir John Falstaff into its dramatic world. For whatever reasons, the promise made in the epilogue to 2 Henry IV to continue the history "with Sir John in it" was not fulfilled. J. H. Walter has argued that a pattern of errors and repetitions in the Folio text indicates an alternative version of the play in which Falstaff was indeed a part of the "low" action, culminating in a conflict between Sir John and diluted Welshman Fluellen.<sup>89</sup> This may or may not be the case, but it certainly makes sense of what remains, which appears to be a hole left where Falstaff has been removed. What remains is a reported account of what might be a fumbling deathbed repentance, and a final quibble on Protestant doctrine. On the claim that Falstaff denounced women on his deathbed, the Boar's Head denizens have the following exchange:

Boy: Yes, that 'a did, and said they were dev'ls incarnate.

Hostess: 'A could never abide carnation—'twas a color he never liked.  
(Henry V, 2.4.31-4)

The flesh of Falstaff, the Lollard who could not abide incarnation, leaves the world as he came into it: an anti-Eucharist, and now emphatically dead meat. What is notable about the fobbing off of Falstaff in Henry V is the complete absence of his body and his voice, as if even these would represent too great a contamination. The void where Falstaff's voice should be is made painfully clear by the use of the Hostess as an intermediary, delivering mostly reported speech: "a babbled of green fields" (2.3.16-7). The *coup de grâce* in the death of Sir John is the sentimentalism of the scene, pathos expended on a fundamentally carnivalesque object. A Falstaff reduced to nostalgic memory is no Falstaff at all. It is a marked contrast to the prince's

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<sup>89</sup> J. H. Walter. "With Sir John in It," The Modern Language Review, vol. 41, no. 3 (July, 1946), pp. 237-245.

more appropriate comment on Falstaff's "death" at Shrewsbury, "Could not all this flesh keep in a little life?" (1 Henry IV, 5.4.102-3).

What is missing from Henry V is the embodied critique of Lancaster that had tempered the plays that preceded it. Falstaff may be too morally compromised for Battenhouse's category of "holy fool" to apply easily, but the drama has developed a dynamic of temptation that works in two directions. Behind the self-conscious irony, there is an element of truth in Falstaff's claim, "Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing; and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked" (1 Henry IV, 1.2.72-3). The radical Protestant positions attributed to Falstaff are consistently inflected by a dominant social power that rejects them as amoral and antinomian. Falstaff is morally compromised but, as Hapgood has argued, "his thieving is of a piece with his lying; both are appealingly childlike in their uninhibited expansiveness."<sup>90</sup> There is nothing of Lancastrian calculation about him: he is a small fish that feeds on the leavings of larger predators. A tactically resourceful critic of Henry IV, there is a distinct injustice in his being forced to bear the culpability not only of noble rebels nobly eulogized, but of the prince's own denied indictment of his natural father. In this respect, the prince's reading of Saint Paul is every bit as willfully partial as Sir John's. Ephesians chapter six tells us,

. . .we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Ephesians, 6:12)

For all his endorsement of social hierarchy, Saint Paul locates the responsibility for the evil of the times at the heights of power. Such evil exists, and is dramatized throughout the Lancastrian cycle, but is rarely if ever subjected to the same rancor as subaltern revolt, or even dissidence. The greatest scorn is reserved for the hybrid, the contaminating margin, particularly when it speaks in its own voice, even more singularly when it does so with eloquence. What is curious

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<sup>90</sup> Hapgood, p. 94.

about Falstaff in his final erasure from the dramatic text is that even such an undermined critique, emerging from a gross body whose soul is ever in doubt, must ultimately be whipped like Adam from the Garden.

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*“La menzogna non è nel discorso, è nelle cose.”*  
--Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili*.