

THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN POST-REFORMATION ENGLISH  
DRAMA, 1559 – 1642

by

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## ABSTRACT

From 1565 the anthropomorphic representation of God in new drama ceased and he apparently exited from the stage-world. This thesis tracks the emergence of a robust system of representation in post-Reformation English drama, that complicates the dominant scholarly narrative of post-1580 secularised drama. It identifies playwrights' creative ways of integrating God in plays written across the period 1559 – 1642. These include his internalisation within protagonists, frame narratives with God-substitutes managing characters' lives, character articulations of faith, and the activities of the Devil and his minions. The thesis asserts that these representations reflected and contributed to changing Reformation theology by illustrating a revised understanding of God's nature, offering audiences a bird's-eye view of divine control, and recalling God's constant presence in human lives. Finally, I assert that the late tragicomedies' providential solutions to seemingly insoluble differences reassured audiences facing similar real-world tensions. The explicitly divine nature of these plays' outcomes demonstrates a change in the genre's form, challenging received wisdom of genre theory. This thesis then rediscovers the 'absent' God, hiding in the play world.

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## INTRODUCTION

At Whitsun in the year 1533 Jeffrey Tybnam stood on the newly renovated wagon waiting, perhaps with a mixture of excitement and trepidation, to begin his oration.<sup>1</sup> Sporting newly repaired gloves, he was to deliver the opening lines of Stephen Prewett's new rendition of *The Creation of Eve, with the Expelling of Adam and Eve out of Paradise*, the Grocers' contribution to Norwich's annual cycle plays. Tybnam was playing God and his fee of sixteen pence topped Prewett's twelve pence for the writing and was considerably more than any other player. Adam's performer was next highest paid at a mere six pence.<sup>2</sup> Thirty-two years later another player, this time wearing a 'face and hair', using a new playscript, and on a brand-new wagon, was waiting for the play to begin.<sup>3</sup> One could be forgiven for assuming tradition rolled on unchanged. But the later player was to be the last known to perform God in a newly written Protestant play in England.<sup>4</sup>

This thesis provides the first diachronic, multi-disciplinary study of the changing representation of God in drama written between 1559 – 1642, against the backdrop of the continuing cultural impact of the English Reformation. It argues that although the anthropomorphic God disappeared from new drama, he continued to be involved in the action of many plays. Further, God's interventions in the plays occur in ways which could help

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<sup>1</sup> The records are unclear on whether this is a Whitsun or a Corpus Christi production, but Norman Davis argues persuasively for the former. Norman Davis, (ed.), 'Introduction' in *Non-cycle Plays and Fragments* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. xiii–cxxix, p. xxxi.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxxii, taken from the *Grocer's Book* folio 34 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxxv.

<sup>4</sup> See chapter one of this thesis for further discussion of the two versions.



explicate Protestant theology by providing a visual interpretation of how the doctrine might function in the real world. As Felicity Heal says:

an audience [at the theatre] would have contained many who could comprehend the main elements in Protestant ideology. Even for the less zealous, reared as they had been in the culture of the Elizabethan Settlement, the *Bible* and the *Psalter* were highly familiar territory. Congregations were constant auditors of the Protestant liturgy through the Prayer Book services.<sup>5</sup>

Contemporary spectators were culturally attuned to religious references through compulsory church attendance and other sources.<sup>6</sup> They are therefore more likely to have been aware of God within the plays they saw than modern audiences, so more impacted by such interventions.<sup>7</sup>

Highlighting God's presence in contemporary drama can therefore offer the modern scholar greater insight into the quotidian nature of post-Reformation audiences' religious experience.

This thesis uniquely focuses on the changing ways dramatists found to represent God in their plays. Many historians have considered supernatural belief during the Renaissance and its relationship to developing Protestant

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<sup>5</sup> Felicity Heal, 'Experiencing Religion in London: Diversity and Choice in Shakespeare's Metropolis' in David Loewenstein and Michael Witmore (eds.), *Shakespeare and Early Modern Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 57–78, pp. 75–6.

<sup>6</sup> Throughout the study I use 'contemporary' for the period contiguous with 1559 – 1642 and 'modern' for post-1900.

<sup>7</sup> Fines were imposed for non-attendance at one's local parish church. This did not, of course, guarantee full attendance but, with street sermons, cheap pamphlets, and church services, most people will have had sufficient exposure to Protestant teaching to recognise it in plays. For a discussion on church attendance see Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550 – 1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Alec Ryrie, 'Counting Sheep, Counting Shepherds: The Problem of Allegiance in the English Reformation' in Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie (eds.), *The Beginnings of English Protestantism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 84–110; Jeremy Boulton, 'The Limits of Formal Religion: The Administration of Holy Communion in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart London' in *London Journal* 10, (1984), pp. 135–54; Ian Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 90–1; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin University Books, 1973), pp. 189–190.

theology, including some who have specifically looked at drama.<sup>8</sup> The widest ranging is probably Keith Thomas's seminal *Religion and the Decline of Magic* who, unlike other scholars' focus on individual areas of the supernatural, endeavours to consider the interconnectedness of supernatural elements. However, even Thomas pays little attention to God.<sup>9</sup> Writing about the supernatural in drama, Ryan Curtis Friesen assumes the supernatural and the religious are mutually exclusive features, with the former posited as false.<sup>10</sup> Others write about specific supernatural elements in individual plays such as Anne Lancashire's 'The Witch' or Sara Munson Deats' *The Faust Legend*, though these also tend to assume the false nature of supernatural beings.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For example Patrick Collinson, *Birthpangs of Protestant England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988); Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Ryan Curtis Friesen, *Supernatural Fiction in Early Modern Drama and Culture* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010); Verena Theile and Andrew D. McCarthy (eds.), *Staging the Superstitions of Early Modern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2013); Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham, (eds.), *Angels in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Adrian Streete, *Protestantism and Drama In Early Modern England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002); Darren Oldridge, *The Supernatural in Tudor and Stuart England* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*.

<sup>9</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*.

<sup>10</sup> Ryan Curtis Friesen, *Supernatural Fiction*, pp. 100–121.

<sup>11</sup> Anne Lancashire, 'The Witch: Stage Flop or Political Mistake' in Kenneth Friedenreich (ed.), *Accompanying the Players: Essays Celebrating Thomas Middleton, 1580 – 1980* (New York: AMS Press, 1983), pp. 161–181; Sara Munson Deats, *The Faust Legend: From Marlowe and Goethe to Contemporary Drama and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Demonism and witchcraft have long been well served subjects for discussion both by literary and historical scholars. Examples of the latter include Philip Almond, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Jeffrey Burton Russell's multi-volume work on the Devil including *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (London: Cornell University Press, 1986); Stuart Clark's seminal study *Thinking With Demons*. Literary scholars as far back as L. W. Cushman's *The Devil and the Vice in the English Dramatic Literature Before Shakespeare* (London: Frank Cass, 1970), first published in 1900, were interested in the profusion of dramatic devils. More recent studies include Jan Frans Van Dijkhuizen, *Devil Theatre: Demonic Possession and Exorcism in English Renaissance Drama, 1558 – 1642* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2007).

This reflects one side of a debate in historical theory. In 2006, Brad Gregory argued that:

if scholars want to understand religious persons such that the latter would recognise themselves in what is said about them [...] then they should reject metaphysically biased reductionist theories of religion. [...Instead using] a study of religion guided not by theories but by the question “What did it mean to them?”<sup>12</sup>

Tor Førland countered that this was essentially ‘taking the easy way out of a real dilemma’.<sup>13</sup> Like Gregory, however, I seek to learn what dramatic representations of faith might have meant to plays’ first audiences. It does not matter that modern audiences do not see God in the plays, any more than it matters that we no longer believe in the Devil visiting Faustus – contemporary audiences believed it to the extent that they sometimes thought real devils joined the performance.

## Context

Before the 1559 Elizabethan Settlement, God was regularly performed on stage by human actors, for example in the medieval mystery cycles. Nor was this practice restricted to Biblical drama. Medieval morality plays such as *The Castle of Perseverance* and *Everyman* both had roles for God. Even early Evangelicals, such as John Bale and John Foxe included God in their plays. In the second half of the sixteenth-century however it became more problematic to stage God anthropomorphically. By the late 1560s allegorical

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<sup>12</sup> Brad S. Gregory, ‘The Other Confessional History: On Secular Bias in the Study of Religion’ in *History and Theory Theme Issue 45* (December 2006), pp. 132–149, p.132.

<sup>13</sup> Tor Egil Førland, ‘Acts of God? Miracles and Scientific Explanations’ in *History and Theory 47* (December 2008) pp. 483–494, p.483. The argument continued in two further essays in the same issue Brad S. Gregory, ‘No Room for God? History, Science, Metaphysics, and the Study of Religion’ in *History and Theory 47* (December 2008), pp. 495–519 and Tor Egil Førland, ‘Historiography Without God: A Reply to Gregory’ in *History and Theory 47* (December 2008), pp. 520–532.

representations had replaced God on the Elizabethan stage. However, even these were to be short-lived and by 1580 no new plays are known involving any explicit anthropomorphic representative of the Christian God. Protestants were increasingly concerned about the broader interpretation of the Second Commandment on idolatry – ‘thou shalt make thee no graven image’.<sup>14</sup>

Physical representations of God were seen as a breach of the Second Commandment, whether that was on the page or the stage, especially when that representation bore a striking resemblance to Man. Although humans were believed to have been made in God’s image, Protestant theologians were increasingly insisting on how far from God’s perfection humans had fallen, making anthropomorphic representations of God ever more inappropriate. Building on Jonathan Willis’s recent work on the decalogue, this thesis demonstrates how changing interpretations of the Second Commandment impacted the presence of God in play worlds as the anthropomorphic God was banished but asserts that creative alternatives maintained the dramatic involvement of the divine.<sup>15</sup>

Attacks on religious imagery were not absolute, however. Historians such as Tara Hamling have shown that even amongst the most godly,

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<sup>14</sup> Exodus 20. The text continues ‘neither any similitude that is in heaven above, either in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth. Thou shalt not worship them, neither serve them: for I the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, and visiteth the sin of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and show mercy unto thousands in them that love me, and keep my commandments.’ *The Byble in Englysh*, (The Great Bible), (London, Edwarde Whitchurch, 1541), Fol. xxvi<sup>v</sup>. Accessed at [bibles-online.net](http://bibles-online.net). On-line editions have been used throughout. My modernisation.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Willis, *The Reformation of the Decalogue: Religious Identity and the Ten Commandments in England, c.1485 – 1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 18-71.

religious images were not totally rejected.<sup>16</sup> The English Protestant ‘iconophobia’ mooted by Patrick Collinson in the 1980s was, perhaps intentionally, an exaggeration.<sup>17</sup> Adam Morton usefully discusses the nuances of Protestant iconoclasm and suggests that although ‘Reformed Protestants were exhaustive in their application of the Second Commandment against the representation of God’, attitudes to images were highly complex, serving as ‘a microcosm of the plurality of beliefs within Protestantism itself’.<sup>18</sup> Three dimensional sacred images were more contentious than two, and the anthropomorphic representation of God expressly contravened the Second Commandment.<sup>19</sup> Plays involving God thus potentially fell foul of both these constraints. However, Protestant focus was on inappropriate use of imagery rather than imagery *per se*, and ‘sensory engagement’ was ‘vital’ in ‘mediating religious experience to believers’.<sup>20</sup> This thesis argues that some post-

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<sup>16</sup> Tara Hamling, *Decorating the ‘Godly’ Household: Religious Art in Post-Reformation Britain* (London: Yale University Press, 2004); Tara Hamling, ‘Visual Culture’ in Andrew Hadfield, Matthew Dimmock and Abigail Shinn (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Culture in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 75-102; Tara Hamling, and Richard L. Williams, (eds.), *Art re-formed: Reassessing the Impact of the Reformation on the Visual Arts* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007); see also, Margaret Aston, *Broken Idols of the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print*.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Collinson, *From Iconoclasm to Iconophobia: The Cultural Impact of the Second English Reformation* (Reading: University of Reading Press, 1986). This lecture was a call to action urging historians and literary scholars to investigate the phenomenon Collinson was describing and as such, I would suggest, he may have intentionally overstated his case. If so, it has certainly borne fruit. Scholars who present evidence undermining Collinson’s assertions about images include: Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*; Margaret Aston, ‘The *Bishop’s Bible* Illustrations’ in Diana Wood (ed.), *Studies in Church History*, vol.28: *The Church and the Arts*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 267–85; Ruth Samson Luborsky and Elizabeth Morley Ingram, *A Guide to English Illustrated Books, 1536-1603*, 2 vols. (Tempe, Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1998); Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored: The Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547- 1700* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Adam Morton, ‘Images and the Senses in Post-Reformation England’ in *Reformation 20:1*, (2015), pp. 77–100, p.83, 78. The former is borne out by Jonathan Willis’ detailed work on the myriad applications of this Commandment. Jonathan Willis, *The Reformation of the Decalogue*, especially pp. 18-71.

<sup>19</sup> Adam Morton ‘Images and the Senses’, p.85.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.78.

Reformation playwrights found acceptable ways to represent God in their play worlds, demonstrating, in a practical manner, theological ideas about his involvement in human lives. This helped audiences' 'sensory engagement' with their faith and contributed to the mediation process.

Ultimately in 1606 the Act Against the Abuses of Players prohibited even the mention of God's name on stage whilst God's physical presence on the Protestant stage had already all but disappeared.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, Protestantism held that God was omnipresent and everything that happened in the world was under his personal control. The world functioned as it did because of his constant involvement. Sermons and religious treatises urged people to recognise God's role in their daily lives whilst spiritual diaries evidence the reality of this at least for the more pious, literate individuals. God then was, for many at least, a real part of their daily lives. Recognising that God still played a dominant role in the lives of the early modern English, this thesis offers a full reassessment of how God's involvement was represented in contemporary drama once God as a character disappeared.

This thesis explores the ways in which English drama engaged with, reflected, and informed contemporary beliefs and practices relating to God from the Elizabethan Settlement through to the closure of the theatres in 1642. Until now, the dominant critical narrative has largely assumed that plays became secularised from about 1580, when God no longer appeared on

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<sup>21</sup> 3 Jac. 1. c.21. The act is entitled 'An Act to restrain the abuses of players' and forbids "any person or persons [...] in any stage play [...] jestingly or profanely [to] speak or use the holy name of God'. Andrew Gurr discusses the impact of this act's introduction in *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574 – 1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 95–6.

stage and few new Biblical plays were written. Greenblatt famously said that in *King Lear* Christian ‘rituals and beliefs [...] no longer efficacious, [...] have been *emptied out*’.<sup>22</sup> However, as Christopher Haigh wrote: ‘Everyone – well, almost everyone – talked and thought and cared about religion [...] albeit] with different levels of concentration and enthusiasm’.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Arnold Hunt noted that ‘It was impossible to avoid exposure to the Protestant preaching ministry, even if for some, it was merely part of the background hum of urban life.’<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the *Homily for Rogation Week* asserted that God is ‘invisible everywhere, and in every creature, and fulfilleth both heaven and earth’.<sup>25</sup> It is not credible therefore that God should disappear from play worlds which, in so many other ways, reflected contemporary culture including religion. This thesis argues that he did not disappear but was represented in a variety of other forms – and therefore was still recognisable to contemporaries as God.

As God stopped appearing, other supernatural beings proliferated on stage. The Devil, witches and magicians, providence and its secular equivalent, Fortune, all appear in contemporary play worlds. In a commercial theatre environment, this was undoubtedly partly a response to audience tastes and theatrical fashion. However, I argue that these beings also helped represent God on the stage. Additionally, ideas from the classics were increasingly appropriated and Christianised, giving classical and pagan gods

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<sup>22</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.119. Greenblatt’s emphasis.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher Haigh, *The Plain Man’s Pathways to Heaven: Kinds of Christianity in Post-Reformation England, 1570 – 1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.227.

<sup>24</sup> Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and their Audiences, 1590 – 1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.205.

<sup>25</sup> *Homily for Rogation Week*, Church of England *Certain Sermons or Homilies appointed to be read in churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth of famous memory* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1851), p.508.

such as Jupiter and Venus the potential to represent the Christian God. This thesis explores the range of ways dramatists found to incorporate God and represent a changing understanding of his role in their play worlds. It shows that they used both other supernatural beings to represent God, and applied narrative techniques, to give their audiences a third person view of God's relationship to human lives. The Devil had a particularly close relationship to God both as antithetical competitor and as subordinate agent. Unlike God, he has a frequent presence in plays throughout the period. I argue that the Devil had an important role in representing God's presence in the play worlds which reflected that in the world of the first audiences.

Often God appears in references which may have been obvious to contemporaries but are obscure to modern audiences. This is particularly true for the doctrinal concept of providence. Although contemporaries did not foresee the civil wars which would engulf England after 1642, religious and political tensions increased in the late 1630s. I conclude the thesis by arguing that one response to consequent audience anxiety was the use of providential solutions in contemporary tragicomedies, and further, that the explicitness of this divine intervention constituted a change to the genre's form. Such a change is contrary to formerly held critical supposition about the stability of the genre post-Fletcher by critics such as Walter Cohen.<sup>26</sup> Our understanding

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<sup>26</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in chapter four. For discussion of the form of contemporary tragicomedy see Walter Cohen, 'Prerevolutionary Drama' in Gordon McMullan and Jonathan Hope (eds.), *The Politics of Tragicomedy: Shakespeare and After* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 122–150; Frank Humphrey Ristine, *English Tragicomedy: Its Origin and History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1910), pp. 111-149. Alternative views are offered by Verna A. Foster, *The Name and Nature of Tragicomedy* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004); Alison Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion* (London: Methuen Press, 2010); David Hirst, *Tragicomedy* (London & New York: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1984); Michael



of the genre is thus enhanced and further consideration of these, all too often neglected, later plays encouraged.

The key focus of the thesis is on the ways in which different supernatural elements were used to represent God in contemporary play worlds that their original audiences might recognise. These beings, including devils, Fortune, and witches, for example, were all connected to religious belief, but their inter-relationships changed during the Reformation. Protestant reformers sought to abolish Catholic 'superstition' and encouraged changes in attitude to some of these supernatural elements. However, theologians also used scriptural authority to rationalise religious beliefs, and most of the supernatural elements are referred to in the *Bible*, giving them a scriptural authority central to Protestant doctrine. The theology surrounding these powers was sometimes contradictory and often contested, with a spectrum of Protestant beliefs developing over a long period of time. Many of these doctrinal tensions are played out mimetically on the contemporary stage, offering audiences a better understanding of God. By exploring these tensions this thesis gives modern readers a similarly enhanced appreciation of Protestant beliefs.

The distinction between acceptable supernatural beliefs and illicit superstition was fluid in post-reformation England. Theologians rehearsed multiple conflicting scriptural interpretations and political authorities used refined definitions of 'superstition' to demonise opposition groups. For

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Neill, 'Turn and Counterturn: Merchanting, Apostasy, and Tragicomic Form in Massinger's *The Renegado*' in Subha Mukherji and Raphael Lyne (eds.), *Early Modern Tragicomedy* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), pp. 154-174.

example, increasingly, Protestant commentators associated elements of Catholic ritual with 'witchcraft'.<sup>27</sup> However, lay belief inevitably changed more slowly. Frequent exhortations from pulpit and press, and evidence from witchcraft trials, indicate the 'unorthodox' and 'unofficial' supernatural beliefs held by the laity well after the Elizabethan settlement, whilst official theology contained many contradictory ideas creating tensions, and hence fruitful material for dramatists. The dramatic use of supernatural elements relied on contemporary belief in their possibility, so changes in conventions used to portray the metaphysical can indicate changing contemporary belief. This study offers a starting point for further study on the evolution of lay understanding of the metaphysical.

## Literary Review

In his seminal work on the demise of the mystery plays, Harold Gardiner wrote that religious mystery plays declined because of pressure from central government through local authorities.<sup>28</sup> He evidenced this with a letter to Wakefield in 1576 forbidding any play or pageant in which 'the Majesty of God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Ghost [...] be counterfeited or represented'.<sup>29</sup> This view was broadly accepted until challenged by Paul Whitfield White who argued for a more subtle, local diversity and the importance of economic factors in the plays' demise from 1580. He notes the

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<sup>27</sup> See for example work by Janette Dillon, *Language and Stage in Medieval and Renaissance England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 188-219; James Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), p.16; Marion Gibson, *Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.25.

<sup>28</sup> Harold C. Gardiner, *Mysteries' End: An Investigation of the Last Days of the Medieval Religious Stage* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1946).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, cited on p.78.

Protestantisation of the plays over time, ‘most notably during the 1560s’, changes which ‘local civic officials strongly endorsed’.<sup>30</sup> Michael O’Connell identifies a ‘two-fold alteration in sensibility’ towards biblical theatre in terms of a ‘vigorous rejection [...] that either God, [...] or the sacred events of biblical history should be physically represented’ along with a ‘new literalism in the attitude towards scripture’.<sup>31</sup> Whatever the cause there is no doubt that biblical drama had almost disappeared from the English public stage by around 1580, with very few subsequent exceptions.<sup>32</sup>

For a long time both historians and literary scholars believed that drama became secularised in a modern sense, with the demise of the mystery plays and God’s presumed disappearance from the early modern stage. Stephen Greenblatt’s assumed nullification of dramatized religious rituals has already been discussed above. In a similar vein, Patrick Collinson identified a move from the ‘iconoclasm’ of early Protestantism to the ‘iconophobia’ of the Elizabethan Protestant propagandists, associated with the latter’s ‘resistance to the theatrical appeal of [...] the “idolatrous eye”’.<sup>33</sup> He argued that post-1580s, Protestants’ dislike of religious images was widespread amongst the pious and amounted to iconophobia. He identified ‘players’ as the one permanent member of three enemies to religion from Foxe in the 1550s to

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<sup>30</sup> Paul Whitfield White, ‘Reforming *Mysteries*’ End: A New Look at Protestant Intervention in English Provincial Drama’ in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29:1. Winter 1999, pp. 121–147, p.125.

<sup>31</sup> Michael O’Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theatre in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.28.

<sup>32</sup> These include, interestingly, a number of puppet-shows for which references continue into the 1640s.

<sup>33</sup> Patrick Collinson *From Iconoclasm to Iconophobia*, p.12. Michael O’Connell writes at length about the perceived risk of idolatry entering through the eye in *The Idolatrous Eye*.

Crashaw in 1610.<sup>34</sup> However, Paul Whitfield White concluded that 'Reformation involvement with the theatre did not decline but became considerably more complex in the age of Shakespeare and his contemporaries' in his study of the role of drama in the early Reformation.<sup>35</sup> In 1997, Huston Diehl asserted that playwrights using Calvinist language dramatize 'religious crises' through the 'moral and social complexities they explore'.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, many other scholars have now also investigated the relationship between specific plays and religion, demonstrating drama's participation in and contributions to contemporary religious debates. For example, Wilbur Sanders explored Marlowe's representation of the doctrine of reprobation in *Dr Faustus* and Adrian Streete discusses Christological elements within several plays.<sup>37</sup> Recently scholars have also focused on the

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<sup>34</sup> He suggests the three 'P's for Foxe in 1550s were 'printers, players and preachers', for Gosson in the 1580s it was 'poets, pipers and players', whilst for Crashaw in 1610 it was 'the Devil, papists and players'. Patrick Collinson, *From Iconoclasm to Iconophobia*, p.15.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.174. He later challenged what he saw as the continuing scholarly perception of the dearth of representation of religion on the English Renaissance stage. Paul Whitfield White, 'Theatre and Religious Culture' in John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (eds.), *A New History of Early English Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 133-151, p.134. This was not an entirely just criticism. For example, in 1976 Robert G. Hunter had explored providential events in his *Shakespeare and the Mystery of God's Judgements* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976), Higgins and Kaufmann had both discussed the theology evident in *The Atheist's Tragedy*, Michael H. Higgins 'The Influence of Calvinist Thought in Tournier's *The Atheist's Tragedy*' in *The Review of English Studies* Vol. 19, no. 76 (Oxford University Press, July 1943), pp. 255-262; R.J. Kaufmann 'Theodicy, Tragedy and the Psalmist: Tournier's *The Atheist's Tragedy*' in *Comparative Drama* Vol. 3, Issue 4, (Winter, 1969), (Kalamazoo, Michigan: 1969), pp. 241-261; Roston Murray had two chapters on Renaissance biblical drama in Roston Murray, *Biblical Drama in England from the Middle Ages to the Present* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), pp. 49-86 and pp. 87-138; Walter Cohen wrote about 'The Reformation and Elizabethan Drama' in *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* Berlin vol 120 (1984), pp. 45-52.

<sup>36</sup> Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theatre in Early Modern England* (London: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); Adrian Streete, *Protestantism and Drama*. Others include Anthony D. Baker, *Shakespeare, Theology and the Unstaged God* (London: Routledge, 2019); Alison Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion*; Robert G. Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Mystery of God's Judgements* (Athens: University of Georgia Press,

ways theatre practices, audience expectations, and external social and economic factors enable the performance of religion, for example, the contributors to Jane Hwang Degenhardt and Elizabeth Williamson's edited work.<sup>38</sup> Many varied approaches then, have usefully been applied to broaden our understanding of the dramatic representation of post-Reformation religion. God the Father, however, continues noticeable for his absence.

This thesis contributes to the process of re-sanctification of early English drama by finding its divine protagonist. Drama is a particularly useful source for understanding how contemporaries understood God. Judith Maltby has demonstrated the widespread interest in sermons and prayer books while Tessa Watt has usefully discussed how the proliferation of cheap printed religious works made religious literature accessible beyond the literate few.<sup>39</sup> In their magisterial *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat* Lake and Questier have shown the extent to which providential doctrine is articulated in, for example, murder pamphlets, also evidencing religious discourse available to the masses.<sup>40</sup> The advantage of studying drama lies in the range of composition of audiences simultaneously viewing the same thing. Particularly in the outdoor commercial theatres, audiences were relatively democratically constituted.

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1976); Paul Whitfield White, 'Theatre and Religious Culture' in John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (eds.), *A New History of Early English Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 133–151; Michael H. Higgins, 'The Influence of Calvinist Thought in Tournier's The Atheist Tragedy' in *The Review of English Studies* Vol. 19, no. 75 (Oxford University Press; July 1943), pp. 255–262; R.J. Kaufmann, 'Theodicy, Tragedy and the Psalmist: Tournier's The Atheist's Tragedy' in *Comparative Drama* Vol. 3, Issue 4, Winter, 1969, (Kalamazoo, Michigan: 1969), pp. 241–261.

<sup>38</sup> Jane Hwang Degenhardt, and Elizabeth Williamson, (eds.), *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England: The Performance of Religion on the Renaissance Stage* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2011); Andrew Mc Rae, *Renaissance Drama* (London: Arnold, 2003), pp. 87–104 similarly discusses stage effects as a way of staging religion.

<sup>39</sup> Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book*; Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print*.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Lake, and Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat*. They also discuss the representation of providence in plays and their relationship to the murder pamphlets.

Scholars such as Andrew Gurr have shown that commercial plays were attended by a broad spectrum of society: rich and poor, men, women, apprentices, lords, and ladies, even royalty. Even pedlars and prostitutes deemed it worth the penny entrance fee for the opportunity of selling their wares.<sup>41</sup> Although theatrical performance increasingly centred in London, playing companies continued to tour the provinces, whilst printed play texts have been identified in booksellers' inventories across the country.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the doctrine plays presented was not only spoken but enacted. Audiences could see and hear theology in action and develop an understanding of how it might operate in their own lives. They were implicitly invited to make judgements about the characters' actions, linked to the words they spoke, and observe the associated spiritual outcomes.<sup>43</sup> Plays therefore can offer modern scholars an insight into the possible practical interpretations of doctrine as understood by ordinary people as well as learned divines. We can therefore begin to understand the religious faith of Dent's Asunetus or Antilegon - the usually silent majority.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Ann Jemalie Cook, 'Audiences: Investigation, Interpretation, Invention' in John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (eds.), *A New History of Early English Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 305–320.

<sup>42</sup> On touring see for example Peter H. Greenfield, 'Touring' in John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (eds.), *A New History of Early English Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 251–268; Alan Somerset 'How chances it they travel?': Provincial Touring, Playing Places, and the King's Men,' *Shakespeare Survey* 47 (1994), pp. 45-60; Barbara Palmer 'Early Modern Mobility: Players, Payments and Patrons' in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 56 (2005), pp. 260–305; Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean discuss the tours of the Queen's Men playing company in their book *The Queen's Men and their Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). On play books for sale see for example Peter M.W. Blayney, 'Publication of Play Books' in John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (eds.), *A New History of Early English Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 383–422.

<sup>43</sup> Huston Diehl *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage*.

<sup>44</sup> 'Asunetus, an ignorant man' and 'Antilegon, a cavalier' were two characters in Arthur Dent's *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* published in 1601. Christopher Haigh *The Plain Man's Pathway* provides a scholarly and entertaining analysis of Dent's text, with the addition of a

Literary critics have increasingly recognised the engagement between drama and reformed faith, but their focus is often limited to Shakespeare's plays or similarly canonical drama. Furthermore, many studies treat the period post-1580 homogenously as 'Shakespearean'. As Brian Cummings observes, assumptions about Shakespeare's secularity have been increasingly undermined in recent years.<sup>45</sup> Shakespeare's role in our own society has made him the most widely studied contemporary playwright. His name sells widely, beyond the academy, so it is understandable that so many scholars choose to focus on his work, but it may limit the potential gain in understanding. Shakespeare and his fellow Lord Chamberlain's/King's Men playwrights wrote under conditions of censorship imposed by their patrons. All plays had to be licenced before they could be performed publicly by the Master of the Revels. This censorship had a more limited effect than we might perhaps expect though, as the main criterion appears to have been avoiding political controversy; nevertheless, as state-patronised players they may have needed to display a level of caution other playing companies did not.<sup>46</sup> Religion was very important to – and contested by – most people in early modern England. There was no 'one way' of understanding or practicing faith, despite authority's best efforts. Limiting consideration of plays to

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Catholic traveller, which effectively provides an overview of the range of voices present in post-Reformation England.

<sup>45</sup> Brian Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts: Religion, Secularity, & Identity in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.14.

<sup>46</sup> For a detailed discussion of contemporary dramatic censorship see Janet Clare, *'Art Made "Tongue-Tied" by Authority': Elizabethan and Jacobean Dramatic Censorship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990). Anne B. Mangum also discusses the difficulty for authors generally who might wish to write things of which the Crown might disapprove. Anne B. Mangum, *Reflection of Africa in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama and Poetry* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), p.3. Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean discuss this in respect of the Queen's Men in *The Queen's Men*.

canonical or state patronised authors thus limits the range of views available and means patterns of representation may be missed.

Another limitation of studies which focus on canonical work only is that such work was not canonical for contemporaries. Audiences attended plays by the whole gamut of writers, and while there is evidence of Shakespeare's popularity with audiences, other playwrights, less popular with modern audiences and scholars, were also hugely popular. Contemporary audiences did not have Shakespeare as their model. Their framework was much larger. By analysing as many plays by as many different authors as possible, I hope to minimise the gap between critical perception and historical reality.

The religious and dramatic landscapes both changed significantly throughout Shakespeare's working life and beyond. Early-Elizabethan Reformist drama was concerned 'with the didactic and often allegorical reinforcement of Protestantism at a doctrinal level, underpinning the religious values of the state'.<sup>47</sup> This was followed by the 'theatrical experimentation' of the 1580s and 1590s, whilst religious controversy is evident in the plays of writers such as Brome towards the end of the period.<sup>48</sup> This thesis looks at plays over an extended period, which facilitates the identification of changes like those observed by Streete. I demonstrate how allegorical didacticism and 'theatrical experimentation' were used by dramatists to represent God in the plays of the 1560s – 1590s, in line with Streete's suggestions. However, whilst not challenging the controversial nature of some religious drama of the

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<sup>47</sup> Adrian Streete, 'Drama' in Andrew Hiscock and Helen Wilcox (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 166-184; pp. 166–8.



late 1630s – 40s, I newly identify a more conciliatory strand. I suggest that by changing the nature of tragicomic endings, playwrights offered reassurance to audiences - whatever their religious position.

It has long been recognised by historians that the English Reformation was a drawn-out process of change, not a single event or series of events at specific moments in time. Studying plays over an extended period acknowledges the reality of this process and recognises the likely impact on the changing portrayal and understanding of God. Although ostensibly the Elizabethan Settlement, *Homilies*, liturgy, and articles of faith remained largely fixed, theological ideas continued to be contested, and the practical implementation of Protestantism shifted. This means that the way audiences imagined and understood God in 1559 will have been very different from the way he was understood in 1642. By considering plays across the period, this thesis demonstrates this changing perception as it was enacted in contemporary drama.

In this study I use a multidisciplinary approach, applying techniques from history and literary scholarship. This is valuable because it allows me to use developments in both fields to extend our understanding of contemporary religious beliefs and drama. Despite historians' acknowledgement of the extended nature of the Reformation, literary scholars considering religion in drama have largely not extended the range of plays they consider beyond the early 1620s. Although there have been valuable studies on the moralities, the period of Elizabethan drama pre-1580 has generally been considered separately to any that follows, often by scholars with an interest in medieval

drama. It has been associated more with pre- or early-Reformation drama, than with 'Shakespearean'. This latter term has been broadly interpreted to include plays written after Shakespeare's death in 1616 but plays of the 1630s have received little attention. By studying plays across the period 1559 – 1642, this thesis applies a historian's understanding of the extended nature of the Reformation as process to dramatic literature. In so doing, it offers literary scholars a broader understanding of contemporary drama's participation in and contribution to the English Reformation – arguably the most important cultural change of the period. Equally, dramatic literature is an underused resource by many historians, who often limit themselves to occasional references to Shakespeare.<sup>49</sup> By considering the representation of God in a diverse range of plays across an extended period, I enhance historians' understanding of the development of contemporary religious beliefs about God as part of Reformation changes. An interdisciplinary approach thus extends our knowledge in the fields of both literature and history.

God himself has received little explicit attention from either historians or literary scholars. Some scholars focus on other individual elements of supernaturalism but until very recently no-one discussed the dramatic involvement of the primary supernatural being of the period, God himself.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, God is rarely considered as a supernatural being. Darren Oldridge's

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<sup>49</sup> Notable exceptions include Adrian Streete, *Protestantism and Drama* who, while making Shakespeare's plays the centre point of his chapters, also draws on a wide variety of plays, including those much less well known. Peter Lake with Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat* also covers a wider range of plays.

<sup>50</sup> For example, Laura Sangha, *Angels and Belief in England, 1480 – 1700* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012); Darren Oldridge, 'Witchcraft and the Devil', in Susan Doran and Norman Jones (eds.), *The Elizabethan World* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 482-493; Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); James Sharpe, *Witchcraft*; Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern Representations and Twentieth Century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996).

*The Supernatural in Tudor and Stuart England* includes a chapter on 'Divine Interventions' but while his chronology is broad it is also sometimes vague, making it difficult to know what is happening at what particular time much less identify a process of change.<sup>51</sup> Most critics seem to have assumed that by around 1580 God was no longer part of contemporary drama. Michael O'Connell discusses drama's incarnation of God's body through references to Christ's passion but he is discussing God incarnate not his spiritual form.<sup>52</sup> John Cox discusses the link between God and the Devil as opposites participating in a 'cosmic struggle' with the Devil dependant on God for his power, but Cox's focus remains firmly on the demonic in his discussion of plays.<sup>53</sup> He does not consider its implication for the performance of God. Marion Gibson and Jo Ann Esra's dictionary identifies a range of supernatural beings evident in Shakespeare's plays and explains their significance - but God does not appear in its index.<sup>54</sup> Adrian Streete offers a very persuasive Christological reading of both Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* and Shakespeare's *Richard II* which he usefully extends to other less well known plays but although Christ as part of the Trinity is God, like O'Connell, it is his passion, that is his human nature, which Streete focuses on.<sup>55</sup> He stops short of associating this with the presence of God the Father in the plays. Anthony Baker does consider God the Father, but his focus is explicitly and exclusively on Shakespeare. Also, his approach to God is more philosophical than literal,

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<sup>51</sup> Darren Oldridge, *Supernatural*, pp. 49-67.

<sup>52</sup> Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye*.

<sup>53</sup> John D. Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350 – 1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.151.

<sup>54</sup> Marion Gibson, and Jo Ann Esra, *Shakespeare's Demonology: A Dictionary* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017).

<sup>55</sup> Adrian Streete, *Protestantism and Drama*, pp. 140-161 and pp. 162-199.

identifying ways a modern reader might understand the theological presence of God in the plays. I extend these scholars' work to a broader range of drama and identify the range of options employed by playwrights to represent God on stage. I argue that by presenting God as an invisible but present power in the play world playwrights enabled audiences to observe the divine in action. Thus, drama contributed to contemporaries' understanding of the Protestant God.

Any representation of supernatural beings, including God, had to be recognisable and, at some level, credible, to the plays' audiences. Audiences needed to understand the significance of supernatural references for their contribution to the play to be effective. Representations of such beings therefore reflect contemporary ideas about them and their interrelationships both with each other and with humans. Plays thus provide an opportunity to understand the various ways contemporaries believed God operated in the real world. The beliefs of theologians, divines and the most pious are well served by extant sermons, pamphlets, and spiritual diaries. Only plays can offer an insight into the perceptions of a wider range of audiences.

Kevin Sharpe argues for greater use of an interdisciplinary approach to 'explore religion as a visual, sensual and emotional, experience - as opposed to theological system or polemical sermon'.<sup>56</sup> Although I do at times use the latter approach, I am also discussing a fictional world viewed by people in a real world. A dramatic text establishes a play world in which the action takes place. This is distinct from, but related to, the real world inhabited by the

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<sup>56</sup> Kevin Sharpe, *Remapping Early Modern England: The Culture of Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.390.

play's audiences. Characters in the play world express views and exhibit behaviours which can both reflect and challenge audiences' views and behaviours in the real world. Watching God represented on stage through the eyes of the characters enables audiences to experience him vicariously, as the characters do. By looking at the representation of God in the play world, alongside contemporary religious writings, I suggest how plays could help contemporaries understand God in a practical sense, rather than as a theoretical idea. I also use the concept of audiences watching a play world which offers a reflection of the real world they inhabit, to consider how audiences might understand and apply what they were viewing to their own lives. The way God was represented in plays offered audiences a birds' eye view of Protestantism's understanding of his engagement with the real world. Analysing this offers modern scholars a similar opportunity.

## **Methodology**

This study uses a wide range of evidence with dramatic texts at its core. Other relevant sources include religious treatises, sermons, and evidence from cheap print. By close reading dramatic texts alongside non-dramatic texts the study identifies drama's engagement with contemporary debates regarding religious supernatural concepts as they relate to understanding God and how this changed over time.

The structure of this thesis is chronological to facilitate identification of patterns of divine interest over an extended period, and to cover the fullest range of expression. It is also thematic as the supernatural elements contributing to God's representation change over time. Investigations using

Martin Wiggins' *Catalogue of British Drama* alongside wide-ranging play reading identified three discrete periods when the proportion of drama involving supernatural elements increased noticeably.<sup>57</sup> These periods relate to the Christian God himself, Fortune and other non-Christian deities, and providence. A fourth element, the Devil, appears consistently across the entire period, although changes in his relationship to God has a more restricted, but still extended, chronology. Each of these chronological and thematic foci provide the material for an individual chapter.

Throughout I have used the dates given in Wiggins' *Catalogue*.<sup>58</sup> Dating plays can be problematic and conclusions that depend on precise dating thus may become fragile. Patterns may change or disappear if a play's date is very different to that assumed. Wiggins describes dating plays as 'an art of polar extremes' from those for which we have precise dating information to those with more limited or contradictory evidence.<sup>59</sup> Sometimes the range of possible dates proposed by Wiggins covers several decades, potentially taking some plays outside the range of this study. This particularly affects plays early in the period. Rather than omit potentially useful material because of its uncertain chronology, where a precise date is not known, I have used Wiggins' 'best guess', which is backed by his and other scholars' meticulous research. I seek to mitigate potential problems by considering many plays.

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<sup>57</sup> Martin Wiggins, in association with Catherine Richardson, *British Drama 1533 – 1642: A Catalogue Volumes 1- 10* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012 - ). All play dates used in this work are taken from Wiggins' *Catalogue* and will be stated without further citation.

<sup>58</sup> For the methodology used by Dr Wiggins for dating plays see Martin Wiggins 'Introduction' to his *Catalogue* volume 1, pp. ix–xli, pp. xxv–xxvi, pp. xxxix–xli.

<sup>59</sup> Martin Wiggins, *Catalogue* Volume 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. x. For a detailed discussion of the potential challenges of dating plays and Wiggins' methodology see his 'Introduction' to volume 1, pp. x-xii.

Plays were chosen for inclusion in the study initially by identifying relevant supernatural powers referenced in the entries of Wiggins' *Catalogue*. This allowed for all known drama to be included in the data collection and thus contribute to the statistics for finding patterns over the period, even when the text is not extant. Clearly much drama has been lost completely from the record, but patterns have been identified from the fullest range of material available. Some elements can only be identified by reading the play text itself, however. For example, the Devil has both Christian and folkloric forms. As my focus is on the consequences of the Reformation for dramatic representations of God, I have excluded predominately folkloric beings, which contemporary theologians and other commentators did not usually discuss in religious terms, even if lay audiences were unclear on the distinctions. This will enable comparisons to be made between theological and dramatic representations, and conclusions drawn about the drama's contribution to Protestantisation of audiences' understanding of God. However, it is not always apparent from a play's synopsis whether a play's devil is Christian or folkloric so a final decision on inclusion was made through close reading. Similarly, providence becomes a key marker for God's involvement in the plays of the late 1630s. Although providential endings are sometimes referenced in the *Catalogue*, it inevitably uses a modern understanding of the term which is much less precise than contemporaries would have had. It also does not take account of the frequency with which characters referenced providence. Finally, the *Catalogue* does not provide a thematic assessment of the plays' content. These limitations were overcome by exhaustive play reading using the general data provided by the *Catalogue* as a starting point.

Audiences did not only see plays written by those we now consider 'good' playwrights, so this thesis includes work by a wide range of dramatists beyond the critically familiar. However, practical constraints demand some limitations be imposed. Hence, post-1580, I considered only plays which are likely to have been performed publicly in the commercial theatre.<sup>60</sup> This ensured the study focused primarily on drama accessible to the 'ordinary' people whose Reformation was more protracted, and who might, arguably, have been more readily influenced by representations on the stage. The first chapter covers drama written during the period 1559 – 1580 when commercial theatre was not established, and plays' performance history is more difficult to ascertain. No restriction has been placed on inclusion for drama written before 1580. Some of the dramatic texts discussed in this chapter may never have had a public airing nor have been intended for a general audience. One piece is known only through its association with a printed sermon and others were written for performance at one or other of the universities. It is likely that such plays will have had only a select audience from amongst the townsfolk, especially where the play was written for royal presentation. University plays, though largely limited to members of the university, did sometimes include townsfolk in their audiences whilst moral interludes are likely to have formed part of touring company repertoires.<sup>61</sup> As the focus is on the way playwrights

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<sup>60</sup> Performance histories for many extant plays are limited to non-existent even after 1576. In practice therefore I have only excluded plays where it is known they were not performed commercially. Thus, plays written for the Inns of Court and the Universities after 1580 and all court masques are excluded from this study. I have been guided throughout by the information provided in Martin Wiggins *Catalogue* Vol. 1 – 10. I am grateful to Dr Wiggins for access to relevant, currently unpublished, material.

<sup>61</sup> See for example Alan H. Nelson, 'The Universities: Early Staging in Cambridge' in John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (eds.), *A New History of Early English Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 59–67 and John R. Elliot, 'Staging in Oxford' John D.



dealt with the Protestant embargo on representing the Christian God on stage, plays written specifically for Catholic audiences have also been omitted from my study.<sup>62</sup>

Clearly elements of performance practice significantly influenced the meanings available to audiences. Richard Emmerson discussed the local tensions aroused by the 1575 performance of the Chester Mystery Cycle, noting the 'divergent and even contradictory ways' that plays 'can be received and perceived'.<sup>63</sup> Marvin Carlson rightly discusses the ways in which a play's meaning is linked as much to its audiences' responses as its texts and that this is likely to change over time.<sup>64</sup> I therefore discuss some aspects of the performance of anthropomorphic representations of God, for which evidence of performance practice is available. I also discuss the significance of storms or entry from below in respect of devils, building on the work of Leslie Thompson, as these were particularly associated with supernaturalism including, specifically, divine activity.<sup>65</sup> Other performance issues, including

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Cox and David Scott Kastan (eds.), *A New History of Early English Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 68–76.

<sup>62</sup> These would anyway be excluded as not performed publicly in England, although they may have been seen in private households or been publicly performed through the English Colleges in Europe.

<sup>63</sup> Richard K. Emmerson, 'Contextualizing Performance: The Reception of the Chester *Antichrist*' in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29:1, Winter 1999, pp. 89–119, p.92.

<sup>64</sup> Carlson uses the term 'ghosting' and discusses how audiences might recycle the experience between different performances that they see. I suggest that sermon or church service 'performances' might also contribute to audiences' 'creative contextualisation of their experience'. Marvin Carlson, 'The Haunted Stage: Recycling and Reception in the Theatre' in *Theatre Survey* vol. 35, no. 1, 1994, pp. 5-18, p. 12, 17-18. Andrew Sofer applies Carlson's ideas to the reappearance of stage props and actors between different plays, suggesting this brings with it some meaning from the earlier play, affecting audiences' understanding of the later play. Andrew Sofer, 'Absorbing Interests: Kyd's Bloody Handkerchief as Palimpsest' in *Comparative Drama* vol. 34, no. 2, Summer 2000, pp. 127-148.

<sup>65</sup> Leslie Thomson, 'The Meaning of Thunder and Lightning: Stage Direction and Audience Expectation' in *Early Theatre* 2 (1999), pp. 11–24; Andrew McRae, *Renaissance Drama* (London: Arnold, 2003), pp. 87-104.

discussion of costumes, props, and acting styles, are beyond the scope of this preliminary study.<sup>66</sup> Evidence for audience's response to contemporary drama is sadly limited. The same is true of performance practices which also contribute to the meaning of the text. Cognisant of this, I argue only for possible ways that original audiences might have understood what we now simply have as words on a page. I do not suggest that my proposals are the only or inevitable contemporary interpretations, merely that it is possible that some people in the original audiences could have heard them thus.

### **Thesis Synopsis**

The opening chapter demonstrates the changes to the representation of God in the first two decades of Elizabeth's reign. During this time sensitivity about the representation of God increased in line with the increasing focus on the Second Commandment on false images. This rendered the presentation of God on the stage problematic. At the same time, the English State moved from Catholicism, with its emphasis on an intercessionary relationship between the believer and the Christian God, to Protestantism, in which the priesthood of all believers was fundamental, each person communing with God personally. This relationship was essentially an internal one which again posed challenges for dramatic representation. The chapter starts with a review of pre-Reformation dramatic practice of a fully anthropomorphic God

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<sup>66</sup> For discussions of these issues not specifically related to God see for example Meg Twycross, and Sarah Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (London: Routledge, 2016); Jonathan Gil Harris, and Natasha Korda (eds.), *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Farah Karim-Cooper and Tiffany Stern (eds.), *Shakespeare's Theatres and the Effects of Performance* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2014); Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574 – 1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

presented by an actor. I then identify a process of change through various stages of allegorical but still anthropomorphic representations of God, particularly through his works and nature as defined by contemporary theologians. This culminates in a representation of God that has been fully internalised within the protagonist – a change not previously identified. I argue that rather than God disappearing from the play world, his involvement was adapted to reflect a Protestant understanding of God's relationship to Mankind. This chapter offers historians a greater understanding of the process of Protestantisation and literary scholars a more refined view of the development of drama just before the establishment of the commercial theatres.

For many critics 1580 marked the end of God's involvement in public Protestant drama. However, for most contemporaries, faith continued to have a quotidian role. God's continuing active role in contemporary life at both micro and macro levels meant that a dramatic world without God would lack credibility. The second chapter discusses two examples of explicitly God-less worlds and then shows the variety of ways in which dramatists maintained divine involvement in their play worlds. The chapter argues that the variety of genres staged during the late 1580s and early 1590s facilitated experimentation in ways of representing God. Some playwrights used the structural technique of a frame narrative. Thus, they granted audiences a bird's-eye view of God-substitutes controlling the lives and actions of characters within the inner play, reflecting contemporary beliefs on how the Christian God participated in human lives in the real world. I suggest this

visual representation of God's engagement might aid audiences' understanding of the underlying doctrine. Other plays, with the non-Christian Eastern settings which became popular following the success of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, used the elision between Christian and classical meanings for references to Fortune, fate, and destiny, to represent God in their play worlds. A combination of Christian and non-Christian protagonists also allowed for the exploration of God's role globally at a time when Christian states were often defeated by Islamic or pagan ones. Within these settings non-Christian protagonists could be presented positively as favoured by God through the agency of Fortune for example. For British history plays however, equating Fortune with God was more problematic. Instead, these playwrights present Fortune as God's antithesis, representing God himself through the piety of the plays' virtuous characters. The experimentation evident in the post-1580 years evolved from the internalisation of God discussed in the first chapter. I suggest the representation of God in the early commercial drama grew directly out of that used by the early-Elizabethan morality plays which undermines previous critical assumptions for an abrupt change in form.

Another supernatural antithesis for God was the Devil. The third chapter looks at the ways in which Protestant beliefs about the nature and activities of the Devil could be used by playwrights to involve God in their play worlds simultaneously. Early in Elizabeth's reign demonic appearances in plays which involved both God and the Devil served to underline God's relative power. From the 1580s the Devil could be used to demonstrate a divine presence in the play world by association. Commonly this involved

reference to the battle between God and the Devil for human souls, with the Devil as opposite but not equal to God, whose presence was inferred by that of the Devil. Blasphemy was deemed a key weapon of the Devil, and this is particularly evident in plays involving magicians or witches. As the doctrine of double predestination meant that God determined both salvation and damnation, the demonic activities and blasphemy of evil characters, with subsequent repentance, and reformation, thus brought God on stage through their articulation of Protestant doctrine. Contemporaries considered themselves under constant threat from the Devil's machinations and their only protection was faith in God, exemplified by the pious articulations of virtuous characters faced with evil experiences. God's presence in the play world is thus asserted. It is enhanced by the association of ideas when a clearly Christianised devil, as distinct from a folkloric one, makes a physical appearance on stage. The appearances and references to the Devil in plays enabled the dramatization of elements of Protestant theology which audiences might hear in church services and at sermons. The plays thus provided audiences with an opportunity to observe the doctrine in action, potentially increasing its accessibility.

The final chapter focuses on a particular moment in time, the late 1630s. Tensions were high as the Scots rejected Charles's changes to their prayer book and the English struggled variously with his fiscal and religious policies. There is some evidence that contemporaries hoped for a providential solution to what appeared intractable problems. A change in the nature of the tragicomic genre of plays performed at that time arguably

reflects this hope. To modern eyes these plays have contrived endings but in the late 1630s the endings are explicitly, and newly, ascribed to God's providence by all the characters involved. God is thus brought into the play world and arguably audiences were offered reassurance that God could deliver a similarly peaceful solution to equally intransigent problems in the real world. Streete discusses the ways by which the difficulties of representing Christ on the Elizabethan stage are 'transmitted into other forms of dramatic representation'.<sup>67</sup> This thesis does the same for the transcendent God

Taken together, these chapters trace a gradual pattern of divine internalisation which leads to the utilisation of non-Christian deities, devils, magicians, and witches, in the fictional worlds presented on stages, culminating in an abstract theological concept. The plays I discuss offered their contemporary audiences a recognisable and real, albeit invisible, representation of God on their stages both at the beginning of the period and at the end. As God said in the Revelations of St John, 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last'.<sup>68</sup> Recognising God's continuing presence in early modern drama improves our understanding of contemporary drama's contribution to and engagement with the long English Reformation.

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<sup>67</sup> Adrian Streete, *Protestantism and Drama*, p.28.

<sup>68</sup> *The Holie Byble, (The Bishops' Bible)*, (London: Richard Jugge, 1568), The Revelations of St John 22:13.

## CHAPTER 1. THE DISAPPEARING GOD, 1559 - 1580<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Writing in the 1960s T.W. Craik claimed that the character of God ceases to appear after the plays of Henry VIII's reign.<sup>2</sup> Whilst this is not strictly accurate, God does seemingly disappear as an on-stage character from new English dramatic writing by the early 1570s. However, analysis of these later plays suggests that, rather than disappearing from the play worlds, God was instead internalised, thus illustrating a faith-based relationship with humanity, aligned with the new Protestant theology. Starting with the explicitly anthropomorphic God of the early 1560s with externalised God-human relationships and culminating with the external representation of psychomachia in *The Conflict of Conscience*, this chapter explores the evolution of God's dramatic representation in the first twenty years following the Elizabethan Settlement.

The Christian God was still the predominant supernatural element evident in new drama up to 1580. However, there was a significant decline in the proportion of plays involving him post-1559. There are two hundred and ninety-eight known plays in the period 1533 – 1558, of which sixty-five involved a god or gods, nearly ninety per cent of which were the Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Some sections of this chapter were originally presented by the author at the Theta XIII symposium, *Forms of the Supernatural on Stage: Evolution, Mutations* at the University of Tours in September 2017. The paper was then edited and published as part of the proceedings and can be found at <https://sceneeuropéenne.univ-tours.fr/theta>. Jan Tasker, 'The Disappearing God: From Anthropomorphic to Internalised Relationships of Faith in the Earlier Elizabethan Drama' in Richard Hillman (ed.), *Theta XIII: Forms of the Supernatural on Stage: Evolution, Mutations*. 2018. *Scène Européenne, Theta, Théâtre anglaise, mis en ligne 9/7/2018* URL: <https://sceneeuropéenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta> 1.3, pp. 133-143.

<sup>2</sup> T. W. Craik, *The Tudor Interlude: Stage, Costume and Acting* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1962), p.50.

God. This compares to sixty-nine out of three hundred and seventy-four plays in the first twenty years of Elizabeth's reign, a fall from approximately twenty percent of the total to about eight percent. Additionally, less than half these, thirty-three, were the Christian God. The distribution and incidence of other supernatural elements show no significant change between the two periods, as shown in figures 1.1 – 1.2.<sup>3</sup>

The form of the representation of God also changed to reflect the increasingly Calvinist religious orthodoxy established as a consequence of the Elizabethan Settlement. After 1559, God's personal anthropomorphic appearance in plays was very rare. Between 1559 and 1580 God's relationship to the plays' human protagonists changed. Initially this relationship had an assumed anthropomorphism, with God as either a literal or rhetorically referenced presence as a distinct external being. Next, a metaphorical, allegorical but still external representation of God was employed. Finally, however, the relationship between God and humans was shown through an external representation of an entirely internalised reflection of personal faith. These changes, I suggest, were, at one level, a response to iconoclastic charges growing out of Protestant anxiety about visual representations of God on the stage and elsewhere. Additionally, I argue, it indicates an attempt to articulate in dramatic terms the doctrine of justification by faith alone, under-pinned by character articulations about the divine, and its associated implications in terms of God's relationship with humankind.

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<sup>3</sup> Data calculated by reference to Martin Wiggins with Catharine Richardson, *British Drama: 1533 – 1642 A Catalogue*, Vol. I and II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012 - ). All subsequent play dates come from Wiggins.



Figure 1.1 Distribution of supernatural elements in plays, 1533 - 1558

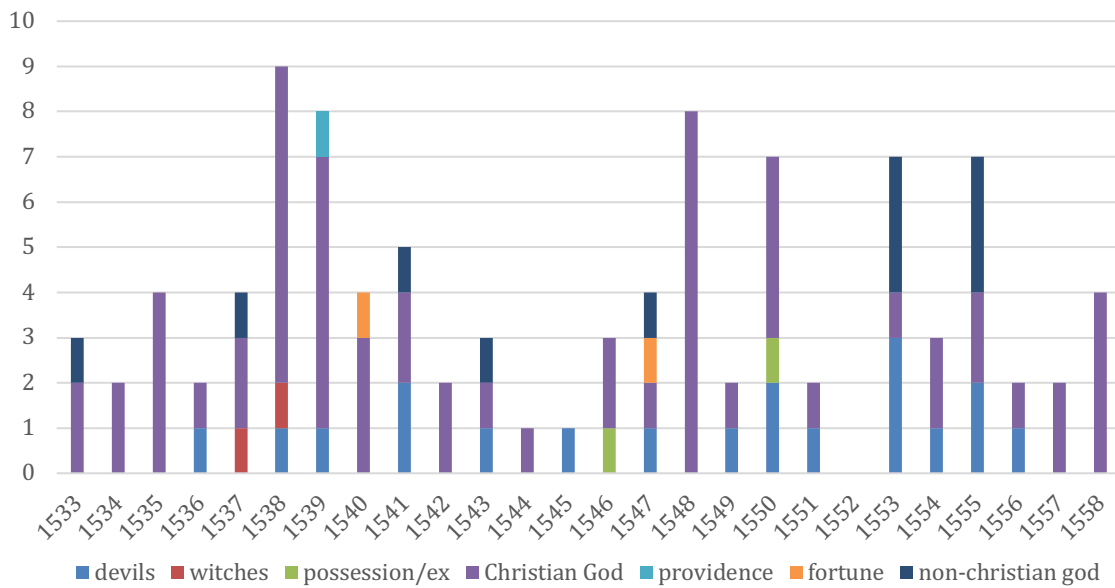
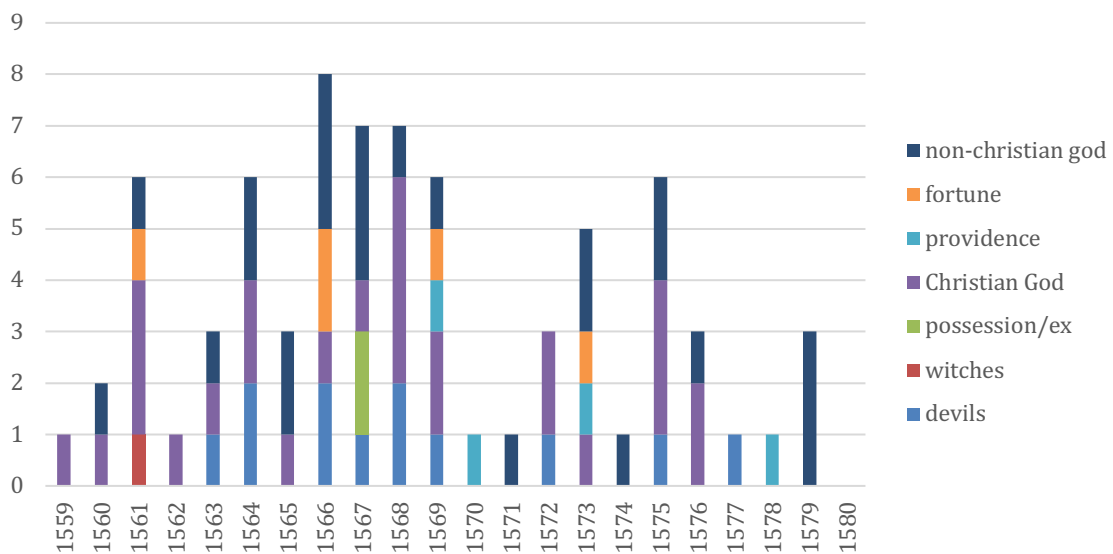


Figure 1.2 Distribution of supernatural elements in plays, 1559 - 1580



A primary cause of God's physical disappearance from the stage was the increasingly precise application and interpretation of the Second Commandment: 'Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image' and its

consequent iconoclasm.<sup>4</sup> Many Marian exiles used John Calvin's catechism in which he argues for the impossibility of producing an image of a God who was both invisible and incomprehensible.<sup>5</sup> The *Homily Against Idolatry* also attacked images of God.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign the removal of images was far from complete. Margaret Aston notes that books printed near the beginning of Elizabeth's reign had woodcut illustrations showing God anthropomorphically, including the *Geneva Bible*, Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* and the 1568 edition of the *Bishops' Bible* - see figure 1.3. This, however, led to complaints from some in Parliament in 1572, resulting in a, still incomplete, revision of the edition in the same year. She adds that 'through this decade, [the 1570s] the sense of impropriety about placing any illustrative matter in the scriptural text was gaining ground'.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Brian Cummings (ed.), *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.152. Jonathan Willis notes that 'idolatry was [...] discussed just as often in the context of the First, Third and Fourth Commandments' as well. His book provides a detailed and thoughtful discussion of the changes to Decalogue understanding and significance throughout the period of the English Reformation. Jonathan Willis, *The Reformation of the Decalogue: Religious Identity and the Ten Commandments in England, c.1485 – 1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p.8.

<sup>5</sup> See Margaret Aston, *Broken Idols of the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p.567.

<sup>6</sup> Church of England, *Certain Sermons or Homilies appointed to be read in churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth of famous memory* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1851), *Against the Peril of Idolatry*, pp. 179–283.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Aston, *Broken Idols*, p.580. Aston notes that the images came from Catholic woodcuts used in Europe and that God was replaced by the tetragrammaton in the illustration of the creation, in which it had dominated the scene, but that many small illustrations, like the one shown in figure 1.3, remained. She discusses the changes in Margaret Aston, 'The *Bishops' Bible* Illustrations', in *Studies in Church History* vol. 28: *The Church and the Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 267–85. This is also discussed in: Colin Clair, 'The *Bishops' Bible* 1568' in *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch*, 1960, pp. 287–90, p.288; and Ruth Samson Luborsky and Elizabeth Ingram, *A Guide to English Illustrated Books 1536 – 1603*, Vol. 1 (Tempe, AZ, 1998), p.123. The latter also identifies the new addition of engravings of Dudley and Cecil to the *Bishops' Bible* positing them as Joshua and David respectively.



Figure 1.3 Illustration from first edition of the *Bishops' Bible*, 1568 Genesis 4.

Note the figure of God, depicted as an old man in the top left-hand corner, watching on. *The Holie Bible. Conteynyng the Olde Testament and the Newe London, In povvles Churchyarde* by Richarde Iugge, printer to the Queenes Maiestie, 1568.

Theologians, then, became increasingly concerned about the dangers of an anthropomorphic understanding of the nature of God, even in the imagination, as a breach of the Second Commandment.<sup>8</sup> Such representations became subject to iconoclastic attack. As most of the known

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<sup>8</sup> The aim was not simply to avoid representing God physically, but also the superstitious idolatry which it was deemed would inevitably arise in consequence.

authors of those plays which reference the Christian God were, or became, ministers, they inevitably had a concern to avoid this charge. Huston Diehl suggests that playwrights shared antitheatricalists' anxieties about idolatry associated with 'the imagination, the function of signs, and the nature of Art'.<sup>9</sup> Peter Happé notes that while representing God on stage was clearly not a problem for the reformer and playwright John Bale, writing in the 1530s and 1540s, it had clearly become so for Dean Hutton when he condemned the Wakefield cycle in 1576, since this was the key focus of his objection. This led Happé to suggest a link between the 'reluctance to present God on stage and the Protestant dislike of images'.<sup>10</sup>

This anxiety was most famously discussed by Patrick Collinson in his paper *Iconoclasm to Iconophobia* in which he identified a 'resistance to the theatrical appeal of [...] "the idolatrous eye"'.<sup>11</sup> His conclusions have since been shown to overstate the extent and nature of anti-imagery but there clearly was a long-lasting move away from religious drama, and, as this chapter shows, that included physical representations of God. Michael

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<sup>9</sup> Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theatre in Early Modern England* (London: Cornell University Press, 1997), p.65.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Happé, "'Erased in the booke": The Mystery Cycles and Reform' in Lloyd Kermode, Jason Scott-Warren, and Martine Van Elk (eds.), *Tudor Drama Before Shakespeare, 1485–1590: New Directions for Research, Criticism and Pedagogy* (Palgrave MacMillan: Basingstoke, 2004), pp. 15–33, p.29. Glynne Wickham, however, associates this more with anxieties following the Northern Rebellion in 1569 and the discovery of the Ridolphi Plot in 1572. Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages, 1300 – 1660: Volume 4 Requiem and an Epilogue* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 145–7.

<sup>11</sup> Patrick Collinson, *From Iconoclasm to Iconophobia: The Cultural Impact of the Second English Reformation* (Reading: University of Reading Press, 1986), p.12. See for example work by Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550 – 1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Tara Hamling, *Decorating the 'Godly' Household: Religious Art in Post-Reformation Britain* (London: Yale University Press, 2004) and 'Visual Culture' in Andrew Hadfield, Matthew Dimmock and Abigail Shinn (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Culture in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 75-102 and, with Richard L. Williams, (eds.), 'Introduction' in *Art Re-formed: Reassessing the Impact of the Reformation on the Visual Arts* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007); see also, Margaret Aston, *Broken Idols*.

O'Connell identifies a 'two-fold alteration in sensibility' entailing a 'rigorous rejection' of the propriety of physical representations of the sacred, including God in all his forms, and a 'new literalism [...] towards Scripture' which fuelled anxieties about dramatizing the religious in any form.<sup>12</sup> As I show, the changing way God is represented in plays of the 1560s and 1570s can be seen as responses to both of these concerns. The first part of this chapter looks at plays which do present God anthropomorphically, either literally or metaphorically. It shows how far these differed from pre-Elizabethan representations of God and the extent to which this may have been a conscious response to Protestant sensitivities.

In discussing the Second Commandment banning idols, catechisms focus initially and primarily on forbidding representations of God, Christ, angels, saints and crosses for worship in a physical sense.<sup>13</sup> Ian Green notes that increasingly catechisms defined God by his attributes – omniscience, omnipotence, wisdom for example – in a list which increased with the length of the catechism.<sup>14</sup> The second section demonstrates that playwrights used particular allegorical characters to represent God through these same attributes and shows that this led to an increasingly internalised relationship between human characters and God.

Ultimately, this change from an anthropomorphic God, through allegorical characters representing his attributes, ended in a representation of

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<sup>12</sup> Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and the Theatre in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.28. This latter view was also put forward by Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.169.

<sup>13</sup> Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England c. 1530 - 1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 434–5.

<sup>14</sup> Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC*, p.305.

God that was fully internalised within the protagonists. The plays under discussion in this chapter were essentially didactic expositions of Protestant faith.<sup>15</sup> They increasingly attempt to demonstrate explicitly Protestant doctrine such as the concept of justification and the internal nature of faith, distinct from saving grace through works and the mediated contact with God which was part of traditional Catholic worship. The third section shows how internalising the relationship between God and Man helped articulate these doctrinal points.

Over time however concern was extended to images formed in the mind.<sup>16</sup> This makes the words used to describe God of importance. So how did the plays maintain God's presence and role in human life whilst avoiding creating an image, mental or physical, of the deity? The answer lies in the words characters use to refer to God. Some years ago, Martin Wiggins proposed the theory that drama could act as a 'precursor of concepts that begin to appear soon after'.<sup>17</sup> This is evident in the representation of God articulated within the plays of this period. The final section, which demonstrates how God was increasingly represented purely through human articulations of faith, shows that the words characters spoke in the plays of the 1560s herald precisely those characteristics subsequently ascribed to God by the influential divine, William Perkins in his 1590 catechism. The analysis

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<sup>15</sup> Adrian Streete comments that early Elizabethan Reformist drama was particularly 'concerned with the didactic and often allegorical reinforcement of Protestantism at a doctrinal level, underpinning the religious values of the state'. Adrian Streete, 'Drama' in Andrew Hiscock and Helen Wilcox (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 166–184, p.170.

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed discussion on this see Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts: Volume 1, Laws Against Images* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), especially pp. 436–465.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Wiggins, 'Macbeth and Premeditation' in Arthur Marwick (ed.), *The Arts Literature and Society* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 23–47, p.41.

must begin however with the dramatic representation of an anthropomorphic God.

### **The Anthropomorphic God – God Humanised**

Even before the Reformation, there seem to have been sensitivities associated with staging God.<sup>18</sup> Lynette Muir notes that God was not personified on stage to any extent until the fifteenth century, and that the doctrine of a unified Trinity was fundamental to this representation.<sup>19</sup> Murray Roston identifies in the medieval Biblical drama a

divergence between two main trends [...] a stylized and reverent re-enactment of the holiest scenes [...] against] a more realistic, almost contemporary treatment of the less sacred characters [...] who gradually shed their typological significance to emerge as human creatures.<sup>20</sup>

He suggests that whilst human characters were relatively wooden it was acceptable to have God on stage but once they were humanised, the same needed to be done for God, with an associated risk of accusations of sacrilege.

Between about 1533 and 1546 there are similarities in the characterisation of God by traditionalist and evangelical playwrights. The *Play of the Weather*, probably written in 1533 by the consistently Catholic John Heywood, nominally has the character of Jupiter rather than the Christian God. However, there are moments of slippage such as when the Wind-miller

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<sup>18</sup> The following summary discussion is provided for background and comparative purposes. It is beyond the scope of this study to pursue the analysis in greater depth and thus conclusions are drawn without supporting evidence.

<sup>19</sup> Lynette Muir, 'The Trinity in Medieval Drama' in *Comparative Drama*, Vol 10, No.2 (Summer 1976), pp. 116–129.

<sup>20</sup> Murray Roston, *Biblical Drama in England from the Middle Ages to the Present*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), pp. 48, 65.

suggests that 'God' is punishing them for 'pride' by sending lots of rain and no wind.<sup>21</sup> This presents a picture of the vengeful Old Testament God punishing recalcitrant humans through his control of the natural elements. Most critics offer a political reading which associates the character of Jupiter with Henry VIII. This is also valid, but the Wind-miller's offer to do penance in recompense, adds a distinctly religious connotation. Christian elements are allowed to slip in, so some degree of divine representation occurs, which would have been more evident to audiences for whom Christianity was an active part of daily life.<sup>22</sup> Heywood's characters all have naturalistic tendencies including Jupiter/God and certainly the humanisation of the character would appear sacrilegious if it were denoted as the Christian God. That Jupiter appears in person to only a select few, higher status, individuals, and to others through an intermediary, reflects the biblical situation in which God speaks directly only with particular individuals, who are then sent to report God's message to others. This presents a distant God, similar to that represented in *God's Promises*, 1538, by the Protestant reformer John Bale, in which God only interacts with biblical counsellors.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> John Heywood, *The Play of the Weather* in Peter Happé (ed.), *Tudor Interludes* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1972), pp. 139–180, ll. 529, 528. My modernisation throughout. All other references to *The Play of the Weather* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

<sup>22</sup> See for example, Greg Walker, *Writing Under Tyranny: English Literature and the Henrican Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (London: University of California Press, 1978); Christopher J. Warner, *Henry VIII's Divorce: Literature and the Politics of the Printing Press* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998).

<sup>23</sup> John Bale, *The Chief Promises of God unto Man by all Ages in the Old Law* in Peter Happé (ed.), *The Complete Plays of John Bale* Vol. 2, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1986), pp. 1–34. All other references to *God's Promises* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.



The punishments and sins listed in *God's Promises*, evidence a similarity of representation between traditional and evangelical playwrights in the 1530s. Both plays illustrate an assumption of human agency influencing the divine, an idea that later reformers would have decried. However, over his series of plays, which were intended to make a reformed mystery cycle, Bale presents a variety of representations of God: vengeful and loving, distant and approachable.<sup>24</sup> There is a clear sense that across the plays Bale was working through ideas of a changing God-human relationship, brought about by the resurrection, as part of a deliberate plan by God. In *John the Baptist*, also 1538, God does not make a physical appearance, but speaks from the clouds.<sup>25</sup> This distances God, removing characterisation, and further reflecting a changed relationship to God. In *Three Laws* God is present physically again but in two quite different characters: *Deus Pater* and *Vindicta Dei*. Ultimately Bale resolves the difficulties of God's character through an exploration of the meaning of the Trinity. He affirms that all three elements are equal 'in essence'.<sup>26</sup> This allows the representations of God across the plays as a cycle to reflect the different elements of the Trinity.

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<sup>24</sup> Roberta Mullini discusses Bale's varied representation of God in 'Representing God and Christ in John Bale's Biblical Plays' in *Theta XIII: Forms of the Supernatural on Stage: Evolution, Mutations*. Edited by Richard Hillman, 2018. Scène Européenne, Theta, Théâtre anglaise, mis en ligne 9/7/2018 URL: [https://sceneeuropéene.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta 13](https://sceneeuropéene.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta%2013), pp. 49-64. My conclusions were drawn independently of hers.

<sup>25</sup> John Bale, *Johan Baptistes Preachynge in the Wyldernesse* in Peter Happé (ed.), *The Complete Plays of John Bale Vol 2*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1986), pp. 35–50. All other references to *John the Baptist* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.

<sup>26</sup> John Bale '*Thre Lawes of Nature, Moses and Christ*' in Peter Happé (editor) *The Complete Plays of John Bale Vol 2*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1986), pp. 65-124, p.68, l.37. All other references to *Three Laws* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.

The separate but unified elements of the Trinity are also evident in Nicholas Grimald's *Christus Redivivus*.<sup>27</sup> The Prologue describes God as 'all-good and all-powerful' combining the sense of both *Deus Pater* and *Vindictus Dei*.<sup>28</sup> Grimauld's 1546 representation in *Archiphroeta* is, in some respects, more traditional than Bale's.<sup>29</sup> In this play God does not interact with any other characters. His appearances are limited to 1.1 and 5.1 when he apparently has the stage to himself. Early Reformation plays then, represent God in a variety of ways with the relationship with humans both formal and informal. There is no clear difference in God's representation between those written by traditionalists and those by Reformers. Predominantly, God was represented anthropomorphically, though Bale at least, also used an off-stage representation. In all cases however, God is inevitably humanised.

This tendency for humanisation changes in Edward's reign during which God as a dramatic character seems to have completely disappeared. There is only one play listed by Wiggins in which God appears, the lost *De Sodome and Gomorre incendio* by Ralph Radcliffe. Instead, we find allegorical characters such as 'GOD'S WORD, the judge' in Punt's *The Indictment against Mother Mass* or 'THE LAW of God' in Wager's *The Life*

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<sup>27</sup> Nicholas Grimald was a Reformer but one who has been criticised for his pragmatic approach, evident in his plays, which enabled him to find accommodation with Mary's Catholic regime, unlike Bale who went into exile. For a discussion of this and other aspects of his faith see Michael G. Brennan, 'Grimald, Nicolas (b.1519/20, d. in or before 1562)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). The online edition has been used throughout.

<sup>28</sup> Nicholas Grimald, *Christus Redivivus* in L.R. Merrill (ed. and trans.), *The Life and Poems of Nicholas Grimald* (London; Humphrey Milford Press, 1925), pp. 55–215, p.115. All other references to *Christus Redivivus* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.

<sup>29</sup> Nicholas Grimald, *Archiphroeta* in L.R. Merrill (ed. and trans.), *The Life and Poems of Nicholas Grimald* (London; Humphrey Milford Press, 1925), pp. 217–357. All other references to *Archiphroeta* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.

*and Repentance of Mary Magdalen [sic].*<sup>30</sup> In Mary's reign there is proportionately less new drama with only fifty-nine plays listed over her five and a half year reign compared to eighty-nine for the six and a half years of Edward's.<sup>31</sup> There is also a notable increase of plays involving non-Christian gods as opposed to the Christian God in Mary's reign.<sup>32</sup> This may link to a humanist interest in the classics, more likely to appeal to the well-educated, adult Mary than to the much younger Edward.

It is not until Elizabeth's reign that a concerted effort seems to have begun to try and control religious representation on the stage. Harold Gardiner points out that both ecclesiastical and secular authorities, locally and nationally, grew increasingly hostile to publicly performed religious drama during the period 1559 – 1580.<sup>33</sup> This is evidenced in the increasingly self-justifying tone in mystery plays' banns and prologues as well as in a number of injunctions and visitation articles, and letters to and actions taken against, town council members responsible for putting these plays on.<sup>34</sup> For example,

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<sup>30</sup> Martin Wiggins, *Catalogue Volume 1: 1533 – 1566* entries 188 pp. 192-3; 187, pp. 190–192, and 209, pp. 215-218.

<sup>31</sup> It is interesting that there does not appear to have been a corresponding Catholic propaganda campaign using drama under Mary. It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate why this might have been. However, I would speculate that it is possible that explicitly Catholic drama that post-dated the beginnings of the English Reformation, would have been subject to suppression in subsequent reigns and a disproportionate amount of it may therefore be lost to the records.

<sup>32</sup> Edward's reign has eighteen plays involving God of which only three were non-Christian, whilst in Mary's reign the numbers are ten and three respectively.

<sup>33</sup> Harold C. Gardiner, *Mysteries End: An Investigation of the Last Days of the Medieval Religious Stage* (New Haven Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1946). However, Paul Whitfield White suggests that Gardiner's analysis exaggerates the degree of opposition from Protestants on religious grounds at both local and national levels as a cause for the cessation of this dramatic form. Paul Whitfield White, 'Reforming *Mysteries*' End: A New Look at Protestant Intervention in English Provincial Drama' in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29:1, Winter (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 121-147. Most attacks occurred in the 1570s.

<sup>34</sup> See Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson (eds.), *Records of Early English Drama: York* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), p.353 and Elizabeth Baldwin,

the Norwich Grocers' 1565 version of the Fall, *The Temptation of Man in Paradise* includes a self-justifying prologue.<sup>35</sup>

The Norwich Grocers' play is a re-writing by an unknown author of Stephen Prewett's 1533 play on the temptation of Adam and Eve by the Devil in the Garden of Eden, preparatory to an anticipated resurrection of the Norwich cycle plays. The newly introduced prologue indicates that such representation was, by 1565, controversial. There are two versions, one for when the play is performed as part of a cycle and the other if stand-alone, but both follow a similar form, repeatedly justifying the plays on the basis that it is 'according unto the scripture'.<sup>36</sup> The stand-alone version also cites historical precedent:

Like as it chanced before this season,  
Out of God's scripture revealed in plays  
Was divers stories set forth by reason  
Of pageants apparelled in Whitsun days. (First Prologue, l.1 – 4)

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Lawrence M. Clopper, and David Mills (eds.), *Records of Early English Drama: Chester* (London: The British Library and University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 143–8, 168–174; Peter Happé "Erased in the booke", pp. 20–3, 29; Walter Howard Frere (ed.), *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation* Volume 3, 1559 – 1575 (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1910).

<sup>35</sup> Henceforth referred to as the Norwich Grocers' play. Roberta Mullini discusses both plays and compares them with other cycle plays in her chapter, 'The Norwich Grocers' Plays' in Peter Happé and Wim Hüskens (eds.), *Staging Scripture: Biblical Drama, 1350 – 1600* (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2016), pp. 125–48. This play's place in the attempted Protestantisation of cycle drama is also discussed by the following: Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker 'Introduction' in Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 1–17, particularly pp. 1–4; Kevin J. Harty, 'The Norwich Grocers' Play and Its Three Cyclic Counterparts: Four English Mystery Plays on the Fall of Man', in *Studia Philologica* 53 (1981), pp. 77–89; Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p.121 and endnote 41, p.373; Paul Whitfield White, *Drama and Religion in English Provincial Society 1485 – 1660*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 77–88; Paul Whitfield White, 'Interludes, Economics, and the Elizabethan Stage' in Mike Pincombe and Cathy Shrank (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 555–570.

<sup>36</sup> Norman Davis (ed.), 'The Norwich Grocers' Play' in *Non-cycle Plays and Fragments* (London: Oxford University Press, for Early English Text Society, 1970), [A text], pp. 8–11, [B text], pp. 11–18, Introductory passage, p.11. All other references to The Norwich Grocers' play are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically. Each prologue is independently numbered and numbering re-starts with the beginning of the play's dialogue. My modernisation of spelling.

However, as it refers to medieval Catholic practice it was unlikely to be viewed positively by those objecting to such performances. The rest of this prologue is given over to the argument of the play, explaining how it fits into the story of the creation:

Beginning in Genesis, that story replete  
Of God his creation of each living thing,  
[...]  
Which stories with the scriptures most justly agree. (l.8 - 9, 14)

'Beginning in Genesis' and 'with the scriptures' repeatedly emphasises its scriptural authority, reinforced by the more precise, 'As in the second chapter of Genesis you see' (l.17). Many lines in the play are quoted directly from the *Great Bible* and the second prologue is explicit about the location of the source material. The author begins by summarising the contents of each former pageant and their place in Genesis:

As in their former pageants is semblably declared  
Of God's mighty creation in every living thing,  
As in the *first of Genesis* to such it is prepared  
[...]  
In *the second of Genesis* of mankind his creation  
Unto this Garden of Eden is made full preparation.  
(l.1 - 3, 6 - 7)<sup>37</sup>

This places the Grocers' pageant in context and leads into the argument for the play:

And here begineth our pageant to make the declaration,  
*From the letter C in the chapter* before said,  
How God put man in Paradise to dress it in best fashion,  
(l.8 - 10)<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> The original cycle of plays consisted of 12 pageants though Whitfield White suggests as few as four might sometimes have been performed together. He notes that they were performed 'intermittently' between 1530 and 1565. Paul Whitfield White *Drama and Religion*, p.81. The full cycle involved plays on 'The creation of the world, Paradise (Grocers plus Chandlers), Cain and Abel, Noah's ark, Abraham and Isaac, Moses and the flight from Egypt, David and Goliath, the Nativity, Christ's baptism, the resurrection, and the Holy Ghost. Norman Davis (ed.), 'Introduction' to *Non-cycle Plays and Fragments* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. xiii-cxxiv; pp. xxix-xxx.

The reference to the letter C directs the audience to the specific place in the *Great Bible*, at which the Grocers' story begins. The 1533 version of the play, which predates State acceptance of a vernacular *Bible*, has neither prologue nor similarly explicit scriptural references. These are clearly entered to reassure local critics of the scriptural legitimacy of the play in the newly Protestant environment.<sup>39</sup>

Such anxieties would not only have been caused by local sensitivities. 1559 saw the introduction of religious censorship targeted explicitly at plays. Early in the year, presumably virulent, anti-Catholic plays had been publicly performed, drawing complaint from the Spanish Ambassador. Consequently, Elizabeth issued a proclamation in April banning all dramatic performances for six months. The following month, another proclamation was issued stating that licensers should allow:

none to be played wherein either matters of religion or of the governance of the estate of the commonweal shall be handled or treated, being no meet matters to be written or treated upon but by men of authority, learning, and wisdom, nor to be handled before any audience but of grave and discreet persons.<sup>40</sup>

Martin Wiggins notes that this was the first time that 'a Protestant regime' had actively repressed drama that reflected their own 'ideological stripe'.<sup>41</sup> The Act of Uniformity, passed eight days earlier but only effective from 24 June, declared criminal 'any interludes, plays, songs, rhymes' condemning 'anything

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<sup>38</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>39</sup> Roberta Mullini reaches a similar conclusion in her discussion of the prologues, and also notes the playwright's specific targeting of an audience of readers for the play rather than simply those who would potentially watch the performance in the streets of Norwich. 'The Norwich Grocers' Plays', pp. 131–132.

<sup>40</sup> Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin (eds), *Tudor Royal Proclamations Volume II, The Later Tudors (1553 – 1587)* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), p.115.

<sup>41</sup> Martin Wiggins, *Drama and the Transfer of Power in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.32.

in the derogation, depraving or despising' of the newly established *Book of Common Prayer* or 'anything therein contained.'<sup>42</sup> However, as Wiggins notes, this only controlled dissent from the authorised view. The proclamation aimed to curb *any* extreme, uncontrolled attacks, including both hotter Protestants seeking to urge further reform, and opposition views, such as those of Catholics. Taken together, the act and proclamation significantly restricted dramatists' freedom of expression regarding religious material. Looking at Wiggins' list of known plays following this proclamation, there were no new, obviously religious, plays until William Alley's *Aegio*, which Wiggins dates at 1561, followed by a passion play in 1562.<sup>43</sup> This suggests some, if limited, effect on the production of explicitly biblical drama and may thus have contributed to the ultimate disappearance of the Christian God on stage.

Nevertheless 'matters of religion' did not disappear from drama following this proclamation and although it did noticeably decline, this was neither immediate nor linear. Indeed, plays involving the Christian God are clustered more towards the beginning of the period in two distinct peaks. Ten of fourteen plays involving gods reference the Christian God during the period 1559 – 1563, out of a total of sixty-three plays. The shorter period 1567 – 9 has another increase, when seven out of twelve 'god' plays were Christian out of a total of only thirty-six plays.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Gerald Bray (ed.), *Documents of the English Reformation* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. Ltd, 1994), p.331.

<sup>43</sup> Martin Wiggins, *Catalogue* Volume 1, 1533 – 1566.

<sup>44</sup> There may have been fewer than thirty-six plays in this period, increasing further the proportion of those involving the Christian God. Several are lost and Wiggins notes that their evidentiary references may be to other known plays, although he has entered them separately in the *Catalogue*.

Despite the 1559 proclamation then, plays on religious themes were still written after this date, but the way God was presented gradually changed. As discussed above, in pre-1559 plays, God was usually a character, played by an actor. His form was fully anthropomorphic. After 1559, although representations of God retained anthropomorphic characteristics, God rarely appeared as a character. Only two known plays written between 1559 – 1566 definitely had God as a character: an untitled religious play from 1564 and the Norwich Grocers' play.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, one lost biblical play, dealing with the Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac from 1564, may have done as the underlying *Bible* story has God demanding Abraham sacrifice his son.<sup>46</sup> There are four other lost plays on biblical themes during this period. Two of these, a passion play of 1561, and *The Two Sins of King David* in 1562, have no obvious role for an anthropomorphic God in their biblical rendition. The evidence for *Play of Nebuchadnezzar*, also 1562, comes from a cast list with no role for God. The biblical source for the fourth, *The Story of Old Toby* from 1564, explicitly references an angel enacting the divine intervention rather than God himself.

The religious play, which Martin Wiggins ascribes to 1564 but for which he offers a date range of 1500 – 1580, is only extant in the part for the actor

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<sup>45</sup> Unnamed play headed 'Religious Play' by Martin Wiggins in his *Catalogue, 1533 – 1642* Vol. 1, entry 382, but given the name *Processus Satanæ* by W.W. Greg.

<sup>46</sup> Alternatively, the actions ascribed to God may have been played by an angel as God's messenger, or an off-stage voice. The *Great Bible* has God telling Abraham to sacrifice his son but 'the angel of the Lord' preventing it. Genesis chapter 22 paragraphs A and B. *The Byble in Englysh*. (London, Edwarde Whitchurch, 1541), fo.viii r and v.



playing God.<sup>47</sup> God defends himself against the Devil's accusation that saving humans after the Fall is unfair, on which a judgement is made by chosen commissioners. As the text only contains God's lines plus abbreviated cues from other characters, there is little sense of how God is characterised but having an actor playing the role is clearly anthropomorphic and so, to some extent, humanised. The language used is also humanising. Speaking to Christ at the beginning, God expresses human emotions towards him, referring to him as 'my well-beloved', and calling on him to 'Sit on my right hand'.<sup>48</sup> This reference to Christ ascending to sit on God's right hand is biblical so perfectly legitimate, but, I discuss later, it posed problems for Protestants averse to the idea of anthropomorphic imagining of both God and Christ.<sup>49</sup> Throughout, the tone of the part is conversational. It is neither a series of pronouncements nor an apostrophe to either the on-stage or off-stage audiences. To Michael, God says 'Tary Michael a while yet' (l.19) whilst the entire discussion with Satan reflects one half of a two-way conversation. God's 'Nay [...] /I have taken that which but was mine own' clearly answers Satan's cue line '... robbed me' (l.24 – 5; l.23). Similarly, 'Why not Satan in all things which be good' responds to '...such policy in God' (l.57; 55). Much of the subsequent conversation consists of God offering various Old Testament prophets to be judges of Satan's complaint and God's defence, each of which

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<sup>47</sup> Martin Wiggins, *Catalogue* Volume 1, pp. 403–4. The author is unknown, but evidence suggests that it may have been written for a church congregation in Limebrook, Herefordshire, see *Catalogue* entry, p.404.

<sup>48</sup> W.W. Greg, 'Processus Satanæ' in *Collections Vol. II, Part III*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, for The Malone Society, 1931), pp. 239–250, l.4, 8. All other references to this religious play are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically. My modernisation.

<sup>49</sup> For example, in the *Great Bible* Mark 16D tells of Christ's ascension to sit on God's right hand. Other equivalent references occur in Matthew, Luke, Acts, Romans and Hebrews.

Satan rejects in turn, in a similarly conversational, humanised, manner. However, God only engages with other supernatural or allegorical beings in this play. There are speech headings for Satan, Christ, Verity and Peace. Old Testament prophets are referred to and come from different periods of biblical time so are presumably not intended to be living humans, if they are even present on stage. In either case, God does not directly address them. So, this play, although humanising God and his engagement with others, does not perform a relationship between humans and God.

In contrast, the Norwich Grocers' play, 1565, does enact human/divine interaction. However, although it involves God as a character, it initially makes some efforts to de-humanise his relationship with Man, in a variation from the 1533 play it replaced. Stephen Prewett's God in the *Creation of Eve* for the Norwich Grocers' play of 1533 is presented naturalistically.<sup>50</sup> His use of the first-person singular in the opening apostrophe makes him accessible. At only one point does he use the royal 'we', when describing his work of creation. Although it is possible that this is a first-person plural as 'ministers angelical' (p.8, l.10) are also referenced here, it is more likely intended as a reminder of God's supremacy. He converses directly with Adam, an everyman character. Throughout the exchanges God and Adam both use the

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<sup>50</sup> Little is known about Stephen Prewett but it is likely he was a traditionalist throughout his life. Davis, taken from Fitch, states that Prewett was 'seventh Prebend of the College of St Mary in the Fields 1536, and one of the Stipendiary Priests of St Peter Mancroft Church', which seems to have been a traditional parish. For Prewett see Norman Davis (ed.), 'Introduction', p.xxxii; for St Peter in Mancroft's traditional credentials see Muriel McClendon, *The Quiet Reformation: Magistrates and the Emergence of Protestantism in Tudor Norwich* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 8, 82, 113, 117–124. She notes that whilst the city was known to have had a reforming element within its population from early on, city leaders held varying religious views after about 1530 and she suggests the civic authorities worked hard to actively avoid religious conflict throughout the Reformation. See p.68, and pp. 61-87.

familiar 'thou' except when God instructs Adam not to eat from the tree of knowledge, when he emphatically uses the 'you' form. The initial use of 'thee' establishes a sense of equality between God and Adam, perhaps as a reminder of Adam created in God's image.<sup>51</sup> The sudden change to 'you' has a distancing effect, reminding Adam, and the audience, that God is in charge. The importance of the commandment not to eat from the tree of knowledge is thus highlighted – making it into a clear command, not a request.<sup>52</sup> Adam's response however is ambivalent:

Thy precept, Lord, in will, word, and deed,  
Shall I observe, and thy request fulfil  
As thou hast commanded, it is reason and skill. (p.9, l.28 – 30)

Although 'precept' and 'commanded' both recognise God's superiority, 'request' implies that Adam supposes he has a choice, and it makes his agreement to 'observe' the instruction because it is 'reason and skill' seem condescending. This, with his apparent failure to recognise the change in personal pronoun, reflected in his own continued use of 'thou', gives his response a casual tone indicating the fall that is to follow. It also emphasises the personal nature of the relationship between the two characters.

In the earlier play, then, God speaks directly to Adam, who responds in dialogue covering twenty-eight lines. In the later version, God is much more distant. The first four lines, spoken by God, take the form of an apostrophe:

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<sup>51</sup> The *Bible* also predominately uses 'thou' and 'thee' as forms of address. What gives it significance here is the change from this to 'you' when God is issuing an instruction.

<sup>52</sup> This contrasts to the representation of this scene in the medieval mystery plays. The Wakefield 'Creation' play explicitly creates a distance between God and his humans. The stage directions state that 'Adam [...] stands beneath God's throne, a little lower than the angels'. God makes pronouncements, including the prohibition, using the 'thou' form for singular and 'ye' for plural in the biblical manner. There is no direct conversation between Adam, Eve and God at this point. Martial Rose (ed.), *The Wakefield Mystery Plays* (London: W.W. Norton, 1969), p.64.

I am Alpha et Omega, my Apocalypse doth testify,  
That made all of nothing for man his sustentation.  
And of this pleasant garden, that I have plant most goodly,  
I will him make the dresser for his good recreation.

(p.13, l.1 – 4)

They are followed by instructions directed explicitly at Adam, referred to impersonally, as Man:

Therefore Man, I give it thee, to have thy delectation.  
In eating thou shalt eat of every growing tree,  
Except the tree of knowledge, the which I forbid thee.

(p.13, l.5 – 7)

Many of the dramatic choices made here make the relationship between God and Adam a distant one. The use of apostrophe de-personalises God while God's imperative tone and use of 'Man' over 'Adam' further marks a clear boundary between them, and noticeably reduces the humanising effect of representing God with a human actor. God's varied use of 'thee' and 'you' throughout his opening speech appear to signal remarks addressed singly to Adam, when he uses 'thee', or jointly to Adam and Eve, indicated by 'you', in keeping with biblical practise. Unlike the earlier version, it is not an indicator of the nature of their relationship. God speaks uninterrupted for twenty-three lines. The only extant response is a joint one from Adam and Eve in which they thank and praise God:

We thank thee, mighty God, and give thee honoration.

(p.13, l.24)

Although they use 'thee' it is possible that by this point God has left the stage and that it reflects conventional biblical language. There is no direct conversation extant between God and the human characters at this stage,

unlike in the earlier version.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, using the generic 'Man' and 'Woman' to refer to Adam and Eve both distances the relationship with God and helps generalise the story. It identifies Adam and Eve as the forebears of the contemporary Christian audiences, when the Holy Ghost brings God's covenant to them at the end of the play.<sup>54</sup>

Following the eating of the apple, God and the other characters are in dialogue, but it is not a conversation as there is a clear distinction between the kinds and quality of the interactions. God fires questions at Adam (now named), the Woman (still impersonal) and the Serpent, in turn, to which they respond. This creates an impression of a careful judge, keen not to presume before passing sentence. He does not respond to their answers though, so the dialogue is not conversational. Although it does bring God closer, the formal tone maintains a distance between God and the human characters, which helps accentuate their subsequent fall. Once he has heard all their answers, he passes judgement on each in turn, but none are given a response, so the distance is maintained. Although anthropomorphic, God's distinction from the human characters is asserted.

As well as the distancing language and dialogue, costume also helped draw a distinction between God and the human characters through the

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<sup>53</sup> There is a lacuna in the manuscript at line 22 seemingly in the middle of God's speech. It ends mid-line with 'I leave you here ...' and recommences with a new line 'See that ye have my words in most high estimation'. It is possible, but not necessary, that Adam responds during this break but there is no evidence in the extant text that he does so.

<sup>54</sup> Roberta Mullini, 'The Norwich Grocers', pp. 139-140. Mullini reaches a similar conclusion about the reason for the generalisation but also stresses the impact on a reader as opposed to a play watcher. Although she discusses the relationships between characters, she does not include God in her discussion, focusing instead on the relationship between Adam and Eve in the different versions and between Satan and Eve.

provision of a mask for God, traditional in medieval representations.<sup>55</sup> This would also have had a dehumanising effect. Peter Happé cites the Chester Banns' post-1570s reference to the use of traditional gold for God which 'doth disfigure the man' (l.200), which, Happé suggests, indicates a link between a 'reluctance to present God on stage and the Protestant dislike of images'.<sup>56</sup> Joseph Quincy Adams, in his edition of this play, suggests that the play wagon had two parts, an upper, representing paradise and a lower for earth. In the early part of the play God, Adam and Eve appear to be situated together on the upper part because a stage direction after the Fall requires that 'Man and Woman depart to the nether part of the pageant'.<sup>57</sup> These features of staging provide a literal, visual representation of the metaphorical fall from grace. It also helps to distinguish between the closer pre- and more distant post-lapsarian relationship between God and humans. Through the prologues, inter-personal relationships, and staging, this later play demonstrates for modern readers changes and similarities between this and earlier representations of the anthropomorphic God. Its insistence on scriptural authority and continuity with the past, illustrates for us its author's discomfort with presenting an anthropomorphic God dramatically, signalling the 'disappearance' on the horizon.

Although these are the only extant plays of the period with a fully anthropomorphic God, metaphorical references to God physicalise him in

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<sup>55</sup> David Galloway (ed.), *Records of Early English Drama: Norwich, 1540 – 1642* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p.344, l.39.

<sup>56</sup> Peter Happé, "Erased in the booke" p.29.

<sup>57</sup> Joseph Quincy Adams (ed.), *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas: A Selection of Plays Illustrating the History of the English Drama from its Origin Down to Shakespeare* (London: George G. Harrap & Company Ltd, 1924), p.92.

many others. Probably the earliest of these is *Aegio*, extant only as a play fragment, which uses the metaphor of God as a father of humankind and refers to God's hand. This fragment was published in 1565 as part of the Bishop of Exeter, William Alley's, *Ptochomuseion*.<sup>58</sup> The title page notes that it was 'read publicly in the cathedral church of Saint Paul' and that 'Here are adjoined at the end of every special treatise, certain fruitful annotations'.<sup>59</sup> This is a theological exegesis about providence, fate and free will and rehearses much that became standard theodicy, though seems to have what would become an unusual emphasis on human free will with regard to the committing of sin.<sup>60</sup>

Wiggins notes that Alley kept a troupe of players at Exeter in the early 1560s and that it is possible that the play was written for them although he also notes that given its academic nature it may have been written whilst he was at university in the 1530s and 1540s.<sup>61</sup> There are no known performances, which might be explained by the proclamations discussed above, although this would then raise the question of why he wrote it at all, if

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<sup>58</sup> Alley was educated at King's College, being ordained a deacon in 1534. He was appointed to the bishopric of Exeter in 1560. His confessional position was clearly Protestant but not extremely so. He faced difficulties from the conservative diocese of Exeter, necessitating local gentry to offer him physical protection when he went to preach at the Cathedral on various occasions. Conversely the papers he submitted for the 1563 Canterbury convocation, are moderate and condemn controversy over adiaphora. See Nicholas Orme, 'Alley, William (1510/11 – 1570)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Orme cites Hooker that two members of the local gentry 'guarded him and brought him to the pulpit sundry times'.

<sup>59</sup> William Alley, *Aegio* in *Ptochomuseion. The Poore Mans Librarie* (London: John Day, 1565), Sig.2F4<sup>r</sup> – 2F5<sup>v</sup>, title page. All other references to *Aegio* are keyed to this edition and sig. references will be given parenthetically. My modernisation. It is not clear whether the part containing the play extract was included when the original sermon was read, or who the audience for the sermon was.

<sup>60</sup> Calvin and subsequent English Protestant theologians largely agreed that post-lapsarian humans were innately reprobate so essentially had no free will to perform good acts, all their actions were sinful, unless God gave grace to them. The doctrine relating to free will is a complex one and was subject to dispute and varied interpretations.

<sup>61</sup> Martin Wiggins *Catalogue* Volume 1, p.354.

indeed he did. Assuming his authorship and the date commonly ascribed to it, it seems likely that it, and the accompanying sermon, were written at this time to explicate certain of the doctrines within the newly authorised *Book of Common Prayer* and associated *Articles of Faith*. Protestant emphasis on providence and predestination made the issue of destiny and apparent inequities in experience of individuals regardless of their personal behaviour, particularly pertinent.

Only the part of the play which Alley included in the publication is extant, so we do not know the context for the dialogue. Two protagonists, Phronimos and Larymos engage in a learned theological disputation.<sup>62</sup> Phronimos, the speaker for providence and free will, metaphorically anthropomorphises God in arguing that although the *Bible* says 'God's hand doth inflict' the 'ill of pain', this is deserved punishment and distinct from sin, which is committed by 'man's will' (Sig. 2F5<sup>v</sup>). This reference to God's hand, although open to a purely metaphorical interpretation, personifies God, as do the references to the relationship between God and humans as parental. The two metaphors are mutually supportive and create a mental image of a humanised God. Additionally, the parental metaphor suggests a direct external relationship between God and humans. It is congruent with the 1559

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<sup>62</sup> That this is the argument that the audience is supposed to support would have been clear to an educated elite audience as 'Phronimos' means 'in one's right mind'. I am grateful to Mr. John Fox for this translation. Conversely, Larymos appears to have no meaning. I am grateful to Dr Niall Livingstone, University of Birmingham for thoughtful and detailed correspondence on possible meanings of 'Larymos', which all nevertheless drew a blank. It is likely that not all the St Paul's audience would have had the education necessary to understand this. Any older citizens present, for example, may not have experienced a grammar-school education. There is some danger, in the dialogue as it stands, that these may have ultimately agreed with Larymos, although the accompanying sermon and any performance choices might be used to offset this. Alternatively, it might support Martin Wiggins' suggestion that it was written earlier as a university exercise. Martin Wiggins, *Catalogue* Volume 1, p.354.



*Book of Common Prayer's* catechism for child confirmation, which notes that Christ 'sitteth at the right hand of God the Father'.<sup>63</sup> God here is a distinct external being. Ian Green asserts that the concept of God's fatherhood was common to 'nearly all the many English Protestants who wrote devotional works' because of its use in both the Creed and the Lord's Prayer.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, it creates the impression of a physical, rather than spiritual, God, which was to be increasingly challenged by catechistical and other theological publications.<sup>65</sup>

A similarly physical God is implied by the marquis, Gautier, in *The Comedy of Patient and Meek Grissel*, written by John Phillip, probably around 1561.<sup>66</sup> His first reference is part of a polite exchange of greetings with Grissel's father, Janikell, when he says 'That God protect both thee and thine, that sits in ethereal skies' and then, when confirming that he wishes to marry Grissel he calls on heaven 'and God that lives therein'.<sup>67</sup> 'Sits' and 'lives' both personify God, whilst the comments themselves assume a God actively

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<sup>63</sup> Brian Cummings, *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 152.

<sup>64</sup> Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC*, p.303.

<sup>65</sup> Calvin, for example, was clear that such expressions were only metaphors. God's writing of the Decalogue with his own finger did not mean 'that God hath any hands'. John Calvin, in Arthur Golding (trans.), *The Sermons of M. John Calvin upon the fifth book of Moses called Deuteronomy* (1583) p. 391, SRC2: 4655. My modernisation.

<sup>66</sup> John Phillip was educated at Queen's College, Cambridge but did not graduate. His biographer in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Alexandra Walsham, mentions a description of him as 'a student in divinity' in 1578 by which time he was writing religious tracts though she considers the description of him as a preacher to be 'a piece of spurious title-page publicity'. There is no indication of any specific religious views, and he wrote a variety of genres including ballads, epitaphs, and moral tracts, which perhaps suggests a greater concern to sell the output than with any message it might carry. Alexandra Walsham, "Phillips [Phillip], John (d. 1594x1617), author." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). See, Martin Wiggins *A Catalogue* Volume 1, p.371 for discussion of the authorship and dating of this play. Henceforth referred to as *Grissell*.

<sup>67</sup> John Phillip, *The Play of Patient Grissell*, Ronald Brunlees McKerrow and W. W. Greg (eds.), (London: Malone Society, 1909), (l.639, 734). All subsequent references to *Grissell* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically with my modernisation of spelling throughout.

involved in human affairs. The use of the present tense gives this an immediacy, further humanising the relationship between God and humankind.

A stage direction in Thomas Garter's *The Most Virtuous and Godly Susanna* (1563) potentially gives God a non-speaking but nevertheless anthropomorphic part in the play. Susanna, falsely accused of adultery by two judges whose sexual advances she rejected, has been sentenced to death. The stage direction at this point reads: 'Here the Judge riseth, and Susanna is led to execution, and God raiseth the spirit of Daniel'.<sup>68</sup> The first two are clearly actions to be carried out by the on-stage actors, so speculatively the third might have been too, although God is not listed in the allocation of roles on the cover of the 1575 printed edition of the play. Both the *Great Bible* and the later *Geneva Bible* of 1560 include the story of Susanna in the Apocrypha and both state that 'God raised up the spirit of a young child, whose name was Daniel'.<sup>69</sup> It is likely that the stage direction is simply a statement of what everyone was assumed to know and merely intended to cue Daniel's entrance.<sup>70</sup> However, the specific mention of God leaves open the possibility of an anthropomorphic divine enactment of this.

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<sup>68</sup> Thomas Garter, *The Most Virtuous and Godly Susanna*, Benjamin Ifor Evans and Walter Wilson Greg (eds.), (London: Oxford University Press, for the Malone Society, 1937), l.1061-2. All other references to *Susanna* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically. There is no known information about Garter's education or religious views.

<sup>69</sup> *Great Bible; The Bible and Holy Scriptures conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament*, (The *Geneva Bible*), (Geneva: Rouland Hall, 1560), p.901.

<sup>70</sup> The thirty-nine articles published in 1563 identified the Book of Susannah as one of those not to be used for clarification of doctrine but as containing useful guidance on behaviour and manners so suitable to be read. It is not clear how frequently the story would have been told prior to this time. Church of England, *The Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical, and the Thirty-Nine Articles* (London: printed for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1851), p. 88. This is printed in the same volume as the *Homilies* but with its own pagination. Martin Wiggins' *Catalogue* records two other plays on this subject between 1533 – 1566, both lost. The earliest, entry 114, was a Latin play written by Ralph Radcliffe in around 1542,

Although most later plays generally use more allegorical representations of God, as discussed below, occasional rhetorical anthropomorphisms survive. For example, in the play *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art*, by William Wager 1569, the character God's Judgement refers to the scriptures as coming from 'the mouth of God'.<sup>71</sup> This character represents God, acting as his agent, so his use of personification carries authority. Such references satisfied the theological imperative of God as omnipotent, omniscient, and constantly involved with human affairs through his providence, but presented a problem later for more precise Calvinists, who objected to the inevitable image of an anthropomorphic God which it engenders. Margaret Aston, discussing changing representations of the Trinity, notes that throughout the 1570s there was an increasing 'sense of impropriety about placing any illustrative matter' in scriptural texts.<sup>72</sup> However, this ultimately went beyond pictures. By 1590 at least, such a physical description of God was anathema to many theologians, who felt that it breached the Second Commandment not to make images of God.<sup>73</sup> William Perkins' master asked:

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performed by the boys of Hitchin School before an audience which included townsfolk. The second, entry 305, appears to have been a parish production in Cornwall.

<sup>71</sup> William Wager, *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art*, in R. Mark Benbow (ed.), *The Longer Thou Livest and Enough is as Good as a Feast* (London: Edward Arnold Ltd, 1968), pp. 3–78, l.1794. Henceforth referred to as *Longer*. All subsequent references to *Longer* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

<sup>72</sup> Margaret Aston, *Broken Idols*, p. 580.

<sup>73</sup> Lucy Wooding however notes a continuum of views on this amongst Protestant theologians with some supporting the value of images outside of church. Lucy Wooding, "'So sholde lewde men lerne by ymages": Religious Imagery and Bible Learning', in Robert Armstrong and Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin (eds.), *The English Bible in the Early Modern World* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2018), pp. 29–52. See also the work of Tara Hamling on the use of religious imagery in the Protestant household in *Decorating the 'Godly' Household*; Adam Morton, 'Images and Senses in Post-Reformation England' in *Reformation* 20.1 (2015), pp. 77–100.

Master: How do you conceive this one God in your mind?  
to which the catechumen's answer was:

Catechumen: Not by framing any image of him in my mind (as ignorant folks do, that think of him to be an old man sitting in heaven) but I conceive him by his properties and works.<sup>74</sup>

Perkins described God as a 'spirit or a spiritual substance, most wise, most holy, eternal, infinite', thus avoiding rhetorical anthropomorphisms.<sup>75</sup>

Similarly, Alexander Nowell, author of the most popular Elizabethan catechisms, first published in the early 1570s, responded to the difficulty presented by the Creed's assertion that post-ascension Christ sat on God's right hand, with an explanation that this was simply a metaphor to illustrate Christ's closeness to God and not intended to be taken literally to imply God had hands like humans. The Master asks:

M. When thou namest the right hand of God, and sitting, dost thou suppose and imagine that God hath the shape or form of a man?  
S. No, forsooth, master. But because we speak of God among men, we do in some sort, after the manner of men, express thereby how Christ hath received the kingdom given him of his Father. For kings use to set them on their right hands to who they vouchsafe to do highest honour, and make lieutenants of their dominion. Therefore in these words is meant that God the Father made Christ his Son the head of the Church, and that by him his pleasure is to preserve them that be his, and to govern all things universally.<sup>76</sup>

However, this metaphorical interpretation was the theologians' position. The fact of its inclusion in the catechisms suggests that it did not necessarily reflect everyone's views or parochial practice this early, so it is hardly surprising that representations of God continued in drama. Jonathan Willis discusses extant examples of tables of the Ten Commandments in churches.

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<sup>74</sup> William Perkins, *The Foundation of Christian Religion*. (1590) Sig. A6v.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* Sig. A6r.

<sup>76</sup> Alexander Nowell, *A Catechism written in Latin* G.E. Corrie (ed.), (Cambridge: The Parker Society, 1853), p.163.

He identifies a number as representing God by the sun and two which show 'a white robed hand emerging from a haze of light', giving the tablets of the laws to Moses.<sup>77</sup> One of these dates from 1602, showing that anthropomorphic representations of God were a long way from dead when they disappear in plays. Of course, the hand may be intended to be angelic rather than the hand of God, although even angels were not considered to have physical form by more precise Protestants. However, as the hand comes from a sun-like yellow light in the sky, and the picture is adjacent to an image of the sun, the nearness of which to a picture of the *Bible* inevitably implies it represents God, the most likely assumption for a viewer of the picture seems to be that it is God's hand. This raises the question, if such images continued in churches, why should physical representations of God on the stage disappear?<sup>78</sup>

As Willis points out, these pictures taken together are 'narrative and instructional', but the nature of the instruction received lies in the mind of the viewer, unmediated by another.<sup>79</sup> As John McGavin and Greg Walker say 'Playing is not just what happens on stage but also what happens in the hidden theatre of the spectator's mind'.<sup>80</sup> Many of those writing plays with explicitly religious doctrinal themes in the 1560s were, or later became,

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<sup>77</sup> Jonathan Willis, *The Reformation of the Decalogue*, p.326. For a discussion on contemporary attitudes to visual representations of religious matter see the following works by Tara Hamling, *Decorating the 'Godly' Household*, 'Visual Culture', and, with Richard L. Williams (eds.) 'Introduction' to *Art Re-formed*. See also, Margaret Aston, *Broken Idols*.

<sup>78</sup> It is beyond the scope of this study to answer this question, though issues associated with a more general antagonism towards theatrical performance by the more 'godly' and others in authority for secular as well as religious reasons may be pertinent. Several attempts have been made to answer it but there seems to be no clear consensus, see for example Harold C. Gardiner, *Mysteries End* and Paul Whitfield White, 'Reforming *Mysteries' End*'.

<sup>79</sup> Jonathan Willis, *The Reformation of the Decalogue*, p.323.

<sup>80</sup> John J. McGavin and Greg Walker, *Imagining Spectatorship: From the Mysteries to the Shakespearean Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.121.

church ministers so perhaps such authors came to recognize the dangers of unmediated physical representations of God. Most of the plays discussed in this chapter have a highly specific religiously didactic content so presumably their authors realised that to have God physically present on the stage risked not delivering the message about the nature of God and the route to faith that they wished to teach. Certainly, from the late 1560s the dramatic God ceased to have explicitly anthropomorphic characteristics, the focus turning instead to allegorical representation, as discussed in the next section.

### **Allegorical Characteristics of God**

The Norwich Grocers' play is the last known Protestant play to be written with a fully anthropomorphic God. Subsequent examples in which God is known or assumed to appear are the Catholic Stonyhurst cycle plays from 1624 and various lost puppet shows on biblical themes, also from the seventeenth century, although these may have represented God only symbolically.<sup>81</sup> This suggests that a desire to avoid any anthropomorphic representation of God on the stage was being established by 1565. Becon's catechism of 1560 stated that:

Nothing doth so alienate, estrange and pluck away the heart of man from God and from all godliness, as idols, mawments, images, and puppets, which be made and set forth before the eyes of the simple

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<sup>81</sup> The Stonyhurst pageants are a series of plays, not all complete or extant, which form part of a biblical cycle based on the Douai translation of the *Bible*. They exist in a manuscript found at Stonyhurst College, MS A, VI 33. Further details can be found in Wiggins' *Catalogue* vol. VIII entries 2099 – 2116. The puppet shows are all lost so any divine participation can only be surmised from the limited information available. Further details of those I consider may have involved God can be found in Wiggins' *Catalogue* as follows: *Ninevah* 1599, volume 4, entry 1210; *Puppet play of London*, 1599, volume 4, entry 1214; *Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah* 1606, volume 5, entry 1508; *Creation of the World* pre-1619, volume 5, entry 1588; *Chaos of the World* 1611, volume 6, entry 1638; *Puppet play of Susannah and the Elders*, 1635, volume 9, entry 2489; *Puppet play of Bel and the Dragon*, 1642, volume 10 (forthcoming).

and unlearned people, to preach, and represent unto them the majesty of God.<sup>82</sup>

The reference to preaching here suggests that in 1560 Becon is primarily concerned to avoid such images in church or other explicitly religious contexts. By 1570 however, Alexander Nowell's catechism takes a broader view that God 'forbiddeth us to make *any* images, to express or counterfeit God'.<sup>83</sup> It is not surprising then that plays written in the late 1560s are finding alternative ways to represent the deity's involvement in human affairs.

The response to concerns regarding the idolatrous representation of God was neither immediate nor complete, when, in the late 1560s, playwrights introduced allegorical characters to enact specific aspects of God's presumed engagement with humans. These replaced the anthropomorphic God of earlier drama. Several reflect God's judgement on human behaviour and so only appear towards the end of the play to visit God's final judgement on the protagonists. For example, in *The Trial of Treasure* (1567) God is represented by the character God's Visitation who comes to dispense pain, in punishment for sinful living.<sup>84</sup> In Wager's *Enough is as Good as a Feast* (1568) God's Plague appears.<sup>85</sup> Ulpian Fulwell's *Like*

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<sup>82</sup> Thomas Becon, *The Catechism of Thomas Becon; with other pieces written by him in the reign of King Edward the Sixth*, Rev. John Ayre (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, for the Parker Society, 1844), pp. 66, 73 (original publication 1560). This quotation is particularly interesting in that puppet shows seem to have been the one theatrical art in which God may have continued to have been directly represented, at least until 1611. Puppet shows were not included in the prohibition against the theatre in 1642.

<sup>83</sup> Alexander Nowell, *Catechism*, p.123 – 4. My emphasis. The following response explains this is forbidden because 'there can be no likeness or agreeing between God, which is a Spirit eternal, unmeasurable, infinite, incomprehensible, severed from all mortal composition – and a frail, bodily, silly, spiritless, and vain shape.'

<sup>84</sup> William Wager (attrib.), *The Trial of Treasure* Peter Happé (ed.), (Manchester: Malone Society, 2010). All other references to *Treasure* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically. Spellings have been silently modernised.

<sup>85</sup> William Wager *Enough is as Good as a Feast* in R. Mark Benbow, (ed.), *The Longer Thou Livest and Enough is as Good as a Feast* (London: Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd, 1968),

*Will to Like, Quoth the Devil to the Collier* (1568) has the more positive sounding God's Promises, while *Longer*, as discussed above, involves God's Judgement.<sup>86</sup> These allegorical characters are similar to earlier representations, for example *Vindicta Dei* in John Bale's *Three Laws*, but in the later plays they replace an anthropomorphic God completely, whereas *Vindicta Dei* is an additional divine character who might be doubled with the character *Deus Pater*, explicitly an anthropomorphic God.<sup>87</sup> The later allegorisations illustrate in an externalised form the mental conception of God as 'his properties and works' whilst also acting as agents for that work.<sup>88</sup> In essence they internalise the relationship between God and Man.

The moral interludes of the late 1560s then involve an allegorical character which replaces the anthropomorphic God seen in earlier plays. In all the plays however, this character is explicitly distinct from God. In *Treasure*, God's Visitation's opening declaration: 'I am God's minister called Visitation' (l.963) articulates his separation from God in the word 'minister'. For contemporaries the word 'minister' clearly indicated his subordinate status as God's agent not God himself, although the list of activities he claims, affect both individuals and whole nations, showing his power to be beyond the

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p.79 – 146. All other references to *Enough* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically. Henceforth referred to as *Enough*.

<sup>86</sup> Ulpian Fulwell, *Like Will to Like, Quoth the Devil to the Collier* in Peter Happé (ed.), *Tudor Interludes* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1972), pp. 318–364. Henceforth referred to as *Like Will to Like*. All other references to *Like Will to Like* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.

<sup>87</sup> The stage direction for the entry of *Vindicta Dei* reads '*Enter Vindicta Dei, otherwise Deus Pater*'. However, the editor has placed this in square brackets and the notes to the edition indicate that these are his additions. They are listed as two separate characters in the list of *Interlocutores*. In his notes for *God's Promises* in the same volume Happé records that he has added some stage directions in square brackets but a similar note is not made for *Three Laws*. John Bale *Three Laws*, p.114.

<sup>88</sup> William Perkins *The Foundation of Christian Religion* (1590), Fo. A7r.



human. Similarly in *Longer*, God's Judgement states: 'I *represent* God's severe judgement' (l.1763) and 'Hither am I *sent*' (l.1765).<sup>89</sup> The word 'represent' makes it clear that he is distinct from God whilst 'sent' highlights his subordinate status. It is a personification of one of God's works, passing judgement on humans, rather than an abstraction of God *per se*. God is being distanced from the human protagonists through a third party.

Initially, the allegorical representative of God appears rather different in Fulwell's *Like Will to Like*, possibly written for performance by boys. God's Promise attends on Virtuous Living with another character, Honour, and his pronouncement: 'I *am* God's Promise' (l.838) appears to suggest something less distinct. However, despite this declaration that he *is* God's Promise, he references God in the third person. He and Honour come 'As messengers *from* God, *his* promise to fulfil' (l.845) and he further states that 'Gods Promise is infallible; *his* word is most true' (l.865).<sup>90</sup> By declaring himself to come 'from' God and bring 'his', that is God's, promise, God's Promise separates himself from God, much as allegorical representatives are distanced in other plays. So, these characters are not God but clearly represent him in the stage world. This is an attempt to avoid the possible blasphemy of a human pretending to be God in response to Protestant sensitivities linked to the Second Commandment. Audiences would recognise that these characters represented divine authority and acts but are actively discouraged from thinking that they are seeing God in human form. Whereas in earlier plays God appeared as himself, these later plays are using an allegorical

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<sup>89</sup> My emphases.

<sup>90</sup> My emphases throughout.

alternative. God has an explicit, external representation but no physical image of him is produced. The relationship between God and the protagonist is an internal one but represented through a third character embodying God's works.

The status of these allegorical characters as God's representative is emphasised through the nature of their engagement with the plays' protagonists. Much like the character of God in the 1565 Norwich Grocers' play discussed above this is largely formal. The characterisation of God's Judgement in *Longer* is distant. His initial speech is not directed at the protagonist Moros but at the audience. The audience is referred to in the second person:

The longer thou livest, the more fool thou art.  
This to thee hath been often recited. (l.1759 – 60)

'Thee' in the second of these lines is explicitly directed at the audience. The tone is stern, so it acts as a warning to them to learn from what happens to Moros. References to Moros are in the third person as he describes Moros' faults, demonstrated earlier in the play:

Who hath said there is no God in his heart.  
His holy laws he has stoutly blasphemed. (l.1767 – 1769)

'His' in the first line and 'he' in the second mean Moros. This distances Moros from God's Judgement. Similarly, God's Visitation in *Treasure* speaks sternly throughout. His speech opens with a list of the dire consequences that follow his visits:

Sometimes I bring sickness, sometimes perturbation  
Sometimes trouble and misery throughout the land,  
Sometimes I signify God's wrath to be at hand,  
Sometimes a forerunner of destruction imminent. (l.965 – 968)

The repetition of 'sometimes' creates a forbidding tone. The whole speech is noticeably longer than any other speeches in the scene at twenty-nine lines

plus an additional four later. It is a pronouncement, and, like God speaking to Man in the Norwich Grocers' play, it is not part of a conversation. He addresses Lust using contemptuous language:

Thou incipient fool that hast followed thy lust  
Disdaining the doctrine declared by Sapience. (pp. 970–971)

The alliteration in the second line enhances the sombre and harsh tone of the first. His interaction with the other characters is distant but direct, emphasizing the finality of God's judgement and punishment.

God's Promise in *Like Will To Like* is an exception to this tendency to put a distance between the protagonist and God's representative. Instead of being distant, formal, and rather forbidding, he is intimate, both with the protagonist, Virtuous Living, and with the allegorical blessings, Honour and Good Fame. God's Promise is friendly and cheerful. His opening line, addressed to Virtuous Living and Good Fame is very human: 'God rest you merry both, and God be your guide' (l.835) and at the end of the section he joins them in a song in praise of God. This better reflects the blessings that he brings. The other plays enacted the punishment sinful Man should expect for transgressions whilst this character brings reward. Nevertheless, the consequence is that this play does not have the same sense of an interiorised God evident in other plays of this period and genre.<sup>91</sup> Although *Like Will to Like* is doctrinally sound it is much less careful to reinforce the importance of

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<sup>91</sup> This difference may be the consequence of the different interests of its author. Although Fulwell was an ordained minister, obtaining a Gloucestershire parish in 1570, David Kathman suggests he was not very assiduous in performing his duties, preferring to focus on his secular writing. This contrasts with William Wager whose pastoral care in his parish was praised by contemporaries and who was awarded a lectureship for any parish in London. For Ulpian Fulwell see David Kathman, 'Fulwell, Ulpian (1545.6 – 1584)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). For William Wager see Peter Happé, 'Wager, William (1537/8? – 1591)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

God's grace in enabling faith and good behaviour. This in turn implies that the fate of the wicked characters is in the hands of the Vice, Nichol Newfangle, on behalf of Lucifer, rather than God. Although *Like Will to Like* avoids the blasphemous staging of God in the same way as Wager's plays, it lacks their portrayal of God as the superior supernatural force or the careful articulation of the Protestant doctrine of justification. Despite this, all the plays clearly distinguish between the allegorical character acted on the stage by a human actor and God. God is not anthropomorphised, despite the physicality of his representatives.

The distinction between God and his representative is also emphasised by the different timescales they operate on. God's actions occur in the future and are post-mortal, while those of his representatives are immediate. God's Plague tells Worldly Man in *Enough* that he 'shalt depart from [his] house and land' and that 'God will overthrow' his family and 'will take no mercy' (l.1227, 1237, 1242), 'shalt' and 'will' indicating future events. Similarly, in *Longer*, having articulated Moros' sins, God's Judgement warns that his 'household shall be dispersed' and his 'children shall be rooted out to the fourth degree' (l.1792, 1793). The use of the future tense for God's actions associates these punishments with the final judgement after death. They will not be shown in the play, but it assures audiences that they will be punished in the hereafter.

The actions of the representative characters conversely are immediate and so in the present tense. God's Judgement tells Moros 'I strike thee' (l.1791). Similarly, God's Plague tells Worldly Man:

It is even I that upon thee doth blow, (l.1223)  
[...]

I am the plague of God properly called  
Which cometh on the wicked suddenly;  
I go through all towns and cities strongly walled,  
Striking to death, and that without all mercy.  
Here thou wicked, covetous person I do strike.  
(l.1223; l.1243 – 1247)

The repetition of 'I' and the present tense verbs in 'doth blow', 'am', 'cometh', 'go', 'striking' and 'strike' all give his presence an immediacy, which emphasises the suddenness with which God's retribution, in the form of death, could strike. This adds to the potential fear the characters generate on God's behalf whilst separating them from him, further underlining their nature as representatives of God, not God himself. The relationship between God and Man is thus distanced by being represented through a third person. That character's relationship to the protagonist is direct and personal but God's is indirect and impersonal.

The exact nature of the relationship between these representatives of the divine and the protagonists varies however, exhibiting increasing levels of internalisation across the plays. In *Treasure* all the characters can see and hear God's Visitation and respond directly to his pronouncements. Although he does not explicitly answer them, what he says does logically follow on from their remarks. Much like God in the Norwich Grocer's play, this is not a conversation, but it is mutual engagement. For example, after Pleasure has told Lust that he is unable to stay with him, God's Visitation points out:

I could in like case separate thy treasure  
But God doth admonish thee by losing thy pleasure. (l.1014 – 5)

He is not responding directly to Lust but is engaging with him, warning that further punishment is possible. The innate sinfulness of all humans, even the elect, is emphasised when God's Visitation notes that he has already visited

Just, since the elect are first in God's attention. That this interaction with Just is not staged emphasizes the internal nature of Just's faith and hence his relationship with God. This was originally articulated by Just following his defeat of Lust:

Not of my power I do thee expel  
But by the might of his spirit that dwelleth in me. (l.152 – 3)

Just, then, recognises his dependence on the 'spirit' of God 'in' him to overcome sinful human tendencies. In contrast, Lust's lack of faith, requires an external action through direct staged engagement with God's representative. Protestantism's privileging of a direct, personal, non-intercessory and, essentially, internal relationship with God is thus emphasised.

In contrast to this active, physical engagement between God's Visitation and Lust, Wager uses a dramatic device to indicate the internalisation of the relationship with God in *Enough*. The allegorical representation of God, God's Plague, visits the reprobate character, Worldly Man, while he is alone and sleeping, speaking into his mind as a dream. That God's Plague's speech is heard in Worldly Man's dream is apparent in the latter's subsequent, seemingly incoherent, comments when Covetous and Ignorance return to the stage. These characters disregard God's Plague, who now stands 'at the door', apparently unaware of his presence, and after some banter, notice the sleeping Worldly Man.<sup>92</sup> Although they have not directed any remarks at him, he seems to respond:

O, I would if I could, but now it is too late.

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<sup>92</sup> Stage direction after line 1250.

Hold thy peace I pray thee and do me no more rate. (l.1277 – 8)

This is clearly a response to the remarks previously made by God's Plague and sound like he is addressing his guilty conscience. The conscience was seen as 'the spiritual instrument of the divine will' deemed to bring guidance and punishment.<sup>93</sup> That guidance was offered is evidenced by 'I would if I could' and Worldly Man also feels the punishment of God's Plague as he implores him to 'do me no more rate'. Worldly Man's subsequent remark 'Is there no remedy but to hell I must needs sink?' (l.1282) confirms that he is responding to God's Plague's warnings. Ignorance subsequently interprets it as a dream, not recognising its divine source. Worldly Man's lack of consciousness of God's Plague makes the latter appear more distant, but, simultaneously, as Worldly Man is the only character to hear God's Plague, it is also more personal. The use of a dream effectively internalises the exchange. Thus, the dramatic device of a dream apparition, allows the engagement with God's representative to remain an internal experience for the protagonist but be externalised for the audience to witness. The implicit link with the conscience encourages audiences to consider their own voice of conscience as a divine visitation, whilst Worldly Man's subsequent fate alerts them to the need to listen to it.

The nature of the interaction between Moros and God's Judgement in *Longer* is less clear. The relationship with God is externalised by an allegorical being, but Moros does not see and appears not to hear him. However, he clearly feels the effect of God's Judgement's presence,

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<sup>93</sup> John S. Wilks, *The Idea of Conscience in Renaissance Tragedy* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.42.

internalising the relationship. After God's Judgement has struck Moros and warned of future punishment from God, Moros responds:

Either I have the falling sickness,  
Or else with the palsy I am stricken.  
I feel in myself no manner of quickness;  
I begin now strangely to sicken. (l.1795 – 9)

He addresses these remarks to himself. He has just been literally physically struck down by God's Judgement but attributes his fall to 'the falling sickness' or a 'palsy', indicating that he does not recognise God's Judgement's presence. Internalisation is increased by Moros's 'I feel *in* myself', whilst the association of his sickness with the supernatural presence is reinforced by the word 'strangely'. Like all the dramatic reprobates though, despite Judgement's warning that he should repent, he disregards the warning and concludes:

It was but a qualm came over my heart;  
I lack nothing but a cup of good wine. (l.1803 - 4)

This further indicates that he is not conscious of the presence of God's Judgement. When Confusion, following God's Judgement's instructions, divests Moros of his clothes of office and replaces them with a 'fool's coat' (l.1820) Moros concludes he is dreaming:

Am I asleep, in a dream, or in a trance?  
Ever methink that I should be waking.  
Body of God! this is a wonderful chance;  
I cannot stand on my feet for quaking. (l.1823 – 6)

He continues the assumption later saying, 'I see well that I was asleep indeed' (l.1840). Again, this shows he can neither see nor hear God's Judgement. There is irony in the suggestion that he can 'see well', as the speech reinforces his inability to see, underlining his spiritual blindness. The



references to dreaming and the lack of direct conversation between Moros and God's Judgement create the sense that even if Moros has some sense of the presence of God's Judgment, which his use of 'wonderful' might suggest, this is not as the external physical presence that the audience experiences.<sup>94</sup> In this way, for the protagonist, God's Judgement is effectively internalised, emphasising that the relationship with God is also an internal one. The internalisation of the relationship between God and humans, with no external intermediary was a key distinguishing feature of Protestant faith. Catholics engaged with God through the ministrations of the priest or the intercession of the saints, but Protestant reformers rejected this.

Finally, that Moros cannot see God's Judgement is evidenced by his immediate reaction to Confusion's appearance:

Here is an ill-favoured knave, by the mass  
Get thee hence, thief, with a wanion. (l.1811 – 2)

This is not simply a passing insult. The stage direction after l.1806 says that Confusion has an 'ill-favoured visage' and Moros is remarking on that. However, God's Judgement is also required to have a 'terrible visage'.<sup>95</sup> Had Moros been able to see God's Judgement then, he would surely have remarked on it. T. W. Craik suggests that allegorical characters representing God's judgement in these morality plays may have worn ugly masks to emphasise God's terrible power.<sup>96</sup> He notes Inclination calls God's Visitation 'you ill-favoured lout' in *The Trial of Treasure*, although given the nature of the

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<sup>94</sup> His swearing 'body of God' simply highlights his reprobate status further as it is a clear breach of the Third Commandment: 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain'. Church of England, *Book of Common Prayer, 1559: The Elizabethan Prayer Book*, John E. Booty, (ed.) (Washington: Folger Books, 1976), p. 248.

<sup>95</sup> Stage direction after l.1758.

<sup>96</sup> T. W. Craik, *The Tudor Interlude*, p. 52.

Vice character he may simply be insulting him.<sup>97</sup> Such masking would have had the added effect of de-humanising the allegorical characters, much as God had been masked in earlier plays, increasing the awe they were intended to inspire in the plays' audiences. Moros's experience, for example, was clearly frightening, evidenced by his 'quaking' (l.1826), although there is an intended comic element too. Unlike the allegorical characters associated with the Devil discussed in chapter three, none of these representatives of God are in any way comic, even when the protagonists' reactions are funny. They are delivering a serious and fearful warning against human sinfulness and the need for faith in God's justice and mercy to achieve salvation in line with the greater emphasis on these in Protestant theodicy.

All the plays discussed in this section are moral interludes satirising perceived social ills, rather than biblical plays, but they have a clear Protestantising agenda.<sup>98</sup> The action centres on one or two lead protagonists, either virtuous or vicious. Allegorical characters are used to tempt the protagonists, externalising the internal human temptations or failings against which Protestants believed humans must struggle to demonstrate the faith that was the sign of the elect. Other allegorical characters represent the spiritual help deemed to be offered by God. Both sets of characters engage directly with the audience drawing them in and encouraging them to apply the

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> The plays discussed in this section evidence many of the features of the traditional morality play genre. For a detailed discussion of morality drama see for example T.W. Craik, *The Tudor Interlude*; Lois Potter, 'The Reformation and the Moral Play' in Norman Sanders, Richard Southern, T.W. Craik, Lois Potter (eds.), *The Revels History of Drama in England*, Vol II, 1500 – 1576 (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 176-206; Greg Walker (ed.), *Medieval Drama: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publications, 2000); David Bevington, *From 'Mankind' to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

lessons to themselves. Ultimately the protagonists are either saved or damned, dependant on their responses to the temptations and spiritual support they experience.

This religious message is most pronounced in *The Trial of Treasure* in which the vice, Natural Inclination tries to lure *alter egos* Just and Lust into evil ways. The virtuous character, Just, is subjected to the attentions of Natural Inclination, but, with the help of God and the externalised spiritual supporters, achieves a state of assurance. Just successfully bridles Inclination aided internally by God and externally by Sapience, Trust and Contentation.<sup>99</sup> The lesson is made explicit by Sapience who, in keeping with his name, advises the audience that to achieve salvation everyone must do as Just has done:

Thus should every man that will be called Just,  
Bridle and subdue his beastly inclination,  
That he in the end may obtain perfect trust,  
The messenger of God to give light to salvation. (l.542 – 546)

Although the fight with Inclination is external, its internal nature is highlighted by the possessive pronoun 'his', personalising the 'beastly inclination' against which 'every man' must fight. Sapience's name emphasises not only that this is wise advice, but that its inspiration is divine.<sup>100</sup> Trust and Contentation externalise the inner voices of faith – 'the messenger[s] of God', bringing light. These allegorical spiritual support characters were considered internal components of humans. They were seen as aids provided by God's grace

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<sup>99</sup> This is an interesting inversion of what Craik describes as the traditional, and continuing, practice of putting virtuous characters in the stocks. T.W. Craik, *The Tudor Interlude*, pp. 93–6.

<sup>100</sup> "sapience, n.". *Oxford English Dictionary* Online edition. March 2021. Oxford University Press.

and demonstrate God's assumed on-going active role in human lives, but they are not God nor a part of him. The direct involvement of God in achieving this is highlighted in the song that they sing on entry:

Their Inclination thou dost stay,  
And sendeth them Sapience,  
That they should serve and eke obey,  
Thy high magnificence.  
Thou sendeth contentation,  
That we in thee may rest,  
Therefore all adoration,  
To thee pertaineth best. (l.653 – 660)

'Thou' and 'thee' here refer to God. Trust in God to save Christians despite their sinfulness was an essential part of faith for Protestants whilst

Contentation represents both a sense of contentment with one's situation but also, for contemporaries, was the term used for Christ's sacrificial act of payment for human sin.<sup>101</sup> Christ was, of course, 'sent' by God to enable humans to 'rest' in him eternally. This is a hymn of praise to God, which emphasises the Protestant focus on justification by faith, as opposed to the Catholic inclusion of the merit of good works.

Despite its traditional form then, this play, like the others discussed here, is doctrinally Protestant, constantly stressing that salvation only comes through faith, that this faith is a gift of God and that those thus elected demonstrate the liveliness of their faith by actively seeking to overcome their inherently reprobate nature. William Wager was known by contemporaries as an active Protestant minister.<sup>102</sup> Ultimately of course Lust fails and is punished whilst Just succeeds, receives lighter punishment, and is given the

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<sup>101</sup> "contentation, n.". *Oxford English Dictionary* Online edition. March 2021. Oxford University Press.

<sup>102</sup> Peter Happé, 'Wager, William (1537/8? – 1591)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

services of Pleasure in reward. A similar pattern is evident in the other plays, with only the specific sins satirised varying. God is shown to be an active but invisible power, whose relationship with humans is direct, internal but distanced by his own perfection and humans' innate inclination to sinfulness. The plays therefore highlight fundamental differentiating features of Protestant doctrine and dramatize God's role within it.

This section has demonstrated how sensitivities about the dramatization of God began to be addressed through the use of allegorical representations of God's powers. Additionally, playwrights used these characters to help highlight newly emphasised elements of the Christian doctrine of justification. God retains his omnipotence and omniscience through the powers wielded by his representatives, but a strong focus is placed on the presence or absence of a lively faith by the protagonists. Finally, the plays begin to try and represent the concept of a direct, internalised relationship with God, not mediated by any other human presence. This was an important distinguishing feature of Protestant belief, distinct from Catholic reliance on intercession by priests or saints, which these plays are actively trying to teach their audiences. The next section shows how this internalisation of God was completed.

## The Internalised God

The final play from this period with a similar allegorical character is *New Custom*, 1573, in which the internalisation is more explicit.<sup>103</sup> The representative of God is God's Felicity who comes to the newly converted protagonist once he has experienced Edification and Assurance of the truth of the Protestant faith.<sup>104</sup> Previous allegorical characters have made statements of the form: 'I am God's' Visitation, Plague, Judgement, or Promise. This externalises the physical experiences God is deemed to be sending the protagonists, even as the mode of representation internalises it. As these experiences are themselves physical, external, and visible (death, poverty, pleasure) this is apt. Although the protagonists lack spiritual faith and references are made to the eternal consequences of this, the outcomes are immediate and essentially worldly. This is in keeping with the plays' concern with specified contemporary moral issues.

Conversely, in *New Custom* the rewards of conversion to the 'true' faith are less obviously tangible, and deliberately unworldly. Consequently, the nature of the persona bringing those rewards changes. Instead of stating 'I am God's Felicity', the character says: 'Which Felicity in person here I do represent'.<sup>105</sup> The character standing on the stage in person, only *represents* the state of happiness promised by God to true believers. It does not represent God. The allegorical nature of the representation is explicitly

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<sup>103</sup> The author of this play is unknown and there are no records of a performance.

<sup>104</sup> Other allegorical characters in the play.

<sup>105</sup> John S. Farmer (ed.), *New Custom in Anonymous Plays, Third Series, 1550 - 1565* (London: Early English Drama Society, 1906), pp. 157–202, 3.1, p.201. All other references to *New Custom* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically. Spelling silently modernised.

articulated. This might signal the character as an angel, a messenger of God, rather than an embodiment of an aspect of divine power. However, the character's role seems to be to represent an abstract state of contentment rather than to deliver a message or act as an agent. Clearly happiness as an emotional state, cannot easily be shown physically on stage, especially if one wishes to avoid reference to worldly causes of happiness and focus on purely spiritual ones.<sup>106</sup> Mary Ann Lund notes that Richard Burton, in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) considers 'the sight of God' as 'the state of true happiness' and that he focuses on spiritual 'seeing' not physical to avoid idolatry.<sup>107</sup> As I have shown above, even by the early 1570s playwrights were anxious to avoid offering both their on- and off-stage audiences any 'sight' of God. The character of God's Felicity only appears at the end, and there is no subsequent action other than praising God and traditional prayers for the Church, Queen and Commonwealth. In case any in the audience are in doubt, the protagonist then explains that 'after this transitory/ life they may come to thy perfect Felicity' (3.1, p.202). 'After' and 'may' stress the post-mortal and contingent nature of Felicity's blessings, whilst 'transitory life'

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<sup>106</sup> For discussions on renaissance emotions and their representation on the stage see, for example: Farah Karim-Cooper, *The Hand on the Shakespearean Stage: Gesture, Touch and the Spectacle of Dismemberment* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016). It is interesting to note that while Karim-Cooper lists both grief and despair in her index there is no reference to happiness, joy or similar positive emotions aside from love; *The Renaissance of Emotion: Understanding Affect in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* edited by Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), particularly their Introduction, pp. 1-22 and David Bagchi "'The Scripture Moveth us in Sundry places": Framing biblical emotions in the *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Homilies*', pp. 45-64; Penelope Gouk and Helen Hills (eds.), *Representing Emotions: New Connections in the Histories of Art, Music, and Medicine* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Tiffany Stern, *Making Shakespeare: From Stage to Page* (London & New York: Routledge, 2004) discusses actors 'passionating' to represent the characters' emotions, p.80.

<sup>107</sup> Mary Ann Lund, 'Robert Burton, Perfect Happiness and the *visio dei*' in Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan (eds.), *The Renaissance of Emotion: Understanding Affect in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), pp.86-105, p.87, 96.

suggests its contrasting eternal spirituality. This physically external character, God's Felicity, is explicitly only representing a temporary worldly state as an exemplar of the 'perfect Felicity' that follows death. God has been fully internalised.

The process of internalising God and his relationship with humans is completed in Nathaniel Woodes' *The Conflict of Conscience* (1572).<sup>108</sup> In this play two characters, Spirit, and Horror, visit the protagonist, Philologus, as messengers from God.<sup>109</sup> Unlike in the earlier plays they are not allegorical representations of God or his works. Philologus, initially a godly Protestant, renounces his faith following temptation from the demonically inspired Catholic Church. His apostasy leads to a visit from the character, Spirit. Spirit does not introduce himself other than to say that the warning he brings is 'given *from* God' (l.1677), emphasising his distinction from God. His subsequent reference to 'thy Lord and God' in the third person further indicates his own separateness from God (l.1697). As with divine messengers and representatives in earlier plays, his tone is stern, and he primarily uses the imperative. Spirit's opening remarks are a series of imperatives warning Philologus of his danger:

Philologus, Philologus, Philologus I say!  
In time take heed; go not too far; look well thy steps unto!  
[...]  
Weigh well this warning given from God, before thou further go.  
(l.1673 – 4, 1677)

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<sup>108</sup> Nathaniel Woodes, *The Conflict of Conscience* Herbert John Davis and Frank Percy Wilson (eds.), (London: Malone Society, 1952). All other references to *Conflict* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.

<sup>109</sup> The full name of the character referred to as Horror is 'Confusion and Horror-of-the-Mind'. He states this in an early speech, but the speech prefix is Horror throughout and I use that name to avoid confusion.



The alliteration in 'weigh well this warning' (l.1677) in conjunction with the serial imperatives creates a sombre, stern tone appropriate to a divine warning. The solemn nature of his words is underlined by the monosyllabic form of the imperatives and resembles in tone those used by God in the creation plays, discussed above. This all has a distancing effect. However, he is clearly intended to be part of Philologus's consciousness rather than having an external existence. Although he is given an entrance in the text, neither Philologus nor Suggestion can see him. Philologus asks:

Alas, what voice is this I hear, so dolefully to sound,  
Into mine ears. (l.1681 – 2)

Suggestion, however, gives no indication of having heard anything. He later responds to Philologus's articulation of the warning of God's anger with 'These are but fancies certainly' (l.1712). That the Spirit is intended to be internal to Philologus is reinforced by his assertion that his '*heart* doth tremble for distress, [his] *conscience* pricks [him] sore' (l.1707).<sup>110</sup> Previous protagonists, such as Worldly Man in *Enough* experienced bodily pains as a consequence of God's message to them:

All the parts of my body wanteth relief.  
O Devotion, I have such pains in my head  
That truly, truly, I wish myself even dead. (l.1294 – 6)

Philologus's suffering is spiritual though, further internalising the relationship with God.

Indeed, there is considerable focus on internal and outward aspects of faith in this scene. Spirit reminds Philologus, and the off-stage audience, that, like Natural Inclination in *Trial of Treasure*, Sensual Suggestion, though

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<sup>110</sup> My emphasis.

represented as a separate character, is an inherent part of his own human nature:

Let not Suggestion of *thy flesh*, thy Conscience thee betray.  
(l.1675)<sup>111</sup>

The association with the flesh is a negative one since, as Anna Bertolet explains, flesh was not simply the body but a part of the soul, an active agent alongside the spirit, and frequently in combat with it.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, Spirit warns Philologus that though ‘the frailty of the flesh’ has encouraged him to ‘deny with *outward lips*, thy Lord and God most dear’, he should not ‘the same [...] stablish with consent, of Conscience’ (l.1696 - 8). He goes on to advise Philologus to:

Shut up these words *within* thy breast, which sound so in thine ear:  
The *outward* man hath caused thee, this enterprise to take,  
Beware lest wickedness of spirit, the same do perfect make.  
(l.1703 – 5)<sup>113</sup>

Inner faith is being stressed here through the distinction between ‘outward lips’, and his conscience ‘within thy breast’. Faith is being externalised by the actor playing the part of Spirit. Philologus’ ‘outward’ desires have made him reject his faith but it is his internal ‘spirit’ that needs to rebel for the blasphemy to be complete. This distinction between internal and external reflects the argument that supported religious equivocation. As Alexandra Walsham notes, most theologians warned this endangered the Christian’s soul but that this separation between inward beliefs and outward words reflect an ‘understanding of conscience which bifurcated inner beliefs from outward

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<sup>111</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>112</sup> Anna Riehl Bertolet, ‘The “Blindnesse of the Flesh” in Nathaniel Woodes’ *The Conflict of Conscience*’ in Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 144–160.

<sup>113</sup> My emphases.

behaviour and prioritized the former over the latter'.<sup>114</sup> Spirit warns of the internal struggle, articulated by Philologus in the next scene when, under pressure from Conscience, he moans: 'My flesh and spirit to contend' [*sic.*] (l.1893).<sup>115</sup> This was a commonplace experience for the godly, and, as Philologus and his pupil, Mathetus, discussed earlier in the play, equally as indicative of elect status as of reprobate. Later drama would develop the soliloquy to represent inner dialogue and struggle of conscience, but that leaves the potential for the protagonist to be deceiving him/herself – a recognised danger with the conscience.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, and importantly for the didacticism of the earlier drama, it leaves the audience in doubt as to the legitimacy of the protagonists' words. Using a physical character to externalise the engagement with God, ensures audiences are clear of the authority of what is said.

The potential for self-deceit is demonstrated by Confusion and Horror-of-the-Mind, another character in *The Conflict of Conscience*. The status of this allegorical character is ambiguous. He appears to be an agent of God but also associates himself with Satan. His introductory lines suggest the former:

My name is called Confusion and Horror-of-the-Mind,

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<sup>114</sup> Alexandra Walsham, 'Ordeals of Conscience: Casuistry, Conformity and Confessional Identity in Post-Reformation England' in Harald Braun and Edward Vallence (eds.), *Contexts of Conscience and Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 32–48, p. 38.

<sup>115</sup> The text reads 'My flesh and spirit *to* contend' but it seems clear from the rest of the speech that 'do' is what is meant. The play's editor has not commented on this word.

<sup>116</sup> As discussed for example by William Perkins in his *A Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience, distinguished into three bookes etc.* (Cambridge: J. Legat, Printer to the University of Cambridge, 1608). Nathan Johnstone discusses the increasing focus on the internalised nature of temptation and links with the Devil in his essay 'The Protestant Devil: The Experience of Temptation in Early Modern England' in the *Journal of British Studies* vol. 43, no. 2 (April 2004), pp. 173–205. This is discussed in more detail in chapter three of this work.

And to correct impenitents, *of God* I am assigned. (l.1968 – 9)<sup>117</sup>  
'Of God' implies 'by God'. However, his appearance is triggered by

Philologus telling his children:

I do not care what to my soul betide,  
So long as this prosperity and wealth by me abide. (l.1957 – 9)

Such disregard for the fate of his soul would have signalled to a contemporary audience a total fall, making him a suitable candidate for the attentions of Satan. However, as contemporary theology held that Satan could only act with God's permission, the two are not incompatible.<sup>118</sup>

Unlike Spirit, Horror is visible to Philologus, who questions him directly:

What is thy name? Whence comest thou? Wherefore, to me  
disclose[?] (l.1966)

The first two questions clearly indicate a physical presence, but neither of his two children are aware of Horror's presence. Gisbertus asks: 'Alas dear father, what doth move and cause you to lament' (l.2000). This suggests Horror is a selective manifestation, perhaps even an externalisation of something within Philologus's own conscience. This possibility adds to the sense of unreliability associated with this character. The panicked tone of Philologus' rapidly fired questions suggests Horror appears terrifying. Unlike Spirit, Horror engages with Philologus, immediately providing answers to these questions. This more direct engagement, albeit brief on Philologus' part, implies a different, less distant, more human relationship. Despite Horror's invisibility to the other characters, this is an external relationship further associating Horror more with the Devil than with God. Horror also

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<sup>117</sup> My hyphenation and my emphasis.

<sup>118</sup> See chapter 3 for a discussion of the role of blasphemy in granting the Devil access to a human and his dependence upon God for permission to act.

explains more than the other supernatural manifestations discussed in this chapter. He tells Philologus that he brings 'The spirit of Satan, blasphemy, confusion and cursing' (l.1983) because Philologus 'hast extinguished the Holy Spirit of God,' (l.1977). The rest of Horror's speech ties him directly to the Devil, albeit acting as God's agent:

I have caught thee in thy pride and brought thee to damnation,  
So that thou art a pattern true of God's just indignation.  
(l.1987 – 80)

The active verbs 'caught' and 'brought' emphasise his own role in Philologus' impending punishment. The main indicator that this character is a representative of Satan rather than God, however, lies in the false doctrine he articulates. He claims that the Holy Spirit:

[...] *will no longer* in thy soul, and spirit make abode;  
But with the Graces, *which he gave to thee*, now is he gone.  
(l.1979 – 80)<sup>119</sup>

Under the doctrine of predestination, the Holy Spirit gave grace to the elect. This was a once and for all gift, that humans had no free will to reject and was independent of any action of theirs but faith, which was itself a gift from God, indicative of election.<sup>120</sup> Calvinist Protestantism preached that this was predetermined in the earliest times.<sup>121</sup> Philologus had demonstrated earlier his lack of faith, but Horror is wrong to suggest that this would cause grace, *once given*, to be taken away. The reprobate might experience some of the early feelings of grace, described by Perkins as 'a calling not effectual' but this was not a sign of true grace having been given to be subsequently taken

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<sup>119</sup> My emphases.

<sup>120</sup> Though it should be noted that at this time the ability of Man to choose to reject God's grace was still a debated question.

<sup>121</sup> It was a subject of contemporary theological debate whether this was before or just after the fall.

away.<sup>122</sup> Grace given was irreversible. As Erin Sullivan notes the pastoral ‘Table’ produced by William Perkins to help reassure the godly, shows two pre-determined pathways: one for the elect and one for the reprobate. Both exhibit similar spiritual experiences of faith and doubt but there is no path crossing from one to the other.<sup>123</sup> In suggesting God’s grace has been taken away from Philologus because of his behaviour Horror is denying the doctrine of predestination – the official doctrine of the contemporary Church of England. Horror is clearly demonic.

However, this was a challenging doctrine for people to understand or engage with, as it states that nothing an individual does will affect their spiritual status. That potentially raised difficult questions about the need to behave well which could be socially disruptive. The morality plays discussed in this chapter appear to have told a different story. Apart from *Worldly Man in Enough*, characters are clearly ‘good’ or ‘bad’ throughout, but their spiritual status, as evidenced by what happens to them ultimately, is explicitly associated with their behaviour. As Maria Devlin points out ‘even if the protagonist’s salvation has already been decided, the play implies that the decision turns on something that happens during the play itself.’<sup>124</sup> She refers

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<sup>122</sup> William Perkins, ‘A Survey or Table declaring the order of the causes of salvation and damnation according to God’s word’ in Perkins, William, 1558-1602. *A Golden Chaine, Or the Description of Theologie Containing the Order of the Causes of Saluation and Damnation, According to Gods Word. Written in Latine, and Translated by R.H. Hereunto is Adioined the Order which M. Theodore Beza Used in Comforting Afflicted Consciences* (London: Printed by J. Orwin for Iohn Legate; printer to the Vniuersitie of Cambridge, 1597).

<sup>123</sup> Erin Sullivan, ‘Doctrinal Doubleness and the Meaning of Despair in William Perkins’s “Table” and Nathaniel Woodes’s *The Conflict of Conscience* in *Studies in Philology* vol. 110, no. 3, Sumer 2013, pp. 533–561. William Perkins’ “Table” was printed in his *A Golden Chain, or The Description of Theology* [1590] extant published edition from 1600.

<sup>124</sup> Maria Devlin, ‘“If it were made for man, ‘twas made for me”: Generic Damnation and Rhetorical Salvation in Reformation Preaching and Plays’ in Jonathan Willis (ed.), *Sin and Salvation in Reformation England* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 173–189, p.175.

to this as 'theology-as-taught', which she calls 'rhetorical theology', distinct from formal doctrine, or 'systematic theology', articulated by theologians, and suggests that it is the former that is often reflected in contemporary drama.<sup>125</sup> This reflects Ian Green's findings that predestination was not a doctrine that was emphasised in popular catechisms.<sup>126</sup> So, probably, Horror's theological error would have gone unnoticed by all but the most doctrinally alert audience members.<sup>127</sup>

Following initial publication, however, perhaps Woodes did notice the contradiction. This play exists in two versions.<sup>128</sup> The original version was probably written in 1572 but was not published until 1581. It ends tragically with Philologus' despair and suicide. For contemporary audiences this clearly marks him as damned. It reinforces Horror's declaration that God's grace has been taken away because of his apostasy. This version explicitly follows the historical case of Frances Spera, referencing him on the title page and in the prologue. Spera denied his Protestant faith under pressure from the Catholic Inquisition and subsequently was presumed to have killed himself.

The second version was published in the same year. It is identical except for the omission of any reference to Spera and a change to the final fourteen lines. Crucially, Philologus experiences a last-minute redemption.

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p.174.

<sup>126</sup> Ian Green *The Christian's ABC*, p.359.

<sup>127</sup> There is no evidence that *The Conflict of Conscience* was ever performed. Martin Wiggins' date argument suggests that it might have been intended for performance during Woodes' time in Cambridge. Wiggins *Catalogue* vol. 2 entry 519, pp. 75–78. If this was the case, this error would be highly pertinent for its original audiences. By the time it was published in 1581 Woodes is described on the title page as 'a minister, in Norwich'.

<sup>128</sup> Erin Kelly discusses the changes between the versions and links it to evidence of censorship. Erin Kelly, 'The Conflict of Conscience and Sixteenth-century Religious Drama' in *English Literary Renaissance* vol. 44 (3), 2014, pp. 388–419.

Although he had intended to starve or hang himself, he was ‘converted unto God’ and ‘his errors all, he did renounce, his blasphemies he abhorred’ (l.2413, 2415). Most importantly the final line suggests that his death, which in itself is not stated with any certainty in this version, was not at his own hand, as ‘the Lord, in mercy great hath eased him of his pain’ (l.2424).<sup>129</sup> This leaves the way clear for Horror’s assertions to be proved false, as one would expect of an advocate of the Devil, and Spirit’s urging of Philologus to repent, justified – he was one of the elect all along. The difficulty of this argument is that it imposes ‘systematic theology’ on a play that necessarily operates on an assumption of ‘rhetorical theology’. Systematic theology depends on retrospective rationalisation which is impossible in the ‘real time’ world of drama. Nevertheless, for a minister like Woodes, educated at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, it is likely that he felt uncomfortable with the tension between the two generated in the first ending, so that the changes made represent an attempt to address this.<sup>130</sup> Nevertheless this is not entirely successful. Perhaps this demonstrates one reason why clerics gave up play writing as a means of religious education.

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<sup>129</sup> Bertolet argues that even in the second ending Philologus commits suicide through his determined refusal of food. This is a plausible reading of an ending which is ambiguous. I present a more positive view because Nuntius announces his death as ‘joyful news’ which he surely would not have done had he perceived it as a suicide case. In the original ending he entered with ‘doleful news’ (l.2411). The ending is sufficiently ambiguous that both alternatives would be available to contemporary audiences. Anna Riehl Bertolet ‘The “Blindness of the Flesh”’. Robert Hunter argues that the play centralizes the mystery of God’s judgement, with God’s will, not Man’s, as the driving force. Robert G. Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Mystery of God’s Judgements* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976), pp. 20–38.

<sup>130</sup> This is not to suggest that rhetoric and systematic theology are necessarily contradictory, simply that theology enacted in the moment focuses on the individual, sometimes at the expense of the broader picture. Thus, they may appear contradictory, particularly to modern audiences. John Cox comments that ‘the ability of early audiences to tolerate inherent ambiguities in theatrical illusion is hard to overestimate.’ Perhaps this is a case in point. John D. Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350 - 1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.151.



In both the plays discussed in this section the agents of God have been fully internalised. Despite their presentation by physical performers, the audience is left in no doubt that what they see is an external manifestation of an internal experience felt by the protagonist alone. Even he is not fully cognisant of what he is experiencing. This could remind audiences that their relationship with God should be internal and personal rather than mediated through another, as was the case with Catholicism. They also stress the importance of discriminating between the voices of the flesh and those of the spirit. All the plays in this chapter use their increasingly internalised representation of God to address contemporary religious concerns of the visualisation of God as a form of idolatry. They additionally present aspects of explicitly Protestant doctrine visually, in a manner that is clearly didactic. The doctrine *Conflict* interrogates is more nuanced and complex, which I argue may have contributed to Woodes' decision to create a second ending.

The physicality involved in manifesting God, however, means that the presence of God in these plays is sporadic, occurring at key points to affect judgement and eternal reward or punishment. For contemporaries though, God was deemed to be omnipresent in their lives, knowing and seeing all. The way this could be achieved on stage is explored in the final section.

### **The Articulated God**

Although God's physical appearance in plays of this period was limited and declining, God was frequently characterised within the dialogue and action of the drama. As previously discussed, visual images of God were subject to

increasing pressure. Formerly these images were justified as serving as the poor man's *Bible*, but thanks to the power of the printing press and the use of the vernacular both in print and in church services this was now regarded by many Reformers as unnecessary. As Keith Thomas summarises, 'words, whether written or spoken, were claimed to be so much more informative than images'.<sup>131</sup> Conversely God's Promises in *Like Will to Like* challenges human capacity to find words to reflect God adequately:

What heart can think, or what tongue can express  
The great goodness of God, which is almighty? (l.855 – 6)

This rhetorical question articulates the perceived impossibility of humans to 'think' or 'express' God's 'great goodness'. As the *Homilies* preached, 'the infinite majesty and greatness of God' was 'incomprehensible to man's mind'.<sup>132</sup> Margaret Aston evidences an increasing antagonism even towards mental images of God. From Becon's attack on physical images quoted earlier to More and Dering's 1582 *A Short Catechism for Householders*, that 'we should not think God to be like either man or woman, or any other thing', there is a 'shift of emphasis from external to internal idolatry [... which] belonged to a conceptualising process that affected other features in the religious landscape'.<sup>133</sup> The plays do articulate an image of God but one increasingly based on intangible characteristics of his 'goodness' rather than any physical attributes.

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<sup>131</sup> Keith Thomas, 'Art and Iconoclasm in Early Modern England' in Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake (eds.), *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), pp. 16-40, p.28.

<sup>132</sup> *Homilies*, p.225.

<sup>133</sup> Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts: Volume 1*, pp. 459, 465. For her discussion of the differing views on this see pp. 436–459. She concludes that the idea that it was both 'natural' and 'neutral' to form mental images of what one hears about 'became increasingly untenable in England' from the middle of the sixteenth century.

The characteristics demonstrated or mentioned in the plays are consistent throughout the period and prefigure the 'properties and works' William Perkins's catechumen subsequently proposed as the terms by which God should be conceived.<sup>134</sup> Perkins describes these properties as: wisdom in knowing and understanding everything; holiness, identified by mercy and justice; eternal; and finally infinite, evidenced by omnipotence and omnipresence. God's works are 'the creation of the world, and of every thing therein, and the preservation of them being created by his special providence'.<sup>135</sup> Man's sins are punished by 'the curse of God in this life': the infliction of bodily diseases, loss of reputation, 'horror of conscience', and loss of worldly goods.<sup>136</sup> All these elements were already present in the plays discussed here. Dramatically, God's works are primarily evidenced through the workings of the plot itself, whilst his properties are often articulated by the pious in the dialogue. Indeed, this is one of the markers for their status among the elect, primarily being used to demonstrate their good faith rather than to describe God.

So, whilst God does not physically appear in most of the plays of the period, his characteristics are represented rhetorically through statements made by various characters, thus drawing God's presence in the play world to audiences' attention. In *Treasure* this occurs through the role of God's Visitation who physically represents God's 'chief properties and works'.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> William Perkins *The Foundation of Christian Religion*. Sig. A7r.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* Sig. A8v – B1r.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.* Sig. A7v.

God's omnipotence is indicated by his power over Pleasure who, in answer to Lust's request that he stay, answers:

Nay there is no remedy I must away,  
For where God doth send punishment and pain,  
I pleasure in no case can not remain. (l.1011 – 1013)

The 'punition and pain' God 'send[s]' is clearly contrary to pleasure who 'must away' and 'can not remain'. He has no choice as he is subject to God's actions. Visitation similarly declares that Inclination will not leave him 'because God's will hath not determined so' (l.999), reinforcing God's providential power over both elect and reprobate and his active participation in the play world, albeit through a third party. God's more comforting characteristics are also referenced. Just presents him as loving and protective of those he has identified as his own. God 'careth for his' and keeps 'under his merciful wings [...] the Just that his will do obey' combining his work of preservation with its concomitant mercy (l.661 – 3). This is equivalent to God's parental role articulated by Phronimos in *Aegio* discussed earlier. For contemporaries, 'fear' of God combined being afraid of God's power of damnation and having reverence for him (l.667).<sup>138</sup> As Just also makes clear, an individual demonstrated this fear by 'observing his holy commandment[s]' (l.664), that is by trying to obey the Ten Commandments, trusting that God's mercy would bring salvation and eternal happiness. To counter the danger that hearers might conclude humans could earn salvation, however, Just asserts that this protection is not given 'for our sake, or for our deservings' but 'for [God's] own sake' (l.665 – 6), because it enhances God's

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<sup>138</sup> The importance of fearing God as a sign of true faith is mentioned in seventeen of the *Homilies* and the sermon against idolatry cites the *Bible* 'Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God' from both Deuteronomy vi:13 and Exodus xx.4, *Homilies*, p.196.

own power. If the attribution of this play to William Wager is correct, this representation is likely to have been part of a conscious and deliberate didactic Protestantisation strategy, given his active pastoral work.

Several of the properties described by Perkins overlap in the plays. God's wisdom and the omniscience inherent in his infinite nature for example are often conflated in the plays' representations and are implicit within evidence of justice and mercy. God's wisdom is particularly well demonstrated in Thomas Garter's *Susanna*. Joachim expresses faith in God's omniscience: 'And I know Lord not one at all, can hide him from thy sight' (l.841) which unwittingly parallels Susanna's earlier expression of faith that God 'seeth everything' (l.781). Later, referring to her miraculous rescue, Susanna addresses the on-stage, and, of course, the off-stage, audience noting 'how God doth help the innocent, and eke their sorrows break' (l.1106) and that 'thus will God deal with all such, as on his mercy call' (l.1112). The final clause articulates a common feature of these plays' descriptions of God's properties, especially justice and mercy, that they are conditional on appropriate faith from the human protagonist. Thus, articulation of God's properties is put in the practical context of their meaning for human salvation. Importantly this is Protestantised to align with the central doctrine of justification by faith *alone*.<sup>139</sup>

In *Like Will to Like* the emphasis is explicitly on God's holy characteristics of mercy and justice towards the virtuous rather than to all.

Virtuous Living says:

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<sup>139</sup> Catholics also believed in the importance of faith for justification but acts of mercy by an individual were thought to also have a value, explicitly denied by Protestants.

God is gracious and full of great mercy  
*To such as in virtue set their whole delight,*  
Pouring his benefits upon them abundantly.  
Oh man, what meanest thou with saviour to fight?  
Come unto him, for he is full of mercy,  
The fountain of virtue and of godliness the spring:  
Come unto me and thou shalt live everlastingly,  
He doth not require thee any price to bring. (l.812 – 819)<sup>140</sup>

The repetition of 'justice' and 'mercy' emphasise these particular characteristics of God, but the primary purpose of the speech is to remind the audience of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. God is merciful not to those who *are* virtuous but to those who 'in virtue set their whole delight'. This, with the repetition of God as 'full of mercy' might remind audiences that such virtue is impossible for humans to achieve without God – they could only *wish* to be virtuous. It is from God that virtue and godliness come. Earnest Protestants subsequently developed a reputation for dourness, associated with their abhorrence for their self-perception as inveterate sinners. The reference here to 'delighting' in virtue takes a more positive view. If they are made miserable by their sin, they must therefore take pleasure from its opposite, virtue.<sup>141</sup> The reference to 'fountain' and 'spring', with their association with water, combine with God's 'pouring his benefits' to suggest that God cleanses the sinful but faithful man. The water metaphor was additionally associated with the heavenly joys to which all earnest Protestants aspired, and which were quite distinct from the transitory pleasure associated with worldly fortunes.<sup>142</sup> This speech therefore articulates the works of God in the language of contemporary theologians. That no 'price' is needed subtly

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<sup>140</sup> My modernisation, my emphasis.

<sup>141</sup> See Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 49-63 for a discussion about Protestant mourning against one's own sins.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* p.89.

denies the Catholic practices of indulgences, offerings, and intercession, and their belief in purgatory as a way of paying for one's sins to be saved. The following lines conclude the lesson:

Come unto me ye that travail, saith he,  
[...]  
Repent, repent; your deeds shall be downtrodden. (l.821, 824)

'Travail' had both the sense of working hard but also being afflicted in such a manner as Ryrie describes the active mourning of sins experienced by earnest Protestants.<sup>143</sup> This centred on a confession of these sins, primarily to God through prayer, accompanied by sincere repentance. These were among the signs of the elect. The expression of faith made by Virtuous Living in this speech had a didactic purpose in the early days of Elizabethan Protestantism when the play was first performed but would later become habits of thought for more earnest Protestants.

The mercy Virtuous Living describes was not restricted to the play's obviously virtuous characters. Faith that repentance can lead to God's mercy is echoed later in the play by one of the seemingly reprobate characters, Peirce Pickpurse. He has been shown throughout the play associating with the Vice, Nichol Newfangle, who brings him to the justice, Severity. In the context of the play's moral that 'like will to like', that is, bad people will inevitably associate with the bad and come to a bad end, Pickpurse's fate appears sealed. Ultimately, however, as he is about to be led to execution for his crimes, Pickpurse acknowledges God's mercy, signalling his potential salvation. He urges his companion, Cuthbert Cutpurse to repent, in a speech

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-63. This concept is also discussed by Adrian Streete, *Protestantism and Drama in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 101-2.

which contemporary audiences, well-versed in the *Bible*, could have recognised as a parallel to the repentance of the thief at the crucifixion:

Sith that by the law we are now condemned,  
Let us call to God for his mercy and grace,  
And exhort that all vice may be amended,  
[...]  
Yet at the last to God let us call:  
For he heareth such as are ready to repent,  
And desireth not that sinners should fall.  
(l.1146 – 1148, 1151 – 1153)

There are several parallels with Virtuous Living's speech here. Both reference God's 'mercy and grace' and the need to repent. Pickpurse urges his colleague to 'exhort that all vice may be amended' whilst Virtuous Living offers assurance that, given repentance, 'your deeds shall be downtrodden'. The close resemblance between Pickpurse's speech and the lesson spoken by Virtuous Living earlier, attests to his sincerity, and implies that Pickpurse may indeed be saved by God, as the crucified thief was presumed to be. This enacts for audiences a sense of the scale of God's mercy towards those who put their trust in him.<sup>144</sup>

There is, however, a contingent edge to these assertions of God's mercy, seen clearly in *Longer*. God's Judgment describes God as vengeful, powerful and, importantly, merciful, offering Moros another opportunity to repent and be saved but this is conditional:

*If thou has grace for mercy now call,  
Yet thy soul perchance thou mayst save;  
For his mercy is above his works all,  
On penitent sinners he is wont mercy to have.*

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<sup>144</sup> For a discussion of the importance of criminal repentance and its representation in contemporary murder pamphlets see Peter Lake with Michael Questier, *The Anti-Christ's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), especially pp. 147-184. It is also discussed further in chapter three of this work.



(l.1799 – 1802)<sup>145</sup>

'If' is obviously conditional and it is dependent on Moros having 'grace'. For Protestants this only came from God and would enable Moros to ask for mercy, requiring an active expression of faith, the second condition.

However, even then salvation would not be certain as only 'perchance' would God choose to show mercy, though it is what he is 'wont' to do. This puts the emphasis firmly on justification by faith. That Moros might be saved despite his life of bad behaviour demonstrates that it is not human actions that count, but faith.<sup>146</sup> Again, new and complex Protestant doctrine is presented in a practical context for audiences to observe, potentially aiding their understanding.

The sense of God's mercy presented by *Enough* is parental, though again this is conditional. Heavenly Man says that God 'careth' for 'his' and 'preserveth them' much as a parent would, 'under his merciful wing' (l.121 – 2). Here, though, God's mercy seems more limited to embrace only those who show their 'heavenly' status by 'obey[ing]' God and 'observing his holy commandments', perhaps emphasising justice more than mercy (l.123 – 4). Similarly, the Prologue in *Susanna* asserts that one of the purposes of the play is to:

showeth forth how prone God is, to help such as are just,  
And in that God before all men, do put assured trust. (l.8 – 9)

To receive God's aid, one must be both 'just' and show 'assured trust' in God.

Assured faith was a crucial sign of election, and this word is used repeatedly

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<sup>145</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>146</sup> It is notable that the doctrine of predestination is not articulated here. The pastoral niceties associated with this difficult doctrine are discussed in chapter 3.

by the play's good characters. The servant and True Report demonstrate their own good faith, God's holiness, and Susanna's faith. Each expresses faith 'assuredly' (l.805; 807) that Susanna will be saved by God's intervention, and whilst the saving they refer to is an earthly one rather than heavenly, to have assured faith was a fundamental requirement of the elect. Ultimately Susanna's mother references God's mercy, omnipotence and justice in saving Susanna, praying:

My daughter was given to the death, thou kept her with thy  
might,  
Thou helpst her for thy mercy sake, because her cause was  
right. (l.1423 – 4)

All these speeches stress God's mercy and, more subtly, justice. God will defend Susanna 'if she guiltless be' 'because her cause was right'. True Report also expresses confidence that God visits justice on the reprobate and articulates Perkins' 'curse of life' through the 'shameful' death that Voluptuous and Sensuality will suffer, affirmed by Daniel in similar language: 'God his vengeance will with shame upon thee wreak' (l.1166). The 'shame' they will suffer asserts God's punishment through lost reputation, just as Moros was punished through loss of worldly goods. Similarly, the Tenant in *Enough* has faith in God's justice, responding to the Servant's complaints about Worldly Man's ill treatment of him with, 'But God will plague him for it, I do not fear' (l.1032) which, of course, subsequently proves true. Although God might show mercy to suitably repentant sinners, then, the most likely outcome was that they would suffer the consequence of another divine characteristic, that of 'vengeance'. The purpose of these repetitions of contemporary doctrine was

explicitly to 'show[] [them] forth' (I.8) for audiences to see, hear and understand the newly established Protestant faith and the nature of its God.

The properties of wisdom and holiness through omniscience, mercy and justice are easy to demonstrate within the action of a play. However, the characteristics of his eternal and infinite nature require an expression of piety which might seem out of place in a play intended to entertain as well as educate. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that the best example is provided in the biblical play of *Susanna*. Susanna responds to Voluptuous' threat to allege adultery against her, with an articulation of faith. She asserts that God 'liveth for aye' attesting to his eternal nature (I.781). Omnipresence and omnipotence are indicated by her assurance that he 'seeth everything', while that he 'knoweth the fruit of every tree' indicates omniscience, with God's prescience evidenced through him knowing this 'before the branch do spring' (I.781 – 2). She repeats these beliefs later when she has been falsely condemned for adultery, attesting that God is eternal, all-seeing, prescient and furthermore hates sin:

Oh God, oh king, oh mighty one, oh ever-living Lord,  
What secret is there thou seest not, what sin is not abhorred,  
Before each thing do come to pass, thou knowest what it will be.  
(I.1043 – 1045)

The assured tone demonstrates her absolute faith in God's providential plan and thus her credentials as a good Protestant. Within her strong faith, God has an active presence in the play and audiences are taught the correct way to understand him.

One of the primary ways God's infinite nature is demonstrated within the plays is through the expression of his omnipotence. In *Enough* the

Physician tells the dying Worldly Man that 'God may do much, for he is omnipotent', though the Doctor deems him 'past help in this world' (l.1367 - 8).

Similarly in *Longer Discipline* greets Piety with the observation that:

Without the worship of God omnipotent  
(Which learned men properly call piety)  
Other virtues, be they never so excellent,  
Are esteemed but as things of vility. (l.199 – 202)<sup>147</sup>

This also of course expresses the centrality of faith and the relative worthlessness of good deeds. God's omnipotence is most strongly evidenced in his stated power over the Devil.<sup>148</sup> In *Like Will to Like* Virtuous Living says:

Satan at no time may him anything deface,  
For God over him will have such regard  
That his foes he shall soon tread under his foot,  
And by God's permission pluck them up by the root.  
(l.775 – 778)<sup>149</sup>

articulating that the Devil can only act when permitted to by God positing Satan as an agent of God. It ensures God's superiority and omnipotence is maintained although critics of Protestantism used it to accuse Protestants of making God the author of evil, as Larymos does in *Aegio*.

In all these examples the primary dramatic purpose has been to evidence characters' good or bad faith through their articulation of God's properties. The emphasis is predominantly on defining what constitutes good faith as a piece of didacticism. Similarly, God's acts of vengeance are explicitly linked to characters' misbehaviour, in keeping with drama's need for cause and effect, rather than presenting a sense of predestination.

Nevertheless, the portrait of God that comes out of these plays is a precursor

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<sup>147</sup> Glossed by Benbow as 'vileness'.

<sup>148</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

<sup>149</sup> My modernisation, my emphases.

for that which Perkins' ultimately describes in his catechism. Previous theologians had focused on what God was not (an old man sitting in on a throne) and a vague spiritual understanding, whilst these plays articulate a more practical way for believers to understand a purely spiritual but ever-present God.

Just as the virtuous, presumably elect, characters describe God through his works and properties, the damned continue to use anthropomorphic descriptions, most typically when swearing.<sup>150</sup> This not only reflects their reprobate status, but also highlights this type of visual imaging of God as blasphemous, for audiences still very familiar with pre-Reformation divine imagery. For example, Lust in *Treasure* swears 'O cocks heart', a variation of Christ's heart (l.992) and in *Like Will to Like*, Rafe Roister, a wastrel, swears by 'God's heart' (l.976) when he is given a beggar's bag as the inheritance of his profligacy by the Vice, Nichol Newfangle. Similarly, in *Longer Moros* frequently uses the expression 'Body of God' as a form of swearing.<sup>151</sup> It begins at line 376 when he is being beaten by the godly characters Discipline, Exercitation and Piety for failing to learn their religious lessons. Initially it is only occasional, the next usage being at line 596, under

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<sup>150</sup> Swearing using God's name was, of course, blasphemous as it breached the Third Commandment 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain'. There was a *Homily Against Swearing and Perjury*, see *Homilies*, pp. 71-80.

<sup>151</sup> This could, in a literal sense, refer to Christ as an embodiment of God. Jonathan Willis notes that pre-Reformation and for a few Reformist authors, this particular form of swearing was akin to 'rent[ing] and [tearing] the body of Christ' anew. He explains that more generally it was accepted however, that the word 'name' in the Commandment 'encompassed any profanation of anything at all to do with God', which of course includes Christ. Jonathan Willis *The Reformation of the Decalogue*, pp. 64, 65. Lucy Wooding describes the pre-Reformation images warning against swearing in churches as showing swearers physically attacking Christ and notes that the imagery remained unchanged after the Reformation in verbal form within church and in pictural form outside. Lucy Wooding "'So sholde lewde men lerne by yimages", especially pp. 46-7; See also, Ashley Montagu, *The Anatomy of Swearing* (London: Rapp & Whiting, 1967), pp. 107-135.

similar circumstances. They are the first words he speaks on meeting Idleness, Incontinence and Wrath at line 703, signalling the negative influence they will have on him. However, as he is shown by costume changes to be growing up, it becomes more frequent, a sign of his more certain reprobation. He uses it at line 940 when boasting how he will attack Discipline, but again shortly after at line 987, in expressing fear of him. The phrase recurs each time he expresses a desire to attack Piety and/or Discipline. This clearly links an anthropomorphic conception of God with sinfulness. Further usages come at lines 1357, 1369, 1635, and 1649. He is saying it with increasing frequency whenever he is on stage, so it almost becomes his catchphrase. The final occasion occurs at line 1825, immediately after God's Judgement has passed him over to Confusion and shortly before Confusion carries him off to hell, thus completing the association of the phrase with damnation.

In contrast, many of the characters in *Enough*, from the reprobate Worldly Man, the Devil's advocate, Covetous, and the hard done by Hireling, use 'body of me' as an equivalent exclamation. All these examples could refer to Christ rather than God but although Christ did have a corporeal form pre-crucifixion, his present state was deemed to be spiritual. Margaret Aston notes that in the Elizabethan *Homilies* 'images of Christ, whatever arguments were based on his humanity, were equally prohibited'.<sup>152</sup> Only Worldly Man is ultimately shown as irredeemably damned, however, the other characters being mere allegorical manifestations of sins.

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<sup>152</sup> Margaret Aston, *Broken Idols*, p.756.

Verbal personification of God, then, was not limited to reprobate characters. The eponymous Susanna references God's hand when speaking of problems which emanate from God: 'That if thou lay thy hand on us, we take that part for ill' (l.681). Similarly, Hireling in *Enough* is sure 'the prayers of the poor' will 'ascend into the ears of the Lord God on high' (l.1114 – 5). These are presumably not meant to imply literal hands or ears, but the use of such metaphors indicates the deep-rootedness of the mental image of an anthropomorphic God. Indeed, the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, citing *The Great Bible*, uses similar phrases. Just looking at the order for morning prayer quickly generates references to God's face, voice, and hands. He is implored to 'turn thy face away from our sins' (Psalm 51), show mercy and forgiveness because 'we [...] have not harkened to thy voice' (Daniel 9) and is praised because 'his hands prepared the dry land' (Psalms 95).<sup>153</sup> Nowell later tried to address this in his popular catechism as part of the discussion of the nature of Christ following the resurrection:

Master: When thou namest the right hand of God, and sitting, dost thou suppose and imagine that God hath the shape or form of a man?  
Student: No, forsooth, master. But because we speak of God among men, we do in some sort, after the manner of men, express thereby how Christ hath received the kingdom given him of his Father. For kings use to set them on their right hands to who they vouchsafe to do highest honour, and make lieutenants of their dominion. Therefore in these words is meant that God the Father made Christ his Son the head of the Church, and that by him his pleasure is to preserve them that be his, and to govern all things universally.<sup>154</sup>

The rather convoluted nature of this response, with further human metaphors for God as father, Christ as son, and of governorship, further highlights the difficulty contemporaries had of speaking of God and explaining him without

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<sup>153</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer*, pp.102, 103, 105.

<sup>154</sup> Alexander Nowell *A Catechism*.

recourse to personification, despite its inherent association with image-making and idolatry. As my discussion has indicated, the drama of this time was no more successful at this than Nowell. Nevertheless, it did find innovative ways to present God as a spiritual being and represent him in terms of his 'properties and works', in advance of their articulation by Perkins twenty years later.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that during the period 1559 - 1580, the Christian God as a physical presence in new drama finally disappeared. Initially he is present anthropomorphically; fully, in part or by implication. The relationship between God and humans is externalised and similar in form to that between one person and another, despite attempts to create a suitable distance between God and the human protagonists. From the late 1560s representations of God, though still largely external, are through abstractions of God's works. These allegorical characters act as agents of God but, as anthropomorphic beings, are explicitly not God. An emphasis is placed on their status as representatives of God. They enact the plays' moral conclusions rather than God himself, whose role is specifically post-mortem. These changes have the effect of distancing God whilst reflecting the relationship between humans and God as an internal, personal one based entirely on faith. In these plays the just are indicated not by virtuous actions, but through their articulation of appropriate, Protestant, beliefs about God. This supports the rhetorical articulation within these plays of the doctrine of



justification by faith alone, a key didactic purpose. Initially these agents are celestial, declaring themselves sent by God, but in *Conflict* this direct association is less clear, paving the way for demonic agency in later drama. The dramatization of the Devil as an instrument and representation of God is the subject of a later chapter.

These allegorical characters illustrated for contemporary audiences appropriate ways to conceive of God that avoid idolatry or superstition. They do this in terms of his properties and works, acting as a precursor for the ideas put forward by later divines. Initially, these characters are also fully externalised, but they become increasingly internalised within the protagonists through verbal comments on their invisibility to others and the dramatic device of making them into a dream. This creates an external representation for off-stage audiences of an on-stage character's internal spiritual experience. It culminates in a fully internalised relationship between the protagonist and God only evident through character articulation.

In addition to pre-empting accusations of idolatry, the changed representation of God from an anthropomorphic being with an external relationship to humans to one that is spiritual and internal, helped playwrights articulate the Protestant doctrine of justification and enact its practical operation. Alongside the allegorical representations of God's properties and works are characters who represent the internal forms of spiritual support provided by God's grace to help the elect obey his commandments. The reprobates similarly engage with allegorical temptations. God's participation in human life is thus reflected through the faith these supporters represent,

the testing of faith provided by the tempters, and the more obviously active representatives who enact God's judgement at the end of life.

Like the allegorical characters, rhetorical descriptions of God within the dialogue also focus on his works and properties in precisely those terms later summarised by Perkins in his 1590 catechism as those by which God should be imagined. It is significant that the plays' choice of divine representation pre-dates this, demonstrating drama's potential for developing an understanding of contemporary theology. These plays can be seen as precursors for later, more developed theological articulations of Protestant doctrine. They explore ways of understanding God within the confines laid down by a more literal interpretation of the injunctions against idolatry, necessitated by the changed status of the Decalogue, and illustrate how this might be applied in the context of everyday life. The plays illustrate the newly developing distinction between good faith and bad through the language used by the implicitly elect, and evidently damned, characters. Virtuous characters articulate their faith in ways which would subsequently become habits of thought for earnest Protestants. It does not matter whether this was the playwrights' intention. The way they chose to represent God in the worlds they invented provided practical ways for Christians to understand God in a purely spiritual, individualised, specifically Protestant, manner. Audiences were of course free to choose how or even whether they engaged with it.

This chapter has shown how, through a variety of dramatic and rhetorical techniques, God was fully internalised to the point where he seemingly 'disappears' from the play world during the 1560s and 1570s.

Nevertheless, he continued to have a very real presence in the lives and minds of most Elizabethan men and women visiting the theatre thereafter. The next chapter explores how playwrights of the 1580s staged this, now seemingly 'absent', God.

## CHAPTER 2. 'THAT WHICH WE CALL FORTUNE IS NOTHING BUT THE HAND OF GOD': STAGING THE ABSENT GOD, 1580 - 1595<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, by the early 1580s the dramatic God had been internalised within the main protagonists. This raises the question of how the Christian God was subsequently staged. In the late-twentieth century there was active debate amongst critics about the extent to which post-Reformation drama had become secularised in the modern sense.<sup>2</sup> More recent critics have demonstrated that much religious thought is represented in contemporary plays.<sup>3</sup> As Adrian Streete says 'there can be little

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Cooper, 1517?-1594, *Certain Sermons wherin is contained the defense of the gospel* (London: Ralphe Newbery, 1580) p.164.

<sup>2</sup> Despite the highly religious language used by Grissel and other virtuous characters throughout the play (see chapter 1 of this work) Frederick Kiefer considered Philip's *Grissel* to have a secular tone in *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy* (San Marino, CA: Huntingdon Library, 1983), pp. 89, 90. Other critics who have asserted the secularity of contemporary drama include: E.K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage* vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), pp. 68–105; Ian Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: the Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Bernard Spivak, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: the History of a Metaphor in Relation to his Major Villains* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p.71. C. John Sommerville in his *The Secularization of Early Modern England: From Religious Culture to Religious Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) develops a complex definition of secularisation and posits a continuum of secularisation across different aspects of contemporary life beginning before the Reformation. He considers drama that is not explicitly religious to be secularised. See his Introduction p.4 and on drama pp. 93–5. John Cox discusses post-Reformation 'religious secularization' (his emphasis and spelling) as the doctrine of justification by faith alone moved salvation outside of the Church in *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350 – 1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 7-9. Alan Sinfield identified growing spiritual scepticism due to 'inherent contradictions' within Protestantism, with censorship of religious drama resulting in more 'secular drama' in *Literature in Protestant England, 1560 – 1660* (Beckenham: Croom-Helm, 1983), pp. 129, 134.

<sup>3</sup> See Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 60, 174 and 'Theatre and Religious Culture', in John Cox and David Scott Kastan (eds.), *A New History of Early English Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 133–151; Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation and Theater in Renaissance England* (Chicago and

doubt that the early modern stage is an important civic site for religious debate'.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, God himself appears to modern eyes to be absent from contemporary drama post-1580.<sup>5</sup>

It is true that biblical or explicitly religious didactic drama had largely disappeared by the 1580s under the pressures outlined above. Some earlier playwrights had had explicit, evangelising agendas, which also appears less true after 1580.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, in a culture in which God had such a central role in most people's lives, it is unlikely that he did not continue to have an active part in their drama too. The focus henceforth is explicitly with commercial drama, as it is from this point that this is more distinct.<sup>7</sup> Clearly the primary concern of playwrights writing for this milieu was with commerciality and thus

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London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 1-21, 23-57; Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theatre in Early Modern England* (London: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 63–66; Victoria Brownlee, *Biblical Readings and Literary Writings in Early Modern England, 1558 – 1625* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p.5.

<sup>4</sup> Adrian Streete, 'Drama' in Andrew Hiscock and Helen Wilcox (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 166–184, p.166.

<sup>5</sup> Alison Shell suggests that 'for Shakespeare's generation of playwrights in England, classical religious language in drama was often a way of deferring to the notion that the Christian God could not be represented on stage without profanity'. She adds that 'there is a kind of piety so sensitive to inappropriateness that it blocks imaginative Christian discourse altogether and obliges writers to explore secular alternatives.' Alison Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion* (London: Methuen Drama, 2010), p.21. I argue conversely that the alternatives they explored were religious in effect so not secular at all.

<sup>6</sup> Many of these had been practicing clerics. Jeffrey Knapp suggests that large numbers of clergymen continued to write plays throughout the period and that whilst some wrote closet drama others had their plays performed publicly. Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe*, p.3 and endnote 8, p.188. Knapp calculated that 'there were nearly half again as many clergymen writing plays from 1583 to 1632 as from 1533 [...] to 1582' with movement happening both to and from the theatre and pulpit. It should be noted that some of these, such as Stephen Gosson and John Marston, left the theatre to become clerics, and then disassociated themselves from their plays entirely whilst others wrote plays as students before taking up their ministry. Nevertheless, some made the reverse move and others continued to write whilst serving. Thus, although the numbers of clerical playwrights might not be as great as Knapp suggests, they are not negligible either.

<sup>7</sup> See thesis introduction for a discussion of the reasoning for this focus.

audience interest. However, there is no reason to suppose that audience interest did not include matters of faith, and playwrights used various means to involve God in their play worlds. Streete also suggests that ‘during the later 1580s and 1590s, theatrical experimentation goes hand in hand with a bolder exploration of religious ideology’.<sup>8</sup> This chapter argues that this combination of experimentation and exploration facilitated novel ways to bring God into the play world for audiences. The divine/human relationship was interrogated along the fault lines of Protestant doctrine, reflecting, and contributing to, contemporary religious debate.

At this period there was active theological debate about the degree of God’s involvement in human affairs.<sup>9</sup> The orthodox position was that God could concern himself with the minutiae of everyday existence, even when humans believe themselves to be acting independently. However, the theology of a providential plan devised and implemented at the beginning of time, led some to believe that God’s active involvement had ceased.<sup>10</sup> This latter idea allowed for the concept of a godless world. The first part of the chapter considers two plays with stage worlds in which God is absent. The first has an explicitly English setting and served as a warning of the dangers of impious living. The second

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<sup>8</sup> Adrian Streete, ‘Drama’, pp. 166–184, p170.

<sup>9</sup> Alison Shell describes ‘the exact relationship of providence, predestination, fortune and fate’ as ‘one of the most divisive issues of the Reformation’ in *Shakespeare and Religion*, p.178. Others discussing the changing ideas around God’s involvement include Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.29; Frederick Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy* pp. 3–14, 17–19, 83–121; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought. Volume 1 The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 96–102; Darren Oldridge, *The Supernatural in Tudor and Stuart England* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p.51; Alan Sinfield, *Literature in Protestant England*, pp. 132–3.

<sup>10</sup> See Alexandra Walsham *Providence* pp. 12–13. The details of providential doctrine are discussed in greater depth in chapter four of this work.

has an Eastern setting and explores the historical reality of God's apparent failure to succour faithful Christians. It shows that for contemporaries a godless world meant chaos, and allowed uncontrolled human self-deification, undermining contemporary expectations about God's justice and mercy.

For many in contemporary audiences the world was not godless however and playwrights more typically tried to incorporate an external controlling power into their plays. The rest of the chapter discusses playwrights' various attempts to evidence God's involvement. It was a widely held belief that God used natural phenomena, such as storms, to intervene in individual human lives. Further, that he could, and occasionally did, affect seemingly miraculous events and some plays reflect this view. Protestant divines argued though that while God could intervene in this way, his control was typically more subtle. The second part of the chapter shows that playwrights more frequently used a framing device to demonstrate divine control. Supernatural beings in the frame narrative claim to control the lives of the protagonists in the inner play world, whilst those inner characters verbalise their acknowledgement of that controlling power. This framing technique gave audiences a bird's eye view of divine-human relationships that could enhance their understanding of the Christian God's active participation in their own lives.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Huston Diehl notes that in his 1612 'An Apology for Actors' Thomas Heywood claims that 'stage plays invite their spectators to adopt the perspective of an omniscient and judging God, and thus internalise the divine spectator in the theatre of the world'. My argument is that the use of a frame narrative from which divine or divine substitutes rule the play world positions this 'invitation' up front. Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage*, pp. 206.

Some contemporaries however were uncomfortable with the potential implications of a providential doctrine which attributed everything to God. Catholics claimed this interpretation made God the author of sin and many Protestants sought an alternative through references to the goddess Fortuna.<sup>12</sup> Fortune's interventionist role in human life had been accommodated within Medieval theology but Reformed doctrine insisted that the Christian God was the only ruling power.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Fortune's supposed ability to reward or punish those she favoured retained a strong hold over the lay imagination at all levels. Sometimes power was ascribed to Fortune to avoid assigning apparent injustice or misfortune to God.<sup>14</sup> Fortune could thus act as a representation of God. Gibson and Esra note that as Fortuna's 'anglicized name was identical with the concept which she represented [...] it was possible to write, read and hear 'fortune' or 'Fortune' as desired'.<sup>15</sup> Equally, references to fate or fates could have both Christian and classical connotations linked to destiny whilst contemporary astronomical beliefs meant 'the term [stars] also came to be a synonym for fate, destiny or fortune'.<sup>16</sup> By implication all these terms have the

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<sup>12</sup> Protestant theologians countered this argument by emphasising God's prescience along with his omnipotence, allowing humans some element of free will. Nevertheless, it was a challenging doctrine, especially in conjunction with the doctrine of predestination by which human salvation was pre-determined.

<sup>13</sup> The perceived lay elision of Fortune and Providence by divines is discussed by Alexandra Walsham in *Providence* pp. 20–1, 125.

<sup>14</sup> As Kiefer notes 'fortune helped to explain the existence of evil in a divinely ordered world'. *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*, p.39.

<sup>15</sup> Marion Gibson and Jo Ann Esra *Shakespeare's Demonology: A Dictionary* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017), p.96.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.180. They discuss the various meanings and uses of the terms, 'destiny' and 'fate', and how they are used in Shakespeare's plays, pp. 57–9, 86–8. Gibson and Esra suggest references to the fates or destinies in the plural implied a classical reference whilst in the singular it became associated with Christian belief, especially providence. However, I argue that the characters in plays of the 1580s, and the audiences hearing them, were possibly less precise in their terminology and that either form might represent God's providence.



potential to recall God's involvement for their contemporary audiences. The third section argues that playwrights used this elision of meaning to represent God on the stage through a variety of controlling powers at the same time as their characters refer to Fortune, the stars, the heavens and fate or the fates, and that using an Eastern setting sometimes facilitated this.

In the late 1580s/early 1590s plays with British historical settings became popular. British history during this period was of increasing interest to many members of the new gentry keen to provide for themselves a distinguished genealogy. Many engaged in developing family trees showing a connection with Norman or even Saxon nobility.<sup>17</sup> Equally, Reformers developed a historiography linking their own doctrine to the early church fathers, and thence back to pre-Christian times to show their beliefs were not new but a return to a purer past.<sup>18</sup> This impacted on the way in which plays with a British setting attributed events to Fortune and God. The final section explores the representation of God in dramatizations of British history. It asserts that in British history plays, Fortune becomes more consistently an antithesis to God, who is represented through virtuous characters' statements of faith. Broadly speaking, these plays are more religiously orthodox, and the relatively few

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<sup>17</sup> Janet Dickinson, 'Nobility and Gentry' in Susan Doran and Norman Jones (eds.), *The Elizabethan World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 285–300, p.286; for the growth and importance of antiquarianism more broadly see: Anne Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620 – 1660* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 1979).

<sup>18</sup> See for example Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), p.3; Victoria Brownlee, *Biblical Readings*, pp. 31–3. Brownlee comments that such typological reading of the *Bible* interpreted the Reformation as part of an overarching providential plan; Adrian Streete, *Apocalypse and Anti-Catholicism in Seventeenth English Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p.7; David Womersley, *Divinity and State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) discusses the history play in the context of Protestant historiography; Alexandra Walsham, 'History, Memory and the English Reformation' in *The Historical Journal*, 55, 4, 2012, pp. 899–938.

references to Fortune, largely stereotypical. The favouring of God or Fortune act as markers of moral status.<sup>19</sup> Virtuous characters in plays with British settings largely attribute all outcomes to God. Villains only pay tribute to Fortune and do not acknowledge God. The ambivalent attitude to Fortune of the earlier plays and the nuances evident in the Eastern plays all disappear.<sup>20</sup> British history plays of the early 1590s, I contend, continue the internalised staging of the Christian God through the articulations of their virtuous characters, whilst supporting the Protestant demonisation of Fortune through her association with villains.

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<sup>19</sup> Kiefer noted that frequent references to Fortune 'serve as a kind of index to that figure's changing moral status [... through which the playwright can] display the declining moral probity of his character'. However, he does not seem to have noted the converse association of reference to God nor that the implicit link between God and Fortune brings God into the play world which I am making in this chapter. He does note that Fortune sometimes acts as God's agent. Frederick Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*, p.34.

<sup>20</sup> I use the term 'Eastern' plays to be inclusive rather than the more common term among modern critics of 'Turkish' which Jane Grogan notes absorbs or obscures 'less Ottoman centred plays' possibly inappropriately. She argues that contemporaries had better knowledge of Persia and the relationship involved less conflict. The term 'Turk' covered 'Ottoman' or 'Muslim' of a wide variety whilst 'Persian' focuses on Cyrus and the Sophy. Jane Grogan, *The Persian Empire in English Renaissance Writing, 1549 – 1622* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 112–113. Jonathan Burton notes that 'Islam and "Turkishness" were often considered synonymous in Early Modern English parlance', and Lisa Hopkins discusses contemporary fluidity regarding Asian boundaries citing the association of Bajazeth with Africa despite his Turkish nationality in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*. Jonathan Burton, *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama 1579 – 1624* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Rosemont Publishing and Printing group, 2005), p.13; Lisa Hopkins, 'Marlowe's Asia and the Feminization of Conquest' in Debra Johanyak and Walter S.H. Lim (eds.), *The English Renaissance, Orientalism, and the Idea of Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.120. The assumption that contemporaries did not distinguish between Turkish Muslims and those from other political and geographical areas, particularly in drama is challenged by, for example, Linda McJannet, *The Sultan Speaks: Dialogue in English Plays and Histories about the Ottoman Turks* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Javad Ghatta, (with contributing editor, Linda McJannet), "'By Mortus Ali and our Persian Gods": Multiple Persian Identities in *Tamburlaine* and *The Travels of the Three English Brothers*', in *Early Theatre* vol. 12, no. 2 (2009), pp. 235–249.

## Contemplating a World Without God – the ‘Godless’ Plays.

Many plays throughout the period might be deemed ‘godless’ plays to modern sensibilities. Often, for example, God is presumed absent because he fails to respond to characters’ prayers or calls for help. Contemporaries, however, accepted that God answered prayers in his own time, and more importantly in his own way, so his response need be neither obvious nor immediate. It was also acknowledged that humans did not always ask for what was best for them, so a different, even opposite result could still signal divine involvement. God was assumed to control human lives for their long-term best interests. This might involve short-term pain for the ultimate good of their eternal soul. However, during the 1580s two playwrights experimented with play worlds in which God was explicitly absent.

Robert Wilson’s *The Three Ladies of London* was probably written in 1581.<sup>21</sup> Wilson was a professional actor and playwright noted for his ‘learning’ by Francis Meres and as a ‘good scholar’ by Thomas Lodge, perhaps suggesting a university education, although David Kathman notes he is not recorded at either of the universities.<sup>22</sup> *Three Ladies* is an allegorical satire on contemporary London. The virtuous ladies, Conscience and Love, have an internalised relationship with God, represented through articulated prayer. From the outset they regularly offer up prayers to God, expressing an

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Wilson, *The Three Ladies of London* in Greg Walker (ed.), *The Oxford Anthology of Tudor Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 403–463. All references to *Three Ladies* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.

<sup>22</sup> David Kathman, “Wilson, Robert (d. 1600), actor and playwright.” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). On-line edition used throughout.

expectation that he will provide protection and bring justice, thus demonstrating their faith. In the opening scene Conscience prays: 'God grant that Conscience keep within the bounds of right,/ And that vile Lucre do not haunt her heart with deadly spite' (sc. 1, l.26 – 7). Love similarly prays: 'And grant, O God, that Love be found in city, town, and country,/ Which causeth wealth and peace abound, and pleaseth God Almighty' (sc. 1, l.28 – 9). The scene concludes with Conscience assuming 'God [...] holds the rod, our states for to defend' (sc. 1, l.33). The use of 'holds the rod' indicates her belief that God is in control whilst 'our states for to defend' assumes that he will protect them in this life. The element of choice, indicated by 'God grant' earlier, recognises that he might not but audiences' experience of the earlier moral interludes, which this play resembles, suggests the ladies' faith is justified. The word 'rod' also suggests an expectation of divine punishment for the oppressors of God's people, even those acting as God's scourge – a biblical prophecy which the play's conclusion does not fulfil.<sup>23</sup> The play's subsequent events show that in this play's world God is absent.

Conscience exhibits the sort of good faith that might indicate her position as one of the Elect. Speaking to Simony and Usury, she asserts God's omniscience and justness:

Think you not that God will plague you for your wicked practices,  
If you intend not to amend your vile lives so amiss?

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<sup>23</sup> See for example Isaiah 10, which prophesies that although the Assyria is 'the rod of [God's] wrath' and has been sent by God 'against the people of [his] wrath', ultimately when God's anger has ended, his 'wrath [...] will be consumed, [...] in [the Assyrians'] destruction'. *The Bible* (London: Christopher Barker, 1583), *cum gratia & privilegio*, (*Geneva Bible, 1583*) on-line edition at <https://bibles-online.net/flippingbook/1583/>.

Think you not God knows your thoughts, words, and works,  
And what secret mischiefs in the hearts of you lurks?

(sc. 2, l.138 – 142)

The first line assumes God will justly 'plague' them for their 'wicked practices' whilst the third and fourth acknowledge his omniscience in knowing 'thoughts, words and works' as well as the 'secret mischiefs' in their 'hearts'. The desire to 'amend [their] vile lives' was a necessary corollary to Christian repentance, required for salvation. The use of the future tense, 'will', also reminds audiences that God does not always act instantly. His great justice is simultaneously reinforced as the delay allows time for repentance, indicated by the conditional 'if'. These largely orthodox references bring God into audience's consciousness, but his persistent inaction throughout the play ultimately denies him a real presence in it. Artifex says: 'God, he knows the world is grown to such a stay/ That men must use Fraud and Dissimulation too, or beg by the way' (sc.3, l.159 – 160), but despite this knowledge God does not engage and men are forced to 'use Fraud or Dissimulation' to survive.

Nevertheless, virtuous characters continue to express faith that God will provide justice within their lifetime. Sincerity, offered only the living of St Nihil by Lady Lucre, hopes that 'God, I trust, will one day yield her just recompense' (sc.4, l.160) for the disrespect she has shown him, Love, and Conscience. His faith is signalled by 'I trust'. Instead, Usury plans to murder Hospitality causing Conscience to cry: 'For God's sake, spare him!' (sc.8, l.20). When he declines, she urges the needs of the poor, who are the only ones left demonstrating faith in God. However, one senses this is because they have nothing else – the last hope of the hopeless:

Consider again the complaint of the sick, blind, and lame,  
That will cry unto the Lord for vengeance on thy head in his name.  
Is the fear of God so far from thee that thou hast no feeling at all?  
(sc.8, l.26 – 28)

The answer to her question is clearly 'yes' and with seeming justification. Her speech implies that the prayers of the poor will be heard, but subsequent events undermine this expectation.

Conscience's faith is exemplary even when she is forced to become a broom-seller, accepting this as God's plan for her: 'Thus am I driven to make a virtue of necessity:/ And, seeing God almighty will have it so, I embrace it thankfully,' (sc. 10, l.21 – 2) and later 'And sith God hath ordained this way, I am to use the mean' (sc. 10, l.38). Such piety in earlier plays ultimately protected the faithful from soul-endangering harm. Virtuous characters were provided with external allegories of God's spiritual aid and ultimately protected from evil. Although Conscience has the support of Sincerity and Hospitality, they are not divine spiritual assistants, and Hospitality is murdered. Shortly after accepting her fate as a broom seller, Conscience desperately succumbs to Lucre's request to run her house as a brothel. God has deserted her.

The play's conclusion re-enforces this sense of God's desertion. Ultimately, Conscience is physically 'spotted' by Lucre 'with all abomination' (sc. 12; l.125) and condemned to prison.<sup>24</sup> The evildoers, except Lady Lucre but including the murderer, Usury, go free. Conscience admits being a bawd and, like Philologus in *A Conflict of Conscience*, cements her status as reprobate by

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<sup>24</sup> At this point in the play Lucre dabs spots onto Conscience's face as a sign of her fall from purity.

expressing a lack of faith in God's mercy: 'Such terror doth affright me, that living I wish to die,/ I am afraid there is no spark left for me of God's mercy' (sc.17, l.45). She does recover her faith later, declaring: 'Yet after judgment I hope of God's mercy' (sc.17, l.74) but her only reward for repentance is a lighter sentence than Lucre or Love, who are both sent to hell.

Even this final judgement lacks God's involvement. The trial of Love, Lucre and Conscience is overseen by Judge Nemo – 'no man', but in this play clearly not God either. He sentences Conscience to prison, 'There to remain until the day of the general session' (sc.17, l.98), the 'general session' being the Last Judgement. This deferred judgement highlights the fact that the judge is not God's representative, and the play ends without this being realised.

Although the earlier plays also do not literally enact the virtuous characters' salvation, their obvious reward signals their elect status. Hence, the importance and benefits of faith in God are made clear to off-stage audiences. Although neither Love nor Conscience are completely virtuous, sin was a recognised part of human nature and unavoidable. For Protestants, what mattered most was faith. Conscience clearly demonstrates such faith, but it is not enough.

Effective faith required God's help, but in this play that is lacking. God's absence shows the absolute vulnerability of the virtuous. This contrasts with the earlier moral interludes which all culminated in appropriate reward for the virtuous and pain for the sinners. Despite the frequent references to him, there is no active part for God in this play, a clear indication that it is a godless play.

The nature of the evil characters in *Three Ladies* has also changed from earlier allegories. They make no effort to hide their natures with false names, their brazenness serving the satirical point of the play. But it also signals a change in their role. They serve Lady Lucre, the main butt of the satire, and their own ends, rather than explicitly corrupting the unwary on the Devil's behalf. Ultimately, this play asserts that individuals are responsible for their own actions and that justice comes in the next world not this. God is absent from the action, unseen and unfelt. Without God's intervention the virtuous characters cannot resist the wicked, despite their best efforts. *Three Ladies* illustrates a world left to its own devices by an inactive God. He is not non-existent, evidenced by the virtuous characters' repeated calls for his help, he is simply absent. The play thus engages with the contemporary debate about God's involvement in human affairs. An active God ensures justice and mercy. Without him the wicked have total control and the faithful cannot live virtuously. For an Elizabethan audience the result might have appeared a dystopian chaos.

*Three Ladies* is explicitly set in contemporary London. More typically however, plays of this period which critics have seen as Godless have the non-Christian, exotic setting of the Mediterranean. Daniel Vitkus describes the Elizabethan view of the Mediterranean world as 'a complex and unstable meeting ground for divergent cultural and religious groups'.<sup>25</sup> He notes that England's dependant position in trade relationships in the Mediterranean created a sense of anxiety, and suggests that by the 1580s the English

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<sup>25</sup> Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570 – 1630* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), p.8.



perceived their association with foreigners as 'both adulterating *and* enriching, potentially contaminating *and* potentially empowering'.<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Burton notes that in pre-1600 Eastern plays 'religious difference often goes unacknowledged, or is merely a marker of exoticism' with a lack of 'internal consistency' in the treatment of the East during the period.<sup>27</sup> Vitkus additionally notes the importance of interaction with Mediterranean states in developing the English sense of self, with plays set in the region 'offer[ing] a spectacle of what England was and was not [...] for the urban populace'.<sup>28</sup> The mixture of races and religions active there created what he describes as a 'free-for-all' not divided along those grounds, enabling the displacement of religious questions 'to the Mediterranean world where many faiths coexisted'.<sup>29</sup> Such an unstable setting allowed greater freedom for religious exploration without falling foul of the censor.

The most notable of the Eastern plays, and the one most accurately described as Godless is Christopher Marlowe's 1587 play, *Tamburlaine the Great*.<sup>30</sup> Its combination of pagan and Muslim characters, with no Christian ones, allows significant flexibility in the exploration of the divine. Some characters call on their gods for support in ways which contemporary audiences might have recognised as sharing Christian characteristics. Zenocrate is

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Burton, *Traffic and Turning*, p.33, p.54. Burton is referencing here the "internal consistency" Edward Said reported for the Orientalism of the eighteenth century.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk*, p.27.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.36.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great* in Greg Walker (ed.), *The Oxford Anthology of Tudor Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 464-507. All references to *Tamburlaine* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.

certain 'the gods' will protect 'poor friendless passengers' from his 'intended drifts' (1.2.67 – 9) when Tamburlaine catches her. Although the plurality of her 'gods' highlights her pagan beliefs, like Christians' expectations of God, she assumes they will protect the vulnerable. However, the defection of her guards leaves her in Tamburlaine's power. Zabina's prayers to Muhammed to 'solicit God' and 'make him rain down murdering shot from heaven' on Tamburlaine (3.3.200 – 1) similarly reflects Christian expectations of the divine. Again, though it proves unfounded as Bajazeth is immediately defeated by Tamburlaine. The repeated 'failure of curse or prophecy, [...] undermine[s] the notion of a unified, all-powerful God'.<sup>31</sup> There is no external, supernatural God, pagan, Islamic nor Christian evident in the play.

In place of an external, supernatural God, Marlowe deifies Tamburlaine himself. Tamburlaine is often presented as the human embodiment of the goddess Fortune or as an agent of God. In the second scene, Theridamas describes Tamburlaine using celestial metaphors associated with the classical world:

His looks do menace heaven and dare the gods.  
His fiery eyes are fixed upon the earth,  
As if he now devised some stratagem,  
Or meant to pierce Avernus' darksome vault  
To pull the triple-headed dog from hell. (1.2.156 – 160)

Avernus, Cerberus, and multiple gods are classical references, but the adjective 'fiery' to describe his eyes, and the 'darksome vault' to 'hell' also recall traditional Christian imagery of the Devil and hell formerly represented in church

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<sup>31</sup> Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk*, p.46.

doom paintings. Further, that Tamburlaine 'menac[es] heaven and dare[s] the gods' whilst planning 'some stratagem' 'upon the earth' associates Tamburlaine with the Devil, apt given Theridamas here is Tamburlaine's enemy.<sup>32</sup>

Menaphon similarly describes Tamburlaine's eyes as fiery but associates them explicitly with heaven:

Whose fiery circles bear encompassed  
A heaven of heavenly bodies in their spheres,  
That guides his steps and actions to the throne  
Where honour sits invested royally. (2.1.15 – 18)

Some people believed that, with God's directing hand, 'heavenly bodies' moving 'in their spheres' 'guide[d human] steps and actions'. However, it is Tamburlaine's eyes that 'encompass' this movement and thus the control lies with him. Both these descriptions posit Tamburlaine as author of his own successes, independent of the divine providence contemporary Protestants believed determined their lives. Conversely, Ortygius infers divine providence's involvement when describing Tamburlaine as a 'man ordained by heaven/ To further every action to the best' (2.1.52 – 3). Cosroe, however, suggests that Tamburlaine's achievements are the consequence of Nature, Fortune and 'his stars' 'striv[ing]' for control 'To make him famous in accomplished worth' (2.1.33 – 4). Zenocrate's servant similarly associates him with Fortune, but she considers Tamburlaine 'hath Fortune so at his command' that he can make her 'turn her wheel no more' (5.2.312 – 313), prohibiting the inevitable fall she was presumed to bring. Together these descriptions have associated him with the Devil, Fortune, and God.

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<sup>32</sup> The contemporary perception of a battle between God and the Devil, and the Devil's self-proclaimed rule over the earth are discussed in the next chapter.

Later in the play, Agydas recognises Tamburlaine's power and equates it to God's. He feels 'betrayed by fortune' (3.2.66) and likens his situation to a sailor seeing an oncoming storm. Agydas' perception that Tamburlaine's 'frowns [...] send a tempest' to him, in which his 'soul divine[s] her overthrow' reflects a common contemporary belief that God sent storms as punishments for sinfulness (3.2.85 – 87). Juxtaposing this with the image of the sailor 'lifting his prayers to the heavens for aid' (3.2.83) doubly associates Tamburlaine with God. Similarly, Agydas immediately understands Tamburlaine's tacit message in the unsheathed dagger and concludes the proffered suicide brings 'more honour and less pain' than 'the torments he and heaven have sworn' (3.2.97,99). 'He' means Tamburlaine, so the juxtaposed reference to Tamburlaine with heaven deifies Tamburlaine.

Throughout the play then, other characters describe Tamburlaine variously as demonic, an embodiment of Fortune, or the agent of God's will, largely dependent on their relationship to him. However, it is Tamburlaine's own, rather ironic, self-image as divine that reads true by the end of the play. He declares his own powers in God-like terms, combining them with contemporary imagery of Fortune:

I hold the Fates bound fast in iron chains,  
And with my hand turn Fortune's wheel about. (1.2.173 – 4)

Many contemporary images showed Fortune and her wheel but with a hand coming down from a cloud turning the wheel.<sup>33</sup> This posits Fortune as God's

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<sup>33</sup> See figures 2.1 – 2.3. Farah Karim-Cooper says that the hand from a cloud image reflected 'God's power and judiciousness' and acts as 'a symbol of Gods "sacred mystery"' so 'the image of a hand' is thus 'fashion[ed...] into a metonym for divine authority'. She notes the ubiquity of

agent, so in boasting to turn the wheel himself, Tamburlaine is taking on the role of God.

Tamburlaine's self-identification becomes increasingly deified as the play progresses. In his first appearance he simply claims to be protected and rewarded by God, telling Theridamas that at any attempt to attack him 'Jove himself will stretch his hand from heaven/ To ward the blow and shield me safe from harm' (1.2.179 – 180). Later in the same scene he compares himself directly to Jove, but in a manner that is also reminiscent of Christ.<sup>34</sup> At his initial entrance, Tamburlaine was dressed as a shepherd, before disrobing and putting on armour so his assertion that Jove 'sometimes masked in a shepherd's weed' assumes a parallel to himself (1.2.198). However, the image also recalls Christ's modest origins as son of a carpenter, whilst being God incarnate. Continuing the image into the subsequent lines that 'by those steps that he hath scaled the heavens,/ May we become immortal like the gods' (1.2.199 – 200) mirrors Christ's role as Saviour through his resurrection and subsequent ascent to heaven completes the association. Protestants could only hope for the immortality of salvation through belief in the salvific effect of the resurrection and so by following Christ.

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this image but does not reference the difficulty it presented for late sixteenth century English Protestants, which I discuss in chapter one. Her examples largely seem to pre-date 1560 or post-date 1660. Farah Karim-Cooper, *The Hand on the Shakespearean Stage: Gesture, Touch and the Spectacle of Dismemberment* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016), pp. 28, 34.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Whitney discusses two contemporary texts which make this comparison, I.F. and Thomas Nashe in Charles Whitney *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 31–5.

Half-way through the play Tamburlaine brags that he is 'termed the scourge and wrath of God' (3.3.44) who:

Will first subdue the Turk and then enlarge  
Those Christian captives which you keep as slaves.  
(3.3.46 – 47)

This promise to free Christians might seem to justify his apparent atheism for contemporary audiences and affirm his claim to be God's scourge.<sup>35</sup> Lars Engle suggests this description of him was 'a calculated challenge [...] to [contemporaries'...] habits of ethical and religious interpretation' as it was 'widely interpreted in providential terms [...] and] offered a way of explaining the huge success of a powerful, transgressive, and balefully violent figure'.<sup>36</sup> A 'scourge' was essentially an agent, acting on God's behalf as directed by God and it is one way of reading this play which would give God a role. It is notable though that he only says that others give him this title. He is not claiming it for himself.

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32–3. Irving Ribner describes the historical Tamburlaine as 'a symbol of Renaissance *virtù*' who Machiavelli used as a model for his philosophy in *The Prince*. Irving Ribner, 'Marlowe and Machiavelli' in *Comparative Literature* Autumn 1954, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 348–356, p.354.

<sup>36</sup> Lars Engle, 'Introduction' to Christopher Marlowe *Tamburlaine the Great* in David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Eric Ramussen (eds.), *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology* (London and New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002), pp. 183–188; p.186.



Figure 2.1: 'Wheel of Fortune' in Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff*, woodcut by A. Dürer.

This does not show Fortune herself so it is arguable that the hand from the cloud could be hers rather than God's. However, the similarity with the image from Hutten in which the hand is clearly not that of Fortune herself suggests it is more likely to be intended as God's hand.

Scan einer Kopie des in Basel liegenden Originals von 1499.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Narrenschiff\\_\(Brant\)\\_1499\\_pic\\_0038.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Narrenschiff_(Brant)_1499_pic_0038.jpg)



Figure 2.2: Georgette de Montenay *Livre d'armoiries en signe* Frankfurt 1619, p.154, XXXI: "Frangor Patientia": "Broken by Patience" Young, fig. 5, cat p.65.

This woodcut is of Fortune's wheel but God's hand holds nettles that cause the misfortune.

Taken from *Fortune: "All is but Fortune"* Compiled and edited by Leslie Thomson, (Washington D.C.; The Folger Shakespeare Library, 2000), p.18.



 **HVLDERICHI**  
 HVTTENI EQ. GERM.  
 DIALOGI.



**FORTVNA.**  
**Febris prima.**  
**Febris secunda**  
**Trias Romana.**  
**Inspicientes.**

**Cum privilegio ad sexennium.**

Figure 2.3: Frontispiece for Hulerichi Hutteni eq. germ. Dialogi. Fortuna. Febris prima. Febris secunda. Trias Romana. Inspicientes. Publisher Jan Scheffer, 1520.

This shows Fortuna blindfolded with her cornucopia balanced unsteadily on a ball with her wheel in front of her. However, the handle of the wheel has a string attached which is being turned by a hand coming from a cloud, suggesting divine involvement. Leslie Thomson suggests this may have been a printer's device and notes that the text on the right reads "Fortune helps those who think soundly" whilst that on the left is "It is a dreadful thing to fight with God, and Fortune".

*Fortune: "All is but Fortune"* Compiled and edited by Leslie Thomson, (Washington D.C.; The Folger Shakespeare Library, 2000), p.19.

G. K. Hunter recognises that Tamburlaine's 'force comes from believing in himself more than in anything else outside' and describes his 'attitude of mind' as 'atheistic' because he has simply excluded God from the equation and concentrated his faith on himself'.<sup>37</sup> Tamburlaine perceives his words and actions as being entirely within his own control. However, more than simply not believing in God, he increasingly actively deifies himself. He promises that everyone who fights well on his behalf will become a king, asserting: 'I speak it, and my words are oracles' (3.3.107). In an ancient context 'oracles' were the words spoken from the gods by the priests but to Christians they also referred to the words of God or the scriptures. Furthermore, in contemporary political theory kings were ordained by God to rule on earth on his behalf.

Tamburlaine's claim to *always* keep his word further likens him to God and is emphasised in his treatment of besieged towns. The daily colour-code Tamburlaine uses to warn a town of its impending doom is applied without favour. This is demonstrated in his sacrifice of the virgins and subsequent sacking of Damascus, despite Zenocrate's plea that he shows mercy to her father's people. As Engles says, it not only demonstrates his 'godlike power over others' but it 'offer[s] an approximation of godlike fairness, [...] from the Calvinist concept of God. [...] Accept him and be saved if in his unknowable will

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<sup>37</sup> G.K. Hunter, 'The Beginnings of Elizabethan Drama: Revolution and Continuity' in *Renaissance Drama*, new series vol. 17, 'Renaissance Drama and Cultural Change' (1986), pp. 29–52, p. 35, 39. Other critics made similar points well before this including: Irving Ribner, 'The Idea of History in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*' in *ELH* vol. 20, no. 4, Dec 1953, pp. 251–266; Williard Thorp, 'The Ethical Problem in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*' in *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, xxix, (1930), pp. 385–9; and Frederick S. Boas, *Christopher Marlowe: A Biographical and Critical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).

he chooses you; reject him and be utterly destroyed'.<sup>38</sup> The respective fates of Zenocrates and Zabina reflect this precisely. However, the dependence on God's *unknowable* will, could even posit Tamburlaine as fairer than the Christian God. His decision to save a town's people is dependant only on their choices, which they can make according to well-known conditions. Tamburlaine establishes himself as a god who is truly merciful, just, and vengeful.

Ultimately though, Tamburlaine is raising himself above God. He tells Zenocrates that he would 'make Jove to stoop' (4.4.75) rather than make peace with her father. Having defeated the Sultan in battle, he posits himself as 'God's rival',<sup>39</sup> claiming 'the god of war resigns his room to me', (5.2.389) whilst 'Jove, viewing me in arms, looks pale and wan,' (5.2.391) fearful that 'my power should pull him from his throne' (5.2.392). Conventionally, such hubris should ultimately result in a fall. In Protestant doctrine human deification recalled Original Sin as Adam and Eve sought to attain divinity.<sup>40</sup> All the other characters who assume to themselves the special favour of God or Fortune are shortly destroyed by Tamburlaine. However, at the end of the play Tamburlaine is more powerful than ever and seems set for a long, and unchallenged rule. Even his enemy Bajazeth acknowledges his superiority over the gods, telling Zabina that:

The heavens may frown, the earth for anger quake;  
But such a star hath influence in his sword  
As rules the skies and countermands the gods. (5.2.168 – 170)

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<sup>38</sup> Lars Engle, 'Introduction' to *Tamburlaine*, p.187.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.186.

<sup>40</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Literature in Protestant England*, p.88.

There is no evidence that the heavens do 'frown', nor the earth 'quake' as he can 'rule the skies and countermand the gods'. Within the play world, as Zabina concludes:

Then is there left no Mahomet, no God,  
No fiend, no fortune, nor no hope of end  
To our infamous, monstrous slaveries. (5.2.176 – 8)

The repetition of 'no' emphasises God's absence. None of the powers characters variously called upon throughout the play exist to help them. As with *Three Ladies* the result is 'monstrous slaver[y]'. Ultimately, *Tamburlaine* is a godless play because there is no other god but Tamburlaine, distinctly human. At a time when God was assumed to control, minutely, every aspect of temporal as well as celestial activity, these two plays experiment with alternative scenarios. The absence of God in these two plays creates a power vacuum which may have been terrifying for contemporary audiences. The rest of this chapter will explore different ways in which other contemporary dramatists asserted the divine's controlling power within their play worlds.

### **Staging the Interventionist God**

It is a commonplace that following the Elizabethan Settlement, the 'age of miracles' was over.<sup>41</sup> God predominately used natural means to intervene.

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<sup>41</sup> For discussions on the contemporary meaning of the idea that 'miracles are dead' and the connection with the doctrine of providence see for example: Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*, pp. 226, 229; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1971), pp. 90-132; Robert Hunter West, *The Invisible World: A Study of Pneumatology in Elizabethan Drama* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), pp. 19–20; Discussing sacred or demonic manifestations van Dijkhuizen notes that much English culture remained unreformed in Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen, *Devil Theatre: Demonic Possession and Exorcism in*

Most plays adhered to this position with God's involvement evidenced only by character articulations, in keeping with the Protestant perception of the internalised nature of God's relationship with humans. However, some plays do have a visible divine response and in two, *King Leir and his Three Daughters* and *Edward I*, it is spectacular, making full use of permanent theatres' potentiality for special effects.

*King Leir and his Three Daughters* 1589, despite its pagan setting, is distinctly Christianised by its virtuous characters' references to God.<sup>42</sup> However, in 3.4 God's involvement has an external sign. Leir's speech warning the messenger sent to murder him against swearing by the heavens, hell and the earth is immediately followed by thunder and lightning. The would-be murderer becomes afraid and has second thoughts:

This old man is some strong magician!  
His words have turned my mind from this exploit. (3.4; 11637 – 8)

Although he credits his change of heart to Leir, for contemporary audiences, thunder and lightning were often associated with supernatural causes, particularly the divine.<sup>43</sup> Swearing in God's name was a breach of the Third Commandment for which the punishment was likely to be temporal, though of

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*English Renaissance Drama, 1558 – 1642* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), p.5; Almond discusses different interpretations of the end of miracles in the context of demonic possession in Philip C. Almond, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 8–12; Darren Oldridge, *Supernatural*, pp. 49–67.

<sup>42</sup> E.B. Everitt (ed.), *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his Three Daughters, Goneril, Ragan and Cordella in Six Early Plays Related to the Shakespeare Canon* (Copenhagen: Anglistica vol. xiv, 1965), pp. 15–58. Author unknown. All references to *King Leir* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.

<sup>43</sup> See chapter 3 for further discussion on this. See also, Leslie Thomson, 'The Meaning of Thunder and Lightning: Stage Direction and Audience Expectation' in *Early Theatre 2* (1999), pp. 11–24, p.11; Andrew McRae, *Renaissance Drama* (London: Arnold, 2003), pp. 98–103; Darren Oldridge, *Supernatural*, p.15; Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*, pp. 116–122.

divine instigation.<sup>44</sup> The supernatural association is reinforced as he debates with himself:

Oh, but my conscience for this act doth tell  
I get heaven's hate, earth's scorn, and pains of hell.  
(3.4; l.1646 – 7)

As discussed in chapter one, the internalised God was presumed to communicate most frequently with humans through the conscience.

Interpretation was challenging but Leir's piety, evidenced by the prayer book he had been reading, combined with the thunder and lightning, would suggest to at least some audiences that God's hand was guiding him away from the murder. Throughout this scene Leir and Perillus repeatedly reference 'the will of God' emphasising God's presence and role. They warn the messenger of the dire consequences for himself of their murder, focussing on the inevitability of an eternity in hell. These warnings are followed by more thunder, reinforcing their words, and causing the messenger to drop his weapons. Both Leir and Perillus highlight the link between the thunder, the messenger's change of heart and God's direct involvement:

Leir: Oh heavens be thanked, he will spare my friend;  
Peril: Oh happy sight! He means to save my lord.  
The king of heaven continue this good mind. (3.4; l.1741 – 3)

The use of the active present tense verb 'continue' makes explicit the belief that God has brought about the change and can sustain it if he chooses. God's

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<sup>44</sup> 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain' Exodus 20 paragraph B, fol. xxxr. Thomas Cranmer, *The Byble in Englyshe* London: Edward Whitchurch, 1540). Also known as the *Great Bible*. Jonathan Willis cites various contemporary authors on the nature of this punishment in his discussion on the Third Commandment. Jonathan Willis, *The Reformation of the Decalogue: Religious Identity and the Ten Commandments in England, c.1485 – 1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p.61.

presence in the scene is articulated by all three characters and evidenced more spectacularly by the theatrical use of thunder and lightning.

An even more direct and spectacular divine involvement is presented in George Peele's 1591 play *Edward I*.<sup>45</sup> The Queen's entrance after murdering the Mayoress is accompanied by thunder and lightning. She complains that the weather 'dare[s...] disturb [her] thoughts' and 'threaten' her, 'England's Queen' (l.2178 – 2180). Her daughter warns her that such pride is blasphemous, associating the storm with divine intervention:

Your blaspheming and other wicked deeds  
Hath caused our God to terrify your thoughts. (l.2182 – 2183)

The storm is 'caused' by God to remind the Queen of her sins and show his displeasure. The Queen responds by lying about the murder, blasphemously swearing this 'by heaven' and challenging God to enact a miracle by causing the earth to 'gape' and cause her to 'sink down to hell' (l.2190, 2197, 2198). The response is immediate, and she is swallowed up by the earth. For contemporary audiences this event would not be an unprecedented divine intervention. Although such miracles were considered rare, pamphlets reporting similar events often appeared, and the ballad, *The Lamentable Fall of Queene Elnor*, describes this event explicitly.<sup>46</sup> Orthodox doctrine might adjudge God no

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<sup>45</sup> George Peele, *Edward I* in Frank S Hook (ed.), *The Dramatic Works of George Peele* vol. 2, 1952 – 70 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1961), pp. 1-212. All references to *Edward I* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.

<sup>46</sup> See for example discussions throughout Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002); Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*; Darren Oldridge, *Supernatural*; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 90-132. The ballad is reprinted in Hook's edition of the play on pp. 206-211, Frank S. Hook (ed.), *The Dramatic Works of George Peele* vol. 2, 1952 – 70 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1961), pp. 1-212.

longer acted in this way, but theologians accepted it was possible. Events which today would be deemed accidents or having human causes were often attributed to God as punishment for sin.<sup>47</sup>

Several scenes later two commoners observe thunder and lightning accompanied by the sudden rising of a mound before them. They recognise it as a divine intervention and one prays for protection: '*Ora pro nobis* John, I pray fall to your prayers' (l.2278). Reappearing, the Queen 'bewail[s her] sinful life' and 'call[s] to God to save [her] soul' (l.2289, 2290), demonstrating her repentance and new-found piety. Any lingering doubt for audiences regarding the divine nature of these events are settled by King Edward who calls them 'miracles', and the Queen's determination to confess her sins, a 'wondrous chance' (l.2321; l.2323). Such spectacular divine responses were rare in contemporary drama however, perhaps because of their dubious theological status.<sup>48</sup> For most people God's involvement in their daily lives was a matter of faith, rather than physical experience. Dramatists who wanted to reflect this reality of contemporary belief needed to find other ways to do so. Some did this through physical, though remote, controlling powers using a framing device.

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<sup>47</sup> Nehemiah Wallington's notebooks contain many such attributions, see David Booy (ed.), *The Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington, 1618 – 1654: A Selection* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); similarly this assumption underlines many stories in the various editions of *A Mirror for Magistrates*, Thomas Beard's *The Theatre of God's Judgement* and similar contemporary texts as discussed by Frederick Kiefer *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*, p.32 and William Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956), pp. 307–319; Alexandra Walsham *Providence* discusses the various forms this took but also notes the ambiguous causality of combining God's work and Fortune in interpreting rapid rises and sudden falls.

<sup>48</sup> As is discussed in chapter 3, such spectacles were more commonly associated with the demonic.



In several plays a frame narrative shows supernatural beings claiming to control the dramatic action in a God-like manner. This allows audiences to observe from the outside the Christian experience of an ever-present, omniscient but invisible God controlling human lives through the experiences of the characters in the inner play. The characters in the frame story are pagan or classical, avoiding staging an anthropomorphic God, but the dialogue within the frame and/or the inner play Christianises them, giving God a presence within the inner play world.

This Christianisation of the frame characters is most evident in *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*.<sup>49</sup> Written in 1582 by an unknown author, Love, Fortune and Jupiter have an anthropomorphic presence, and literally claim control of human affairs in the opening scene. Despite the classical references to Pluto as King of Hell, the appearance of the fury Tisiphone, and the main characters of Jupiter, Venus and Fortune, the goddesses' battle mirrors that between God and Satan.<sup>50</sup> In the play, Fortune's association with hell and Venus's with heaven is direct and explicit. They are referred to as the daughters of Pluto, and Jupiter respectively. Jupiter is ascribed characteristics of God, further Christianising this part of the play. The fury, Tisiphone, addresses Jupiter as 'the father high' of men (l.23). The paternal nature of the Christian God, was emphasised throughout the liturgy and in contemporary

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<sup>49</sup> John Isaac Owen (ed.), *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune* (New York and London: Garland Renaissance Drama, 1979). All references to *Love and Fortune* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically. My modernisation throughout.

<sup>50</sup> For a discussion of the contemporary theology regarding the battle between God and the Devil and relevant secondary references see chapter 3.

catechisms, as was his ‘command’ of heaven, earth, and hell (l.19).<sup>51</sup> An additional association with the Christian God is made when Tisiphone describes herself as ‘Tormenting [...] the damned souls of them/ [...] that careless live of thy commandment’ (l.23 – 4). The Decalogue was God’s ‘commandment’, so ‘thy’ posits Jupiter as the Christian God. Ignoring the Commandments signalled reprobation and ultimate damnation, with all its associated ‘torments’ in hell.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Venus says Jupiter ‘governest everything’, acknowledging God’s omnipotence and controls gods and humans with his ‘fearful thunderbolt’ (l.97, 98). God was also deemed to use thunder and lightning to show his displeasure and change human behaviour.<sup>53</sup> Like Tamburlaine, discussed above, Jupiter himself claims a characteristic of God declaring: ‘What I have promised, doubt not to be performed’ (l.141). Finally, just as the Christian God ultimately judges human behaviour, so Jupiter is to judge which goddess ‘most can please [the human characters] or despite’ (l.265). Jupiter’s control over the humans in the inner play, delegated to the lesser goddesses, Love and Fortune, is distanced, just as God’s is in the real world. Pluto’s inferiority to Jupiter mirrors Satan’s relationship to the Christian God.<sup>54</sup> This is evidenced by Tisiphone’s acknowledgement of Jupiter as the being who ‘lowest hell obey’

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<sup>51</sup> God is referred to as Father over one hundred times in both the *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Homilies*. For references to God as ruler over heaven and earth see for example Brian Cummings (ed.), *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 114, 136, 241 and the Church of England, *Certain Sermons or Homilies appointed to be read in churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth of famous memory* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1851), pp. 179, 214, 415, 477, 516, 521, 524, 535, 607. God’s power over hell is largely asserted by inference through references to Christ’s resurrection and the harrowing of hell. See *Homilies* pp. 449, 479, 480 and 482.

<sup>52</sup> Jonathan Willis discusses the complex relationship between the doctrine of predestination, sin, salvation, and damnation, and keeping the Ten Commandments in Part II ‘The Evangelical Office of the Law’ of his monograph, *The Reformation of the Decalogue*, pp. 133–215.

<sup>53</sup> See discussion below and in chapters three and four.

<sup>54</sup> The relationship between God and the Devil is discussed in chapter three.

(l.19) and by Pluto's apology for the disturbance. Jupiter, represented by Venus, then is a substitute for the Christian God in the play.

Similarly, Oberon, in Robert Greene's 1590 play *James IV*, is ascribed divine characteristics paralleling the Christian God.<sup>55</sup> He describes himself as 'king/ [...] of all the world', articulating the concept of God in majesty and continues that he is 'tied to no place' expressing God's omnipresence (Chorus [1], l.4 – 7). Finally, 'all are tied to me' highlights humans' presumed dependence on God (Chorus [1], l.7).<sup>56</sup> Oberon's subsequent involvement in the inner play can thus be seen as the play's representation of the Christian God's management of the off-stage world.

The frame story of *Suleiman and Perseda*, written in 1588 and attributed to Thomas Kyd, resembles that in *Love and Fortune* but it is not Christianised by the frame characters.<sup>57</sup> Although characters in the inner story attribute events to Love, Fortune or Death only the braggart, Basilisco, appears to believe genuinely in Fortune's power. However, his boastful character, and subsequent cowardice projects him as one whose faith was more likely to be noisy than sincere. It thus serves more to undermine Fortune's power than reinforce it. Other characters assume control by a monotheistic god in keeping with their faith, either Christian or Muslim. For example, Perseda hopes Erastus

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<sup>55</sup> Robert Greene, *James IV* J.A. Lavin (ed.), (London: New Mermaids, 1967). All references to *James IV* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.

<sup>56</sup> The choruses are unnumbered in the text. These lines come from the first chorus which occurs between acts 1 and 2. The play's opening scene between Bohan and Oberon is referred to as the Induction.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Kyd (attrib.) *The Tragedye of Solyman and Perseda* John J. Murray (ed.), (New York & London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1991). All references to *Suleiman and Perseda* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.

will win his fights at the tournament and says: 'Heavens hear my hearty prayer, and it effect' (1.2.105) and facing imminent execution prays 'O Christ, receive my soul' (4.1.127) demonstrating her faith. Her piety is underlined when Suleiman allows Erastus and Perseda to return to Rhodes together and she promises that she will 'still solicit God for Suleiman' (4.1.199).

Suleiman variously attributes events to heaven or Fortune. He tells Erastus that: 'heavens brought thee hither for our benefit' (3.1.77) and seeing the love between Erastus and Perseda says: 'That heavens and heavenly powers do manage love' (4.1.168). Shortly after this however, regretting his decision to let Erastus and Perseda go, he attributes events to Fortune, Love and God:

What was it but abuse of Fortune's gift  
And therefore Fortune now will be revenged.  
What was it but abuse of Love's command?  
And therefore mighty Love will be revenged.  
What was it but abuse of heavens that gave her me?  
And therefore angry heavens will be revenged.  
Heavens, Love, and Fortune, all three have decreed  
That I shall love her still. (4.1.208 – 215)

The repetitious pattern here gives equal power to the three forces, although the ordering of Fortune, Love then Heaven, followed immediately by its reversal implies an increasing hierarchy in favour of the heavens. The absence of Death, the third character in the frame narrative, implicitly associates it with the heavens, reflecting the ultimate power of God to determine the moment of death. Subsequently, however, Suleiman asks why heavens, that 'hitherto have smiled on' him now 'unkindly lour' (5.4.82 – 3). The change between 'smiled' and 'lour[ed]' recalls Fortune's alleged changeability rather than God's

constancy. The references have gone full circle and are combined into one all-powerful being reminiscent of the Christian God. Thus, characters in this play acknowledge the power of both the celestial characters of the frame narrative and the orthodox Christian God, whom they might be seen to represent. Such a combination would have been familiar to contemporary audiences, though some would have been more comfortable with it than others.

The Christianisation in *James IV* is also reinforced by the assertions of the characters in the inner play who assume a Christian point of view throughout. Sir Bertram immediately sees the fortuitous theft of the warrant as 'a wondrous means' enacted by 'the hidden mercy from above' (3.3.33; 32) reinforcing the idea of Oberon as representing God and Slipper as his agent. Sir Bertram's reference to 'hidden' and 'above' signals Oberon and Bohan observing in the gallery but also God in heaven, as references to 'mercy' and 'wondrous' also have divine connotations. Explaining how he came by the papers, he urges Dorothea to 'mark the power of God' (3.3.62). The 'wonder' by which she was saved suggests a miracle which she should therefore not ignore, and he assures her that 'God will conduct your steps' (3.3.67). Dorothea herself frequently calls on God for protection praying 'God shield me [...] And save my soul' (4.3.52 – 3) and even Nano prays to 'The God of heaven' (4.4.70).

Likewise, in *Love and Fortune*, inner play characters contribute to the Christianisation of those in the frame narrative. Hermione asks 'Can gods or Fortune make amends in this distressed case' (1.493) distinguishing Fortune

from other gods, inferring an alternative supernatural power that contemporary audiences might hear as referencing the Christian God.<sup>58</sup> Later Bormio calls on the 'eternal Gods, that know my true intent/ And how unjustly wronged I have been', to prevent 'all secret dangers' and 'further' his plan to rescue Fidelia (I.1127 - 1130). The reference to 'eternal Gods' who know his inner thoughts and what has happened to him, articulates the characteristics of perpetuity and omniscience given to the Christian God. The ability to protect and assist assumes both omniscience and omnipotence. Hence the gods in the frame narrative are further Christianised.

Supernatural beings in frame narratives then were Christianised so that their control of the inner play world might be seen to reflect God's control of the real world. The nature of their involvement with their subject characters also represented Protestant beliefs about God's providence. The contemporary doctrine of providence asserted that God had simultaneously planned all events throughout time and that he controlled human lives in the here and now.<sup>59</sup> Both these doctrinal elements are evident in the way frame characters controlled their subjects in the inner play world.

In most of these plays the supernatural beings primarily achieve their aims through indirect action. In *Suleiman and Perseda* for example they claim

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<sup>58</sup> Gibson and Esra discuss the manner in which Sylvia, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, associates heaven with fortune but distinguishes between them, and they conclude that 'Fortune was often linked with other powers in debate, perhaps because it was inherently multi-natured and very hard to describe'. Marion Gibson and Jo Ann Esra, *Shakespeare's Demonology*, p.97.

<sup>59</sup> This is a complex doctrine which, simplified here, is dealt with in greater detail in chapter four of this work. For a full discussion of Protestant providentialism see Alexandra Walsham *Providence*.

to control characters' emotions and manipulate events. Love created Erastus and Perseda's love but Fortune 'first by chance brought them together' (1.6.14 – 16), whilst Death claims to have made Brusor murderously jealous, resulting in the plot to kill Erastus. The gods do not cross into the inner play-world.

Similarly, in *Love and Fortune*, Fortune takes responsibility for separating the lovers whilst at the end of the following act Venus claims to have reunited them. Despite these assertions, like the Christian God in real life, no direct control is perceptible for most of the play. They are all dependant on their subjects' faith in their power.

Revenge's participation is similarly indirect in *The Spanish Tragedy*. It is initially explicitly observational rather than participatory as he tells Andrea: 'Here sit we down to see the mystery/ And serve for Chorus in this tragedy'.<sup>60</sup> The verbs 'sit' and 'see' are passive, whilst 'Chorus' reflects their roles as commentators. However, at the end of the first act, responding to Andrea's complaints Revenge assures him that:

ere we go from hence  
I'll turn their friendship into fell despite,  
Their love to mortal hate, their day to night,  
Their hope into despair, their peace to war,  
Their joys to pain, their bliss to misery. (1.5.5 – 9)

Here he is asserting what he is going to do. 'I'll' is active and the repetitive pattern of 'their ... to' with its pairs of opposites is insistent, adding to the sense of his power and activity. This is very similar to the claims made by the gods in

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy* David Bevington (ed.), (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), (1.1.90 – 1). All other references to *Spanish Tragedy* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.

*Love and Fortune* and *Suleiman and Perseda*, although in both those plays Fortune's pronouncements are retrospective, not promising future action.

Nevertheless, Revenge is not shown to be active thereafter, even falling asleep during the action. At Andrea's complaints, he presents a prophetic dumbshow and urges Andrea to watch 'and then imagine thou/ What 'tis to be subject to destiny' (3.15.25 – 6). David Bevington describes him as 'the author and stage manager of this play'.<sup>61</sup> However, Revenge is also an allegorical representation of a human emotional driver; an externalisation of Andrea's own desire for revenge, as well as that of the characters within the inner play. Bevington likewise observes that the play 'is built upon irony, upon the ignorance of the characters that they are being used to fulfil the will of the gods', but this reflects contemporary orthodox views of humanity's relationship with God's providential plan – human lives were 'fulfilling the will of God'.<sup>62</sup> At the end of act three Andrea complains that Revenge is sleeping and not attending to what is happening. However, during that act the audience has seen Hieronimo's grief reach the point where he is contemplating suicide, his behaviour such that he appears mad to others, and his attempts to find earthly justice through the King finally defeated. This lays the groundwork for the conversation with Bel-Imperia planning their joint revenge which opens the next act. Revenge can sleep whilst the action unfolds because the emotion needed to enact his promises has been awoken within the characters who will affect

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<sup>61</sup> David Bevington, 'Introduction' to Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 1–15, p.6.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.



them. Direct input from him is unnecessary. Revenge has set the process in motion and merely needs to wait for Hieronimo to carry it through. In making what they think are their own decisions, Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia are shown to be acting out Revenge's plan. Revenge foretold the satisfaction of Andrea's need for vengeance, implanted the necessary emotional responses in his human subjects, and sat back to watch it unfold. Revenge's role thus mirrors the workings of God's providence: pre-planned, active yet indirect, effected through humans' emotional responses. Although God argues against humans taking revenge into their own hands, the dramatic technique of Revenge working in a frame narrative provides a practical enactment of God's assertion that 'vengeance is mine'. Normally hidden, the use of a narrative frame opens God's providential working to off-stage audiences' view.

*James IV* is unusual in that the frame narrative involves mortal characters alongside the supernatural. Additionally, these characters travel into the inner play world to affect their control. The inner play represents a story told by the mortal Bohan to the supernatural Oberon. Despite this being Bohan's tale however, it is the supernatural figure of Oberon who appears in control.<sup>63</sup> Oberon repeatedly disrupts Bohan's intended tale of 'deceit' and 'doubt' with dancing fairies (chorus between acts 1 and 2, l.3, 10). Bohan sends his sons off into the play world, but it is Oberon's more positive mood that they seem to represent, suggesting they are his agents. For example, after Oberon expresses regret over James' nefarious plans to kill Dorothea, Slipper dances to

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<sup>63</sup> J. Clinton Crumley, 'Anachronism and Historical Romance in Renaissance Drama' in *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* Jan 1, 1998, 24, pp. 75–90, p.88.

cheer him up. In the next scene he lays the groundwork for saving her, and, indirectly, James himself. The juxtaposition of these events links Oberon's dissatisfaction to Slipper's action, positing Slipper as an agent for Oberon. Similarly, it is Nano who suggests the disguise which facilitates Dorothea's escape and who accompanies her, thus also marking him as Oberon's agent. The change of scenes creates a sense of the time necessary for the events to occur whilst maintaining a continuous narrative, implying causality. Despite their participation in the frame narrative, Slipper and Nano are ordinary human characters within the inner play. They enact Oberon's wishes in the same way that human actions in the real world were believed to facilitate the implementation of God's providential plan.

Like Revenge, Oberon sleeps through part of the play, as if to allow the process which he has set in motion to take place. For contemporary audiences this can serve as a reminder that God's plans need time to take effect and that he need not constantly be interfering with human life to still have control over it. Contemporary theology described a providential plan that operated similarly; prepared by God at the beginning of time, which made on-going intervention by him unnecessary.<sup>64</sup> The plays' frame narratives mirror contemporary belief that God controls human life through the actions of humans themselves. These plays allow off-stage audiences to see and hear a representation of the workings of God – constantly involved in the workaday events of human life but

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<sup>64</sup> For discussions on providence and predestination see Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*; Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); Darren Oldridge, *Supernatural*; Alison Shell *Shakespeare and Religion*.

subtle and hidden. They also help modern scholars understand how God's providential plan was deemed to operate and to see his presence in the theatrical world.

A significant difference between the framing narrative of *James IV* and the other three plays discussed here concerns the relative timeframes of the narrative and inner play worlds. In *James IV*, the framing scene is initially set some time after the events of the inner play.<sup>65</sup> In introducing his scene, Bohan dates the events he describes as having taken place in 1520, explicitly the past. In the other three plays the two worlds are contemporaneous. However, the frequent movement of characters between the frame and the play effectively merges the time frames in *James IV*, making them concurrent.<sup>66</sup> Crumley's interpretation of this concerns historicity and is valid but there is an additional effect. Contemporaries' typological reading of the scriptures meant they regarded history as a working out of God's providential plan, so events of the past were inevitably linked to the present through a chain of causation.<sup>67</sup> God's participation was understood as being in the past, the present and the future simultaneously. The manipulation of time through the movement between the worlds in this play, accompanied by the interventions of frame characters, effectively reflects that continuity. It provides audiences with a visual presentation of the complex workings of God's providence.

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<sup>65</sup> J. Clinton Crumley, 'Anachronism', p.80.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.81.

<sup>67</sup> This is one part of the 'four-fold' meaning of scripture described by Philip M. Soergel, 'Luther on Angels' in Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (eds.), *Angels in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 64–82.

All the framing devices discussed here are distinct from a simple chorus's observational function. Frame characters assert their responsibility for the action that has been or will be seen, as well as what they will do henceforth to further their aims. Equally characters in the inner plays acknowledge the controlling claims of the frame characters in a manner that reflects real life theology. The Protestant belief that the omniscient, omnipresent but invisible God took providential control of all human lives was widely acknowledged, evidenced in both public and private extant materials.<sup>68</sup> In *Love and Fortune* all the main characters assume their lives are controlled by the framing supernatural forces, repeatedly attributing their experiences to Fortune or to Love. Fortune is characterised to reflect various contemporary assumptions and is given credit for both successes and disasters. Armenio, overhearing Fidelity and Hermione exchanging love vows, asks angrily: 'Hath Fortune promised so much hope at first,/ To make thy conquest of a Prince's child?' (l.317 – 8). Armenio attributes Hermione's presumption to Fortune but 'at first' hints at the subsequent fall that was to be expected from such hubris. Fortune was frequently portrayed raising beggars and casting down kings.<sup>69</sup> This foreshadows Fortune's subsequent boast concluding the act that it is her

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<sup>68</sup> Contemporary belief in providence is discussed in greater depth in chapter 4. For evidence of the widespread assumption of the doctrine see for example Alexandra Walsham *Providence*; Darren Oldridge *Supernatural*; Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *Antichrist's Lewd Hat* pp. 153, 359, 440; Paul S. Seaver, *Wallington's World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1985), pp. 46-66 presents extracts from the spiritual notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington in which Wallington assumes a providential cause for a wide range of events. There are many extant contemporary texts presenting providential events including Thomas Beard, *Theatre of God's Judgement* (London: Adam Islip, 1597) and the multiple editions of *A Mirror for Magistrates*. For a discussion of the providentialism in these texts see for example: Frederick Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy* (Huntingdon Library, 1983).

<sup>69</sup> See figure 2.4.

'Empery [...] in her pleasure to be changing still' and that she 'can on earth do what she will' (l.561 – 2; 564). Further she claims 'Fortune's power confounds' men's 'strong devises' (l.566). Hermione declares himself 'Confounded so to yield to fortune's will,' (l.422), reflecting Fortune's self-characterisation and suggesting that that Fortune cannot be resisted. Venus' power is also acknowledged. Hermione blames Love as well as Fortune when he misses his meeting with Fidelia, declaring that 'Love and Fortune once advanced' him but have now 'cast [him] away' (l.929 – 30). The active verbs 'advanced' and 'cast away' emphasise their control. Bormelio lays the blame firmly at Venus' door: 'Accuse not Fortune, son but blame thy love therefore' (l.936). The characters acknowledge that their lives are controlled by supernatural powers, who parallel the Christian God, just as contemporary Christians recognised God's power over their lives.

Similarly, in *Suleiman and Perseda* Erastus alternately assumes his life is subject to the power of Love and Fortune. He calls first on Love: 'if thou be'st of heavenly power,/ Inspire me with some present stratagem' (2.1.177 – 8) and then hopes 'Fortune may make me master of my own' (2.1.203). The active verbs 'inspire' and 'make', in conjunction with the choral intervention of the framing device, give these words a literal meaning. Later, he posits Fortune and Love in opposition when he bemoans the loss of his chain: 'Ah, treacherous Fortune, enemy to Love,/ Didst thou advance me for my greater fall?' (1.4.116 – 7). This apostrophe personifies both Love and Fortune whilst their mutual opposition is both conventional and reflects the frame narrative. He thus

accepts and reinforces their claims to control his life. Erastus also personifies Death through apostrophe, calling on 'gentle death' to 'ease [his] grief' (1.4.127) by forestalling the 'malice Fortune misintends' (1.4.128). This reflects the argument of the chorus over who has greatest power. Ultimately, he concludes that 'fell Fortune, Love and Death' all 'conspire [his] tragedy' (2.1.256 – 7) linking the events explicitly to the frame narrative. This supports the claims and counterclaims of the gods in the frame story.

As with Christian beliefs about God's involvement in human life, there is only limited direct engagement between the frame characters and those of the inner play. The circular nature of the battle in *Love and Fortune* does ultimately necessitate their participation in the inner play. However, this operates similarly to the actions of the characters enacting God's judgement in the moralities discussed in chapter one, so reflects a theatrical tradition. Likewise, Oberon's appearance in the inner world in *James IV* is only seen by Slipper, the go-between character he rescues. This has the aura of a miraculous intervention for the off-stage audience without undermining the distinction between the divine and temporal play worlds. As with heaven and earth then, the controlling frame and subject story operate in parallel but claims by the characters of the former and attributions by the latter tie them together. This is like Protestant believers attributing the events of their lives to God's intervention as discussed below. The framing scenes in all the plays discussed here can thus be seen to represent for contemporary audiences the providentialism of the Christian God in action. Like God, their divine characters manage human lives according to

their own plans. God's involvement is portrayed whilst Protestant sensitivities against the anthropomorphic presentation of God on stage are respected. The presence of the divine substitutes, whether constant or not, allows off-stage audiences to observe God's *modus operandi* as described in contemporary Protestant doctrine. This potentially facilitated audience understanding of that doctrine.

In the plays discussed so far God is represented by anthropomorphic supernatural characters controlling the action in a real but remote, God-like manner backed up by the assertions of inner play characters. In plays without a frame narrative God's involvement is reflected entirely by character assertion. As with the framed plays though this is often facilitated by references to Fortune.



Figure 2.4. Illustration from John Lydgate's *Siege of Troy*, by an unknown artist.

It shows Fortune as a queen turning/holding the wheel on which figures rise and fall.

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## Representing God Through Fortune

In his letter to the 'gentlemen readers' of *Perimedes the Blacksmith* Robert Greene lambasts Marlowe's play, asserting that he was 'daring God out of



heaven with that atheist Tamburlaine'.<sup>70</sup> This indicates that, in some respects at least, contemporaries might have seen *Tamburlaine* as a godless play. Nevertheless, it was hugely successful and spawned several plays with similar lead characters including one by Greene himself.<sup>71</sup> However, unlike *Tamburlaine* these plays largely represent God's earthly control of humankind, albeit through references to Fortune, who is shown controlling their characters' lives.

During the Medieval period many writers, both lay and spiritual, accommodated the pagan concept of Fortune within a Christian framework. Aquinas said that the existence of God's providence did not exclude chance or luck, whilst other medieval thinkers 'maintained the pagan tradition of the goddess Fortuna side by side with a belief in God's omnipotence'.<sup>72</sup> Writers such as Chaucer and Dante also incorporated the goddess into the theology their works reflect.<sup>73</sup> Fortune was used to explain the seemingly random events

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<sup>70</sup> Greene, Robert, 1558?-1592. *Perimedes the Blacke-Smith* (London: Printed by Iohn VVolve, for Edward White, 1588).

<sup>71</sup> Peter Berek suggests that Greene's *Alphonsus* is not an attack on Tamburlaine's atheism because it is too casual about consistency. He claims that Greene is using a Tamburlaine-style for stage effects not 'a coherent body of ideas which he expected his audience to assess' in Peter Berek, 'Tamburlaine's "Weak Sons": Imitation as Interpretation Before 1593' in *Renaissance Drama New Series* Vol. 13, 1982, pp. 55-82, p.65. He argues that none of *Tamburlaine's* imitators were responses to its moral position, but simply exploited the new effects and that although their characters talk about ruling fate 'the preponderance of evidence in their plays suggests the writer expected his audience to regard such claims as imitations of theatrical style, which didn't [*sic*] require them to revise their ethical standards' (p.72), essentially 'mediating between that play and their audiences' perhaps uneasy, but fundamentally conservative tastes' (p.82). However, the important point here is that these authors did choose to make their heroes ultimately subject to an external supernatural being, and to acknowledge that superior power.

<sup>72</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.91. Similarly, Alan Sinfield notes that 'Medieval thinkers [...made] Fortune a systematic power subordinate to God'. Sinfield, *Literature in Protestant England*, p.120. Beliefs about Providence are discussed further in chapter four.

<sup>73</sup> For a detailed summary of this history see for example: Frederick Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*. For Fortune's place in medieval literature see William Farnham, *The*

that occur in human life. People observed that the undeserving were often rewarded with wealth or position, whilst the more virtuous suffered misfortune. This seemed contrary to their concept of a just God, particularly within a Christianity in which good works were presumed to have a spiritual value. It was this unpredictable aspect of life that encouraged a belief in Fortune as an external power interfering with earthly affairs. Protestant theologians and preachers though sought to persuade their parishioners to recognise this unpredictability as the working out of God's providential plan.<sup>74</sup>

However, despite complaints by Reformation theologians, the idea of Fortune's influence remained strong in the popular imagination following the Reformation. The Protestant Bishop of Lincoln, Thomas Cooper railed against those who believed in God as first creator but not involved in the minutiae of human affairs, which, he said created an 'impotent god, and so no god'.<sup>75</sup> Other clerics and theologians, including Calvin and the Bristol preacher John Northbrooke, complained that even the educated laity believed in luck, whilst images of the goddess Fortune abounded.<sup>76</sup> In the 1580s this continued interest in fortune as a concept had several additional sources. Writers of this

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*Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy*. For a summary of pre-Renaissance development of thought on Fate, Fortune, Providence and human freedom see Antonio Poppi, 'Fate, Fortune, Providence and Human Freedom' in Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy Volume 1*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 641–667; pp. 641–4.

<sup>74</sup> Alan R. Young, 'Fortune in Shakespeare's *King Lear*' in Leslie Thomson, (compiler and ed.), *Fortune: "All is but Fortune"* (Washington D.C: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 2000), pp. 57–65. Young discusses Calvin's repudiation of Fortune's power in favour of the providential God and rejection of Dante's suggestion of Fortune as God's agent; Victoria Brownlee, *Biblical Readings and Literary Writings*, p.104; Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*, pp. 22–3; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 91–2, all discuss the persistence of lay attribution to Fortune despite the efforts of theologians and preachers.

<sup>75</sup> Thomas Cooper, *Certain Sermons*, p.191.

<sup>76</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Providence* pp. 20–1.

period were exposed to a Christian humanist education including classical representations of Fortune in standard texts. Also, despite the lack of a printed English translation until 1640, interest in Machiavelli's *The Prince* was strong, with many manuscript versions in circulation, as well as printed versions in Italian, French, and Latin.<sup>77</sup> Machiavelli had a human-centred view that the events that make up an individual's life can, at least to some extent, be controlled by humans.<sup>78</sup> This fed into the debate about human responsibility for sin at an individual level as part of the finer elements of Reformed doctrine as well as concerns to avoid making God the author of sin, an accusation Catholics in particular directed at the reformed theology.<sup>79</sup>

Reformers' revised historiography however claimed that such accusations were evidence of the 'false' theology of Roman Catholic Christianity which had, they argued, diverged from the 'true' Christian faith to which they

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<sup>77</sup> Irving Ribner, 'Marlowe and Machiavelli', p.350; Also, Timothy M. Ponce, 'Reconsidering the Early Modern Machiavellian: Illicit Manuscripts and Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*' in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* vol. 60, no. 4, Winter 2018, pp. 443–466. Ponce discusses the more positive slant on Machiavellian philosophy provided by these manuscript translations and suggests Lorenzo and Hieronimo reflect 'the evil and Biblical versions of the Machiavel' p.444. Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli* (Oxford: Routledge, 1964), pp. 52–4 describes the variety of versions available to readers in the 1580s. Raab further discusses, partly speculatively, the reception of Machiavelli in the 1580s and 1590s including a discussion of Machiavellian stage villains pp. 54–76.

<sup>78</sup> For discussion of Machiavelli and providence see for example William R Elton, *King Lear and the Gods* (San Marino, California: Henry E. Huntington Library, 1966), p. 11; for Machiavelli and *Tamburlaine* see Frederick Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*, pp. 122-157, and Alan Sinfield, *Literature in Protestant England*, pp. 81-105; for Machiavelli and Fortune see Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought Volume 1*, pp. 120–121, 129–138; for contemporary attitudes to Machiavelli see Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli*.

<sup>79</sup> See for example Francis Young, *English Catholics and the Supernatural, 1543 – 1829* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2013), pp. 42–3; Michael Braddick, *God's Fury, England's Fire: A New History of the English Civil Wars* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2008), pp. 18–21; Antonio Poppi, 'Fate, Fortune, Providence and Human Freedom', pp. 661–7.

were returning.<sup>80</sup> As human works no longer had a salvific value and everyone one was deemed a sinner, suffering was always justified. In this view there was no room for random chance, much less an alternative ruling power influencing human affairs. That was the sole prerogative of God, and any apparent injustice or contradiction arose from human inability to recognise the rationality of God's overall providential plan - a consequence of weak human intellect.

Thomas Cooper wrote in 1580:

that which we call fortune is nothing but the hand of God, working by causes and for causes that we know not. Chance or fortune are gods devised by man and made by our ignorance of the true almighty and everlasting God.<sup>81</sup>

Keith Thomas notes that 'all post-Reformation theologians taught that nothing could happen in this world without God's permission.'<sup>82</sup> The *Homilies*, preached regularly in churches up and down the country, affirmed that to ascribe events to fortune or chance was to deny God his own, an act of spiritual idolatry.<sup>83</sup>

Both the traditional concept of Fortune and the Protestant doctrine of a providential God appear in the dramatic representation of Fortune and God during the 1580s and into the early 1590s. The extent and nature of the representation of Fortune though was determined by the plays' settings. Drama set in non-Christian contemporary, settings, for example, had much greater freedom from the constraints of orthodox providential control, as heterodox

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<sup>80</sup> Alister McGrath discusses the idea of the Reformation as a return to a purer past in his introduction. Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought*. Alec Ryrie discusses the English Radicals' similar ideas, in particular their insistence on a historiographical link with the Lollards. Alec Ryrie, *The English Reformation: A Very Brief History* (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 2020), pp. 79-97.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas Cooper, *Certain Sermons* p. 164.

<sup>82</sup> Keith Thomas *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 90.

<sup>83</sup> *Homilies*, p.663, also pp. 527-529. This is discussed by Alexandra Walsham *Providence* p.125.

ideas could be attributed to non-Christians. Many plays present a range of theological perspectives without necessarily choosing between them. Virtuous characters articulate faith in Fortune, God or both as readily as the villains, without an obvious judgemental outcome for them, leaving audience members to read it as they choose.

One feature that appears in several plays associates Fortune with temporal affairs and God with the end of life. In Thomas Lodge's 1588 play *The Wounds of Civil War* characters articulate various conceptions of God and Fortune.<sup>84</sup> Sulla ultimately sees Fate and Fortune working in combination. Fortune influences what happens in an earthly, short-term sense but Fate, representing God, rules the final outcome, death, and in particular one's post-mortual status, reflected here by permanent reputation.<sup>85</sup> Speaking of his enemies, Marius and his son, Sulla notes that although Fortune's 'lours' ensured their ultimate defeat, both Old Marius and Young Marius had had opportunities to rule so both also benefited from Fortune's 'laughs' (5.5.83). Neither 'their minds could tame' (5.5.83), implying they could manage the effects of Fortune and suggesting they both deserved Fate's reward. Sulla asserts that 'men were made to mount and then to droop' (5.5.94) as part of the divine plan and this must be accepted. He describes Fate as 'uncertain', like Fortune, and contends that 'where she kisseth once she quelleth twice' (5.5.95;

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<sup>84</sup> Thomas Lodge, *The Wounds of Civil War* Joseph W. Houppert (ed.), (London: Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd, 1970). All references to *Wounds* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.

<sup>85</sup> For a discussion of the inter-relationship between reputation/fame, *vir* *virtù*, and salvation see for example Quentin Skinner *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, volume 1*, pp. 88–100, 175. For a detailed discussion of these themes specific to *The Wounds of Civil War* see Frederick Kiefer *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*, pp. 123–133.

96). However, the terms 'uncertain', 'kiss' and 'quell' are less negative than the equivalent 'fickle', or 'unconstant' commonly associated with Fortune. All these terms for Fate can equally be associated with God's providence. 'Uncertain' reflects a failure to understand God's plans rather than implying God is changeable, whilst 'kiss' and 'quell' have connotations associated with God's paternal relationship with humankind whereby God both rewards and punishes. Fortune then influenced their life-chances, in parallel with God's ultimate control over their death.

Sulla's recognition of the superior power of Fate results in a visit from a spirit reassuring him that he will go to heaven when he dies. In Christian terms this equates to salvation. As Sulla explains to Pompey, having 'made the world to stoop' (5.5.315) by achieving many victories and 'fettered Fortune in the chains of power' (5.5.316) he wielded, he ultimately 'must droop and draw the Chariot of Fate' (5.5.317). He cannot fight against this, indicated by 'must' whilst the image of him having to 'draw a chariot' parallels the punishment he imposed on the African princes he defeated. The power he had to 'conquer kingdoms' was dependent on the 'gracious revolution of the stars' (5.5.340). He cannot 'master Fate' (5.5.341) as Fate, representing God, is the ultimate controller of human life and no-one can resist its power.

The capacity to manage Fortune but not Fate is also evident in Robert Greene's 1587 play *Alphonsus, King of Aragon*.<sup>86</sup> Like Tamburlaine, Alphonsus

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<sup>86</sup> Robert Greene, *Alphonsus, King of Aragon* in J. Churton Collins (ed.), *The Plays and Poems of Robert Greene Volume I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), pp. 77–135. All references to *Alphonsus* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.

claims to control Fortune. Responding to Amurack's warning that, although Fortune has previously favoured him, she will now change, Alphonsus declares:

I clap up Fortune in a cage of gold,  
To make her turn her wheel as I think best. ([4.3]; l.1481 – 2)

The repetition of 'I' at the beginning and end of this statement, along with the active controlling verbs 'clap up' and 'make' all reflect his self-image as controller of his own circumstances. Similarly, when Venus describes Alphonsus' early achievements in the prologue which begins the second act, she attributes his success to himself: 'Alphonsus 'gins by step and step to climb/ Unto the top of friendly Fortune's wheel' (l.353 – 354).<sup>87</sup> The use of the active verb 'climb' puts Alphonsus in control. Conversely, 'friendly' implies that Fortune is passively allowing this, with the unspoken corollary that she could subsequently choose not to. The references to her wheel in both speeches acts as a reminder of the possibility of an impending fall. All may not be in his power after all.

However, in the opening prologue Venus credited Alphonsus with 'power divine' (l.26), describing him as 'that man of Jove his seed,/ Sprung from the loins of the immortal Gods' (l.21 – 2). Venus's association with heaven gives her words veracity. Alphonsus here is shown as acting as God's agent in controlling Fortune. Act four ends with Alphonsus fighting the Muslim, Amurack, to secure his crown. In the following prologue Venus describes the battle as

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<sup>87</sup> See figures 2.1 – 2.4 above showing Fortune and her wheel. This was a very common representation.

initially going evenly between them.<sup>88</sup> Fortune temporarily ‘tempered [...] her wheel’ so ‘there was no vantage to be seen’ between the protagonists (l.1529 – 1530). Ultimately though ‘God and Fates decreed’ Alphonsus’ success (l.1532). Although Carinus credits Fortune with ‘raising up’ Alphonsus ‘Unto the top of [her] most mighty wheel’, ([5.3]; l.1751 – 2) Alphonsus, the undoubted hero, combines thanks to both God and Fortune working together, asking: ‘can the gods be found to be so kind to me’ ([5.3]; l.1767) further adding that ‘the fates and fortune, both in one’ ([5.3]; l.1785) have raised his status. Alphonsus’ combination of faith in God and recognition of Fortune perhaps reflects the mixed assumptions of many in the play’s early audiences.

The link between the Fates, representing God, and Fortune was not limited to the Eastern plays. A similar relationship is assumed by Richard at the end of the anonymous *The True Tragedy of Richard III* (1589).<sup>89</sup> Facing imminent defeat and despite injury and the loss of his horse, Richard refuses to fly, soliloquising:

for this day, if Fortune will, shall make thee King  
possessed with quiet crown, if Fates deny, this ground must be  
my grave, yet golden thoughts that reached for a crown,  
daunted before by Fortune’s cruel spite, are come as comforts  
to my drooping heart. (l.1993 – 7; sig. H3r)

As discussed below, Richard consistently defers to Fortune, but here he recognises two powers at work: Fortune, who may ‘will’ earthly power for him,

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<sup>88</sup> There is a prologue at the beginning of each act, but they are otherwise not numbered. The line numbering is continuous throughout.

<sup>89</sup> W.W. Greg (ed.), *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third* (Oxford: Malone Society Reprints, 1929). All references to *Richard III* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically. Throughout this chapter it is this play about Richard III that is discussed and not the more well-known play by Shakespeare.



and the more powerful Fates, who can 'deny' Fortune, overriding her and bring death.<sup>90</sup> The repetition of 'if' illustrates the contingent nature of human lives dependant on external powers, despite any 'golden thoughts' they may have for themselves. As with Alphonsus, for Richard, Fortune plays her part but under God's ultimate control.

Some playwrights reflected the orthodox Protestant anti-Fortune doctrine by assigning belief in Fortune as a ruling deity to explicitly Catholic, Muslim or pagan characters of low moral status. Fortune then acts as an anti-God figure. Their expressed faith in Fortune mirrors more orthodox religious faith and the falseness of their views is underlined by their subsequent fate. In *The Battle of Alcazar* written in 1588 and attributed to George Peele, Stukeley, a historical figure of possibly Catholic leanings, plans to overthrow Elizabeth's government in Ireland.<sup>91</sup> He expresses belief in Fortune as ruler of his life saying he 'touched the height of Fortune's wheel' when he was young and living in

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<sup>90</sup> Paul Jorgenson discusses how Shakespeare's history plays were affected by these different views of the relative influence of God, Fortune and human action on the outcome of war in Paul A. Jorgenson, 'Formative Shakespearean Legacy: Elizabethan Views of God, Fortune and War' in *PMLA* March 1975, vol. 90, no. 2, pp. 222–233.

<sup>91</sup> George Peele was educated at Christ Church, Cambridge and subsequently associated with Oxford. No specific religious affiliation is given in his *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry. See Reid Barbour, "Peele, George (bap. 1556, d. 1596), poet and playwright." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). The online edition has been used throughout. The historical Stukeley's religious affiliations are unclear. According to Charles Edelman in his introduction to the Revels edition of *The Battle of Alcazar* he served Somerset in Edward the Sixth's reign then lived in France during Mary's, suggesting Protestant leanings and he also hoped for preferment under Elizabeth. However, he was friends with the Catholic Sean O'Neill and liaised with the Spanish Ambassador. Failing to get support from Elizabeth, he tried to engage with the Pope and Spain against her, and reportedly lived in Spain as a practicing Catholic. Edelman provides evidence that Elizabeth certainly believed him to be Catholic (p.6). Edelman's brief biography paints a picture of someone willing to be whatever suited his best interests at the time. Charles Edelman, 'Introduction' to *The Stukeley Plays* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, Revels Plays, 2005) pp. 1–57.

England.<sup>92</sup> He believes that ‘from our cradles we were marked all/ And destinate to die in Afric here’ (5.1.171 – 2). His subsequent ‘Here endeth Fortune’s rule and bitter rage’ (5.1.179) credits Fortune with control over his death. Several indicators underpin the association between Stukeley’s Fortune references and his low moral status. Stukeley’s link with the Irish Bishop in the play associated him with ‘superstitious’ Catholic beliefs in the orthodox Protestant rhetoric of the day.<sup>93</sup> This would have been heightened for any audience members aware of the historical Stukeley’s supposed Catholicism whilst in Spain. Also, his plan to travel to Ireland to overthrow Elizabeth’s rule there supported by a foreign force obviously marked him as a traitor.

Similarly, in the same play the Muslim character Muly Mohamet bemoans his fate with reference to the stereotypical inconstancy of Fortune: ‘O fortune constant in unconstancy!’ (2.3.4) whilst attributing the success of his adversary Abdulmelec to her too: ‘Fortune hath made thee King of Barbary’ (2.3.15). In *Alphonsus*, Amurack expects that as ‘Fortune oft hath viewed’ Alphonsus ‘with friendly face’ she now ‘shall change’ allowing ‘Mars, that God of might’ to instead ‘succour me, and leave Alphonsus quite’ ([4.3]; l.1475, 1478 – 9). His paganism is indicated by his deification of Mars. He is, inevitably, disappointed. Equally, the, presumably Christian, Duke of Milan’s evident low moral status is

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<sup>92</sup> George Peele (attrib.), *The Battle of Alcazar* in Charles Edelman (ed.), *The Stukeley Plays* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 59–128, 5.1.139. All other references to *Alcazar* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.

<sup>93</sup> Different aspects of Catholic belief were highlighted as superstitious in Protestant propaganda as discussed in Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Darren Oldridge, *Supernatural*, p.11; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.303; Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Tudor Church Militant: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation* (London: Penguin Press, 1999); Adrian Streete discusses the use of anti-Catholic language in contemporary English drama in Adrian Streete, *Apocalypse and Anti-Catholicism*.

accompanied by an inappropriate reliance on Fortune. He complains that ‘This is the chance of fickle Fortune’s wheel;/ A Prince at morn, a Pilgrim ere it be night;’ ([4.2]; l. 1270 – 1), before resigning himself to what ‘Fortune hath assigned’ ([4.2]; l.1275). Reference to Fortune also signals impending doom for Abradatus in *The Wars of Cyrus, King of Persia*, written by an unknown author in 1588.<sup>94</sup> He is chosen by lot to lead the vanguard for Cyrus in the ultimate fight against Antiochus at which he declares: ‘Fortune hath favoured me; the lot is mine’ (5.2; l.1560). Drawing lots is an activity of chance and so was condemned by some Protestants.<sup>95</sup> Attributing the outcome explicitly to Fortune also takes from God what is rightfully his, so Abradatus’ death in the subsequent battle might seem deserved to some contemporary audiences, despite his apparent valour.<sup>96</sup>

Unlike some of the other Eastern plays, in *Alphonsus Amurack*’s religion is represented in a consistently negative light as superstitious. This is because the play tells the story of a “good” Christian fighting both “bad” Christians and “infidels” rather than bad Christians being punished by God through the agency

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<sup>94</sup> James Paul Brawner (ed.), *The Wars of Cyrus: An Early Classical Narrative Drama of the Child Actors* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1942). All references to *Cyrus* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically. I have modernised the spelling of this text. Although the play has been divided into acts and scenes the line numbering is continuous.

<sup>95</sup> Keith Thomas discusses the ambiguity towards drawing lots. The medieval Church considered the result occurred with God’s help and the practice and assumption continued post-Reformation. However, it was seen as a recourse to God’s providence so only for serious issues, hence Puritans in particular, forbade games of chance or similar trivial uses. Keith Thomas *Religion and the Decline of Magic*.

<sup>96</sup> The idea that accrediting Fortune with events denied God’s providence came from Augustine. For discussions of this see Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought Volume 1*, p.95; Alexandra Walsham *Providence*, p.125; Keith Thomas *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.91. Alan Sinfield however notes that although Calvin held this view, some Protestants allowed a role for Fortune in suffering. Alan Sinfield *Literature in Protestant England*.

of Muslims or pagans. From a Protestant point of view, Amurack's references to Mohammad as god might seem like Catholics praying to saints.<sup>97</sup> Indeed Matar notes that 'there is scarcely a mention of the Turks and Islam in early modern English eschatology without an immediate mention of the Pope and Catholicism', whilst Vitkus explains that this false idea of Muslim deification of Mohammad came from anti-Islamic discourse over many centuries.<sup>98</sup> Despite claiming him as cousin, Amurack only agrees to help Belinius if Mohammad 'say aye unto the same' but warns 'would I not set foot forth of this land,/ If Mohammad our journey did withstand' ([3.2]; l.810, 814 – 5). In some ways this can be read as a pious reference, but it is undermined by his negative references to Fate which he declares to have 'been so false' as to allow Alphonsus' victory ([3.2] l.782). As discussed above, within *Alphonsus* Fate is aligned with God so Amurack's condemnation of fate underlines his own low moral status. Denying the decision of the Fates in this play is tantamount to denying God's choices.

More typically Muslim or pagan characters in these plays are treated ambivalently, with what may seem a surprising degree of even-handedness. This reflects the mixed attitudes to both the Ottoman Turks and the Persian Muslims in England at that time. As non-Christians and warriors, they were

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<sup>97</sup> For discussions on orthodox Protestant attitudes to intercessory prayers to the saints see Alexandra Walsham, 'Angels and Idols in England's Long Reformation' in Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (eds.), *Angels in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 134–167, pp. 137–8; Laura Sangha, *Angels and Belief in England, 1480 – 1700* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), pp. 42–51; Keith Thomas *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.81.

<sup>98</sup> Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain 1558 – 1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.154; Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk*, p.52.

castigated and feared. Between them they ruled over an impressive empire stretching throughout the Mediterranean, eastward towards Asia, and threatening the borders of Austria. Their wealth was also perceived to be impressive, and these features resulted in wary respect and admiration. Contemporary English could not view Muslims as inferior, except in terms of their religious beliefs. Equally, they were important trade partners for English merchants in the Mediterranean. Elizabeth I wrote to the Shah of Persia and received letters of privilege in 1580.<sup>99</sup> She also hoped that he would help her in the war against Spain, though this did not eventuate. England traded military hardware with the Turks, despite knowing that it would be used against fellow Christians, albeit Catholic ones. Indeed, Elizabeth took pains to suggest that English Protestantism was closer to Islam than to Catholicism, with their shared logocentric faith and hatred of icons.<sup>100</sup> Consequently, in plays explicitly involving a mixture of Christian and non-Christian characters, attributions to God and Fortune are more complex, reflecting the moral ambiguity of characters who were not English Protestants for audiences.

For example, Abdelmelec in *Alcazar*, begins by piously articulating the 'due and duties' he '[does] owe/ To heaven and earth' (2.1.9 – 10) before proclaiming his reinstatement of the succession usurped by Muly Mohamet. The ambivalent nature of Abdelmelec's character as a Muslim is indicated by

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<sup>99</sup> The broader significance of this is discussed in Nabil Matar *Islam in Britain*, p.20.

<sup>100</sup> For detailed discussions see Jonathan Burton, *Traffic and Turning*; Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain* who discusses both secular and eschatological attitudes of the English towards Muslims throughout her book; Jane Grogan, *The Persian Empire*, who in the introduction highlights the distinction between Persian and other eastern groups, which, she says, modern critics often assimilate as if the same; Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk*.

his public statement associating his victory with 'fortune's plumes' (2.1.6). Nevertheless, overall, he is a positive character, and he repeatedly calls on 'heaven and earth' (2.1.11, 12) to hear his promise, and asks 'Ye gods of heaven' to show approval so that 'men on earth' will 'stand content' (2.1.20, 21). Similarly in *Cyrus*, most of the virtuous characters attribute desired outcomes to God but their references to Fortune again indicate a degree of ambivalence. For example, Panthea considers it a consequence of 'fortune's wrath' that she is captured by Cyrus (1.1; l.101) but subsequently sends her 'good angel' to care for Abradates (5.2; l.1567). She also asks the 'Persian Deities, for Cyrus sake,' and the 'Assyrian Gods, for Abradates sake,' to 'give victory unto the Persians', before offering sacrifice at Bellona's altar, carefully covering all options (5.2; l.1573 -1575). Conversely Libanio's piety is more clearly Christianised. He attributes his eventual escape 'alone unto the gods' as 'it passed so far the reach of human sense' (4.1; l.1092 – 3), reflecting Protestant theology's argument that God's seemingly unaccountable decisions were beyond humans' weak understanding. Alexandra similarly shows her piety when she says 'I have not prayed in vain,/ Nor called upon the gods with frustrate vows' (4.1; l.1086 – 7) when she sees him return safely to the court. These examples reflect the opinion of John Florio, Italian language teacher, who in his *Firste Fruites*, 1578, advised 'that man should never seek after Fortune, but altogether despise her' instead recommending man 'put himself in the hands of God'.<sup>101</sup> The Christianisation of these Muslim characters' piety in

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<sup>101</sup> John Florio, *Firste Fruites*, London 1578, sig M4v. My modernisation.

contrast to others' reliance on Fortune facilitates God's participation in the play world.

The Eastern plays of the later 1580s make use of their exotic setting to represent different attitudes to the roles of God and Fortune in human life.

Pagan, heathen, and villainous Christians could legitimately make blasphemous assertions without risking censorship. Many of the plays enacted historical events in which Muslim forces often did defeat Christians so God necessarily could not always be on the side of the Christian righteous. Virtuous and villainous characters were equally as likely to attribute their life experiences to God or to Fortune, and often to a mixture of the two. However, the representation of God in British history plays presented a different challenge.

### **Staging God in the Early British History Plays**

The Eastern plays then experimented with different relationships between God, Fortune, and the protagonists. In plays with non-Christian or ambivalent Christians there need be no straightforward association between the victors and God. This was not the case with plays covering British history. In these plays, acknowledging God is an explicit moral marker. Virtuous characters establish their moral status through reference to God, whilst the villains favour Fortune, sometimes disregarding God completely. In this way God is distanced from their evil deeds, which are instead associated with Fortune or the Devil.

The British history plays of the late sixteenth century seek to establish their Christian credentials early on. In the opening scene of *The Troublesome Reign of King John* from 1589, Elinor attributes Richard's supposed death to 'God and Fortune'.<sup>102</sup> Her careful ordering prioritises the power of God. Similarly, although Lord Chantillon's introduction as the ambassador from Philip, 'by the grace of God most Christian King of France' (1.1; l.46 – 7) is a conventional title matching the occasion's formality, it also helps establish the Christian context for audiences. The opening scene of *Richard III* from the same year is a prologue or chorus involving a ghost and the allegorical character of Truth, with no divine references. However, once the play proper begins, the characters acknowledge God's power and involvement in earthly matters:

Hastings: For our unthankfulness the heavens hath thrown thee  
down

Dorset: I fear for our ingratitude, our angry God doth frown.  
(sc. 2, l.81 – 2; sig. A4r)

Although the direct association between human 'unthankfulness' and 'ingratitude', and a responsive God who 'frown[s]' and 'throw[s Edward] down' has a Catholic feel commensurate to the period of the play's setting, Protestants also saw personal and national disasters like this as punishments from God. The use of 'for' in relation to 'unthankfulness' and 'ingratitude' perhaps suggests a more direct causal link than was orthodox, but many in a contemporary audience would have identified with such an interpretation. Even the strictest

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<sup>102</sup> George Peele (attrib.), *The Troublesome Reign of King John* in E.B. Everitt (ed.), *Six Early Plays Related to the Shakespeare Canon*, Anglistica vol. 14 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1965), pp. 143–192, 1.1; l.19. All other references to *King John* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.



Protestants were encouraged to seek within their own behaviours the cause of their misfortunes.<sup>103</sup> Edward's 'he that lay me here,/Can raise me at his pleasure' is more orthodox (l.83 – 4; sig. A4r). The active verbs 'lay' and 'raise' ascribes his illness to the unnamed but implicit God referred to as 'he', with no suggestion that Edward's own behaviour has caused God's choices.<sup>104</sup> Additionally, having persuaded Hastings and Dorset to become friends, his final words involve a conventional, commitment reflected in the words of many a contemporary Protestant will:

I commit my soul to almighty God,  
My saviour, and sweet redeemer, my body to the earth,  
(l.186 – 7; sig. B1v)<sup>105</sup>

and:

He that made me save me,  
Unto whose hands I commit my Spirit. (l.190 – 1; sig. B1v)

Again, the active verbs 'made', and 'save' are given to God whilst the more passive 'commit' is for the human Edward. Religiously precise audience members might see the orthodoxy of Edward's speeches compared to his followers' more traditional language as subtle character markers, but none would doubt that the play is operating in a Christian world in which God is both present and active.

The play *Edward I* initially displays an unwillingness to attribute perceived undeserved misfortune directly to God as Edward blames 'ingrateful

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<sup>103</sup> This is epitomized by the entries in the diary of Nehemiah Wallington. For an accessible edited version see Booy (ed.), *The Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington*.

<sup>104</sup> Protestants did believe that their misfortunes were just punishments for wrongdoing, but to suggest that their behaviour directly caused a response from God undermined the concept of God's omnipotence and prescience. God always knew that an individual would sin, so the associated punishment was pre-ordained not reactionary.

<sup>105</sup> More traditional wills often included references to the Saints.

destiny' (l.42 – 3) for his mother's fainting fit which he mistakes for her death. He has been fighting in the crusades, upholding the Christian faith in contemporary eyes, so to be greeted on his return by his mother's death might be construed as 'ingrateful'. Gibson and Esra note that 'destiny' referred to 'the individual 'fate' or predestined path of a person' linking it to the Christian doctrine of providence.<sup>106</sup> Using 'destiny' therefore avoids explicitly accusing God of injustice, whilst allowing a natural human response. Edward's Christian credentials are therefore asserted immediately and reinforced by his subsequent:

O God my God, the brightness of my day,  
How oft hast thou preserv'd thy servant, safe,  
By sea and land, yea in the gates of death,  
O God to thee how highly am I bound,  
For setting me with these on English ground?  
(l.112 – 116)

The repetition of 'O God' emphasises Edward's faith while the active verbs 'preserv'd' and 'setting' highlights God's control. When Edward accepts the crown he prioritises God's role by placing a reference to the 'decree' of the 'doom of heaven' ahead of that to the 'lawful line of our succession' and by concluding that it is 'a blessing from on high' (l.190, 191, 193).

The plays discussed so far, all use formal, orthodox language to establish God's role in the play world, commensurate with the high-status individuals speaking. In the 1590 play *Jack Straw* the opening scene involves commoners, with inevitably more informal language. Nevertheless, God's status as ruler of human affairs is again clearly signalled. Nobs, supporting the

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<sup>106</sup> Marion Gibson and Jo Ann Esra, *Shakespeare's Demonology*, p.57.

call for rebellion, asserts that 'We owe God a death, and we can but die' while the parson says that 'God doth not this dealing allow or love'.<sup>107</sup> Their consequent assumption that God would therefore favour the communal ownership and social equity that they propose would have been perceived as erroneous by most contemporary audiences, indeed, against God's order, but they do establish his involvement.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, given the molestation that triggered the rebellious talk, this conscious inclusion of God would potentially have helped to arouse some audience sympathy for the rebels. It is especially interesting that the following scene, involving high status individuals, including the Lord Archbishop, has no direct reference to God.

Even plays set in pre-Christian Britain have at least some attributions to an evidently Christian God early on. *King Leir* is set in the ninth century B.C. Nevertheless in the opening lines Leir hopes that his late wife's soul 'possessed of heavenly joys,/ Doth ride in triumph 'mongst the cherubins' (1.1; l.3 – 4). Also, he intends to focus on 'the welfare of my soul' (1.1; l.30), explicitly Christian concerns. There are some early references to fate and fortune from Leir's nobles, perhaps in acknowledgement of the pre-Christian setting, but their placement alongside the Christian references Christianises them in keeping with common literary practice of the Renaissance period. For example, one

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<sup>107</sup> My modernisation. Stephen Longstaffe, (ed.), *A Critical Edition of the Life and Death of Jack Straw 1594* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 1.1.38 – 9; 1.1.61. All other references to *Jack Straw* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically. Note, as with all play dates in this thesis, I have preferred Martin Wiggins' suggested best guess of 1590 in dating this play to Longstaffe's date of 1594. It makes no significant difference to my argument.

<sup>108</sup> For hierarchy ordained by God and the importance of staying in one's allotted place 'with all submission and meekness' see the *Homilies* p.158. Other references occur on p.125, 342, 346.

noble refers to Leir's ultimate death as the time 'When fates should loose the prison of your life' (1.1; l.48 – 9). Gibson and Esra suggest that 'fates' in plural generally referred to the three Fates of classical mythology. This is reinforced by 'loose' suggesting their cutting the thread of life.<sup>109</sup> However, the proximity to Leir's Christian comments, enables the more Christian reading Gibson and Esra associate with 'fate' singular.<sup>110</sup>

Virtuous characters are consistently associated with references to God in the history plays. Henry Richmond's role as hero in *Richard III* is underlined by his faith in God. He says that the 'guiltless blood' of those killed by Richard, 'craves daily at God's hands,/ Revenge' (l.1648 – 49; sig.G2r). Despite this assumption that revenge will be in 'God's hands', however, he intends to be the avenger, thus positing himself as God's agent. Nevertheless, he asserts his dependence upon God's aid, reassuring his men that 'Our quarrel's good, and God will help the right,' and that 'God no doubt will give us victory' (l.1651 – 3; sig. G2r). His faith is underlined by the repetition of the emphatic 'will' and the assertive 'no doubt' linking the assumption that God favours the just with their own success in battle.<sup>111</sup> Ultimately, having defeated Richard at Bosworth, Henry tells his compatriots, 'since God hath given us fortune of the day, let us first give thanks unto his Deity' (l.2036 –8; sig.H3v). The verb 'given' underlines God's active role in the play's events, whilst 'first' stresses Henry's piety, as

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<sup>109</sup> Marion Gibson and Jo Ann Esra, *Shakespeare's Demonology*, p.86.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> See Paul Jorgenson 'Formative Shakespearean Legacy' for a discussion of the development of contemporary ideas about the relationship between human actions, success in battle and God's providential control.

thanking God is to take priority over all the other necessary tasks that inevitably follow his success.

Other virtuous characters' piety is similarly evidenced through references to God as they also assume God's control of human lives. The young King Edward's promises that if he lives a long life, 'as God forbid but I may' (l.531; sig.C2v), he will put an end to the infighting between all the nobles, elicits Vaughan's similarly pious response of 'whose reign God long prosper among us' (l.537; sig.C2v). Rivers, realising that he is likely to be killed by Richard, expresses concern for the safety of the boys, praying that 'God bless these young and tender babes,' and 'God above protect them day and night,' (l.654, 656; sig, Cr4). Even the Innkeeper calls on God to evidence his unwilling part in the treachery he fears is intended by Richard: 'but even against my will, God is my witness' (l.577; sig.C3r). God is consistently given a role in ensuring the right outcome – a Tudor victory - which the audience knows will, ultimately, happen. The short-term failure of young Edward's, Vaughan's and Rivers' prayers merely serve to highlight the impenetrable nature of God's providence, whilst allowing them the opportunity to demonstrate their virtuous Christian credentials.

Similarly, Cordella's piety is established early on in *King Leir*. After Leir's rejection of Cordella for her refusal to join her sisters' blatant flattery, she resigns herself to God's care:

Now whither, poor forsaken, shall I go,  
When mine own sisters triumph in my woe,  
But unto Him which doth protect the just;  
In Him will poor Cordella put her trust. (1.3; l.331 – 4)

Her 'trust' that God 'doth protect the just' evidences her assurance and faith, prerequisites for elect status which the word 'just' signals. It is reminiscent of the eponymous Grissell in the earlier play, discussed in chapter one. For the audiences of these plays God is posited as the controlling power in the same way that orthodox faith assumed God's control of human lives in the real world.

However, even characters as virtuous as Cordella were subject to lapses at moments of weakness and stress. Beset by misfortune Cordella blames 'the fickle queen of chance', Fortune, for 'mak[ing her] a pattern of her power' (1.7; l.605 – 6) using a stereotypical characteristic of Fortune, that she is fickle. A few lines later though, again Grissell-like, she corrects herself. It is 'the pleasure of my God' not Fortune's that she should suffer the punishment of God's 'rod' so she 'willingly embrace[s]' it (1.7; l.612 – 613). The active nature of 'willingly embrace', further underlines her good Protestant credentials and displays appropriate piety for the watching audiences. Although she continues to refer to Fortune when telling the French king and Mumford her situation, Fortune only 'triumph[s] in [Cordella's] overthrow', she does not actively cause it (1.7; l.659). That it is also her 'sisters' day of triumph' (1.7; l.658) links Fortune to Goneril and Ragan through the repetition of 'triumph'. The alternating patterns across Cordella's speeches highlight the oppositional relationship between the controlling powers of God and Fortune. A few lines later, she accepts that 'fortune have the power/ To spoil mine honour and debase my state' but if she and the disguised king pretend to be monarchs, she will 'mock

fortune, as she mocketh me', (1.7; l.664 – 5, l.706). From this point on Cordella attributes everything to God, sealing her moral status.

Similarly, Leir's hope that 'fortune's force shall ne'er prevail to cease' (1.1; l.69 – 70) the peace he hopes his daughters' strategic marriages will bring presents the personified Fortune in opposition to the 'heavenly powers' (1.1; l.159) which he earlier presumed would approve his plans. This lapse occurs at a moment of sinfulness, immediately after his decision to use emotional blackmail to force Cordella to marry someone she does not love, a point of moral weakness for him. This associates Fortune with sinfulness for audiences. Subsequently, as he suffers abuse at the hands of Goneril and Ragan, his faith returns, and he also only references God in a suitably Christian manner. His moral status is repaired, and God is the acknowledged power in his life.

Other human sinners also demonstrate mixed faith but, like Leir and Cordella, are ultimately allowed to demonstrate their repentance through more pious language. In *Richard III* Mistress Shore and her maid initially associate events with Fortune.<sup>112</sup> Mistress Shore cries out against Fortune: 'O Fortune, wherefore wert thou called Fortune? / [...] / Fortune I would thou hadst never favoured me' (l.195, 200; sig. B1v). Her maid, Ursula, is taken aback by this: 'who hath advanced you but Fortune?' (l.203; sig. B1v – B2r) causing Mistress Shore to respond:

Aye, as she hath advanced me,

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<sup>112</sup> Frederick Kiefer notes that the representation of her in *A Mirror For Magistrates* similarly involves references to the role of fickle, deceitful Fortune in her story, but that Shore likens herself to Fortune, supporting Cade's theory in the same book, that Fortune is really just human will by another name. Frederick Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*, p.51 – 2.

So may she throw me down. (l.204 – 5; sig. B2r)

She thus prophetically recognises her future. Fortune is given an explicitly active role in the verbs ‘advance’ and ‘throw’, which together articulate Fortune’s traditional role of raising commoners to princedom only to throw them down again. However, towards the end of the play she repents. She prays that ‘God forgive all my foul offence’ and asks that, despite her sins, ‘Into hell fire, let not my soul be hurled’ (l.1186, 1188; sig. E3v). Here God has the active verbs ‘forgive’ and ‘let’, recognising that redemption is in God’s power alone. Her repentance and her expression of faith, with the speech’s acknowledgement of God’s role in these, fulfil the doctrinal requirements of justification by faith alone. Unlike Ragan, Goneril and Richard III, Cordella, Leir and Mistress Shore are each presented as ordinary sinners, not guilty of heinous crimes. Their alternating faith in God and Fortune help make them more identifiable to audiences, without undermining their moral status through wicked deeds. Simultaneously, audiences are reminded of the controlling power of God in both the on- and off-stage worlds.

It is not always so clear however, whose ‘quarrel’s right’<sup>113</sup> as it is in *Richard III* or *King Leir*. In *Jack Straw* characters on both sides claim God’s support using very similar language. Although the outcome is firmly on the side of the State, some ambivalence is created by competing references to God. Domestically, the 1580s and 1590s saw failed harvests with consequent famine, enclosures, and plague, accompanied by an increasing population and rising unemployment. This may have caused some audience members to empathise

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<sup>113</sup> Said by the Parson at l.681 in *Jack Straw*.



with the rebels in this play. The Parson's insistence that 'God will give you strength and might' (l.680) encourages the rebels to believe that God is on their side, though the subsequent 'For of my honesty your quarrel's right' (l.681) contains potential ambivalence in 'my honesty'. It is notable that this is a parson and not a friar or priest, so he does not inherently attract the negative connotations sometimes associated with those more Catholic terms.<sup>114</sup> His honesty is not automatically subject to question. The pious references to God's support and the Parson's religious status encourage audiences to consider the concerns of the rebels more positively and avoids condemning them early on.

The play's civic authorities also claimed God's support. The Parson, a representative of the Church, stands in opposition to the Mayor, representing the State. London mayors and aldermen were often vociferous critics of theatres and theatregoing, principally because of the risk of riot they felt it encouraged, making this character equally ambivalent, both for some in the audience and for those on-stage. His language is very similar to the Parson's, promising his soldiers that 'God will strengthen you and daunt your foes' (l.763). God's support is being claimed by both sides in indistinguishable language in the same scene, simultaneously recognising God's control of human lives whilst highlighting the difficulty of knowing what his will is or who is right. As was evident in the outcome of *Richard III*, fighting an anointed king was not necessarily wrong. Ultimately though, in *Jack Straw*, God stands on the side of established law and order. The Mayor declares 'It is our God that gives the

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<sup>114</sup> Priest was not used exclusively for Roman Catholic ministers either at that time but perhaps more associated with them. 'Minister' was the most clearly Protestant term.

victory' and the King, that victory was achieved 'by the help and mighty hand of God' (l.770). Good order, as defined by the *Homily Against Rebellion*, is restored as 'These foul unnatural broils are quieted' (l.771). Nevertheless, the declarations of both sides bring God into the play world in a manner consistent with his perceived role in the real world. The early potential legitimacy of both side's claims encourages audiences to think about the difficulty of identifying the just and thus human dependency on God's help.

All these references can be heard as merely conventional phrases, but they replicate the Christian world of their audiences. In the examples across all the plays, references to Fortune by virtuous characters highlight the Protestant concept of the weakness and sinfulness of all humans, whilst characters' pious exclamations are a reminder of the need for God's help in all things, including faith. Together these signal a character's positive moral status.

In contrast, villainous characters consistently refer to Fortune and not God. Richard, the eponymous villain in *Richard III*, attributes everything to her in a variety of stereotypical ways. Deifying Fortune he asks her to make him king:

Why so, now Fortune make me a King, Fortune give me a kingdom, let the world report the Duke of Gloucester was a King, therefore Fortune make me King, [...for however short a time], nay sweet Fortune, clap but the Crown on my head, that the vassals may once say, God save King Richard's life, it is enough.  
(l.443 – 5; l.447 – 9; sig. C1r)

The use of the active verbs 'make', 'give', 'let' and 'clap' ascribed repeatedly and explicitly to Fortune highlight his dependence on her as distinct from God. It is ironic then that his primary desire in being king is to hear the 'vassals' say

'God save King Richard's life'.<sup>115</sup> At this point this is merely a figure of speech, but it does draw attention to his own blasphemous worship of Fortune over God. Despite this deification, Richard is a classic example of someone who grasps Fortune by the forelock, essentially controlling his own destiny.<sup>116</sup> His first appearance sees him musing on the possibility of gaining the throne rather than simply being Protector. He hopes a letter from Buckingham 'brings good luck' (l.391; sig. B4v) to help him achieve this ambition:

Doth Fortune so much favour my happiness,  
That I no sooner devise, but she sets abroad?  
(l.393 – 4; sig.B4v)

He impiously ascribes outcomes to 'luck' and Fortune's 'favour' and sees himself working in consort with Fortune, as he 'devise[s]' and she 'sets abroad'. However, he also recognises Fortune's chief characteristic of unreliability wondering if she is 'raising me aloft' to 'try' him and to make his subsequent fall 'the greater' (l.395 – 6; sig. B4v). This is an inversion of one explanation why virtuous people sometimes experienced more hardships than the wicked. God was presumed to 'try' their faith with hardships, bringing them down, preparatory to raising them, after death, up to heaven. Richard is ascribing this to Fortune. Contemporary audiences would, of course, have known Richard's earthly fate, so this not only reflects accurately the course of

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<sup>115</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>116</sup> Traditionally, it was Occasion who was represented with a forelock but during the late fifteenth to early sixteenth century, Fortune became associated with the sea and ships which men could actively sail, and she began to be represented with a forelock. These changes are discussed by Frank Kiefer *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy* pp. 193-231. For a discussion of contemporary ideas of controlling Fortune see for example Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought. Volume I*; Leslie Thomson, 'Fortune: "All is but Fortune"', pp. 31, 45, 81.

events, but associating Fortune with a known villain also serves to undermine Fortune's ascribed power in favour of God's.

Unlike the villains in the Eastern plays discussed above however, even Richard's Fortune references are Christianised in their British history play setting. Finally facing defeat, as those who promised support desert him, he associates Fortune with the Devil:

the devil go with you all, God I hope, God, what talk I of God, that have served the devil all this while. No, fortune and courage for me, [...] part not childishly from thy crown, but come the devil to claim it, strike him down, and though that Fortune hath decreed, to set revenge with triumphs on my wretched head, yet death, sweet death, my latest friend, hath sworn to make a bargain for my lasting fame. (l. 1968 – 70, 1973 – 7; sig. H2v)

In this speech he alternately locates power with God, the Devil, and Fortune before finally it rests with the personification of death. Ignoring its consequent associations with the pains of hell, he sees death as his 'sweet [...] friend'.

Ultimately then, Richard does begin to speak of God. He suffers pangs of guilt and knows that the only solution is repentance:

Even repent, crave mercy for thy damned fact,  
Appeal for mercy to thy righteous God. (l.1417 – 1418; sig. F3r)

The imperatives 'repent', 'crave' and 'appeal' are addressed to himself, as if by a third person but they inherently lack assertiveness because they all signal a reliance on another, that is, God. His subsequent, 'Ha repent, not I,' is more determined and assured (l.1419; sig. F3r).<sup>117</sup> The juxtaposition of God-fearing and his denial emphasises Richard's villainy, culminating in his final 'My God is

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<sup>117</sup> Some in the audience may have been reminded of Dr Faustus' denials of God in the immensely popular earlier play. A discussion of Faustus' inability to repent is discussed in chapter 3.

none of mine' (l.1420; sig. F3r). Richard knows that only repentance can save him from damnation, but he determines against it. Unlike Faustus, who *could not* repent, Richard *will* not. This is emphasised using caesura and the monosyllabic, emphatic, 'not I' breaking up the flow of line 1419. He acknowledges the price of this is:

To place thy soul in valence with their blood,  
Soul for soul, and body for body. (l.1421 – 22)

His rejection of God, despite Fortune's obvious desertion of him, is complete and almost jubilant. He is the complete villain.

In *Leir* character references to Fortune and denial of God similarly signal low moral status. Ragan, the most villainous character in the play, attributes her success to the 'happy stars' at 'the hour of [her] nativity' (2.3; l.929, 928). Similarly, 'kind fortune [...] vouchsafes/ To all [her] actions, such desired event!' (2.3; l.930 – 931). This demonstrates her moral status in several ways. The superstitious belief in the ruling power of the stars, although commonplace, was condemned by preachers, almost as much as her belief that Fortune 'vouchsafes' events. Equally her subsequent boast that she controls both her husband and their lands, overturned the hierarchical order of the day, believed to be ordained by God, and broke her marriage vow to obey him. This means she has effectively blasphemed by breaking a vow to God.

With Goneril another development occurs, that of a bad character pretending piety to hide her wickedness. Goneril's poor moral character is indicated not through references to Fortune but to God. On two occasions she asks that God see bad things happen to others. After Leir has left her to stay

with Ragan she hopes that he will die unrecognised en-route and be buried as a commoner: 'Would God it were so well' (2.4; l.978). Later she poses as pious in a conversation with the French ambassador who tells Goneril that, despite good health, Cordella remains unhappy until she is reconciled to Leir. Goneril's 'God continue it' (3.3; l.1406) in response pretends to reference Cordella's good health, not her state of unhappiness. Thus, her references to the divine are a form of blasphemy, alerting audiences to her deceitful character, whilst apparently signalling the opposite to the on-stage characters to whom they are addressed.

In the British history plays of the early 1590s then, the assertions of the virtuous characters signal God's place in the power structure of the play world and identifies them as saved. The failure honestly to acknowledge God by the villains successfully distances him from their evil deeds, associating them instead with Fortune or the Devil. Their downfall signals God's ultimate control, providing reassurance to audiences that despite the trials experienced by the pious, God's justice will prevail.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that during the 1580s to early 1590s dramatists experimented with different ways to represent God's relationship with humankind. Two plays enacted worlds in which God was explicitly absent. These show a world of chaos in which contemporary Protestant beliefs about God's justice and mercy towards the faithful are undermined. They demonstrate to audiences that people cannot avoid sin without God's help, and

that faith without his Grace is ineffectual. These were key doctrines of Protestant theology concerning justification by faith.

More typically playwrights reflect God's participation in their play worlds in keeping with contemporary religious beliefs. Occasionally plays enacted divine intervention in a spectacular manner. In these plays God's responsibility for the action is acknowledged by the characters so that his part is made explicit to audiences. Another technique involved a narrative framing device to show supernatural powers controlling the action in an inner play world. This allowed supernatural characters to claim control of the lives of the protagonists. The aversion to staging an anthropomorphic Christian God caused the involvement of non-Christian powers but contemporary associations, such as the Christianisation of the classics, meant that God's presence could be inferred. Both the Christianisation and the divine control were acknowledged by those subjected to it, in a manner which reflects contemporary Protestant beliefs about God's role in human life. I have argued that the use of a frame narrative to represent God's providential control allowed off-stage audiences to observe the working relationship between God and people from a third person viewpoint. This reinforced contemporary Protestant doctrine and arguably aided understanding.

An alternative approach was to set the play in an exotic setting. This allowed dramatists to explore God's role globally. It was a fact that Islamic and pagan countries frequently defeated Christian ones and had rich cultural lives visibly equal or superior to those of Christian countries. The non-Christian,

Eastern setting facilitated a non-judgemental presentation of heterodox views by ascribing them to non-Christian characters. Equally the interrelated meaning of the concepts Fate, Fortune, heaven, and the stars allowed these to substitute for the Christian God. Belief in Fortune in these plays was not always negative as she could be represented as God's agent. Plays which involved a mix of Christian and non-Christian characters could thus use a complex array of attributions to God and Fortune, reflecting the moral ambiguity contemporary audiences might feel for people from an Eastern background.

The on-going success of non-Christian forces against Christians posed difficulties for contemporaries as it could seem as if Christians had been deserted by God. This raised questions of God's role which could be explored by enacting the experiences of characters with differing degrees of piety, albeit their religion was not Christian. In entirely non-Christian plays, virtuous characters could safely refer to non-Christian gods in a manner that reflected Protestant ideals, thus allowing God to participate in the play world. Villainous characters would reinforce this through their reliance on Fortune, whilst associating Islamic characters' beliefs with Catholic practices served to reinforce Protestant anti-Catholic propaganda. The Protestantising of the virtuous characters thus had the potential to encourage orthodox practices in audiences.

Finally, the British history plays at the end of the period resulted in the development of God represented in the play world entirely through character articulation. The Christian context is established early on signalling God's



control of the play world and highlighting its equivalence to that of the audience. In these plays Fortune is the antithesis of God and whether a character relies on Fortune or God indicates their moral status. Virtuous characters piously attribute their experiences to God whilst vicious ones denied God and often assumed that their lives were ruled by their own actions, supported by Fortune. The essentially sinful nature of humankind is illustrated through virtuous characters calling on Fortune during moments of weakness. Like the godless plays, this serves to reinforce the Protestant message that people are unable to avoid sin or have effectual faith without God's help. Ultimately the downfall of the sinful characters and success of virtuous ones reinforced the power of God and demonised the concept of Fortune.

Orthodox Protestant attitudes to God and Fortune are ultimately reflected and reinforced by the plays discussed in this chapter. Dramatically, they continue the process of internalising the staging of the Christian God through the declarations of faith made by the virtuous, regardless of their faith. All the plays discussed in this chapter envision a God involved with people in keeping with Protestant doctrine, which contemporary audiences might recognise and identify with. The relationship presented between God and Fortune bears resemblances to contemporary ideas about that between God and the Devil. It is this relationship which forms the basis of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3. 'SHOW ME A DEVIL AND I'LL BELIEVE THERE'S A GOD'<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

This chapter argues that the appearance of the Christian Devil in plays of this period facilitated the implicit involvement of the Christian God. God was an inherent part of contemporary life, and such articulations reflect the involvement many of the earliest audiences believed he had in their lives. Thus, the play world is rendered more life-like. These appearances can also provide an opportunity for Protestant doctrine to be articulated and enacted. Complex, sometimes apparently contradictory, theology is worked through in a practical setting, potentially aiding audience understanding. Such rehearsals provide an interpretation of that doctrine which audience members might apply to their own lives or may feel challenged to reconsider their own beliefs. Playgoers could see the beginning, middle and, importantly, end, result of such an application in a compressed timeframe, providing a more holistic understanding than they could have of their own lives.<sup>2</sup> Modern critics can also gain an insight into contemporary interpretations of doctrine and its application, and better understand the religious sociocultural world in which the plays were written, and their audiences lived.

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<sup>1</sup> Unattributed quotation from 1635 in Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1971), p.567.

<sup>2</sup> This is not to suggest that this was a primary function of demonic appearances in drama post-1580, or that it was necessarily conscious. This was discussed in chapter two and is referenced further below.

For contemporaries the Devil had both a Christian and a folkloric tradition. This is evident within drama and in literature more generally. Jeffrey Burton Russell notes the long development of the concept of the Devil, and, despite remaining inconsistencies, there was 'a consensus that was both wide and deep'.<sup>3</sup> Following the Reformation, the Devil retained his significance. Most sermons in the *Homilies* mention Satan, he is a subject of discussion in catechisms, the communion service warned the sinful against him, and preachers warned of his constant presence and power. The *Homilies* drew attention to the Devil's role in routine temptation, as well as associating him with Catholicism as part of the Protestantisation programme.<sup>4</sup> Nathan Johnstone notes that though there were few works dedicated to demonic theology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, indicating the absence of attempts to change basic demonic beliefs, there was a 'profound sense of the Devil's power'.<sup>5</sup> The *Bible* presents the Devil as a tempter. He caused the Original Sin by tempting Eve to eat the forbidden fruit and later attempted to draw Christ into sin. In Calvinist theology this was a primary function of the Devil. He encouraged evil deeds and thoughts, trying to tempt the Christian away from their faith. Darren Oldridge notes that Satan was sometimes presented as

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<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (London: Cornell University Press, 1986), p.24.

<sup>4</sup> The former is evident throughout the *Homilies*. For the latter, see in particular, the *Homily Against the Peril of Idolatry* in Church of England, *Certain Sermons or Homilies appointed to be read in churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth of famous memory*, (London: For the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1851), pp. 179–283.

<sup>5</sup> Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.29. The Devil's appearance in religious texts is discussed in pp. 67–9. The constant presence of the Devil is also discussed by Keith Thomas *Religion and the Decline of Magic* pp. 560–1.

subtly tricking people into a false religion by making it seem true.<sup>6</sup> As well as its use in anti-Catholic or anti-puritan propaganda, this was also shown being used against orthodox Protestant targets, endeavouring to pull them away from their true faith, often through breaches of the Ten Commandments. This reflects the role ascribed to the Devil in the *Homilies* where such breaches were presented as sins against God.<sup>7</sup> Thus, any act of a Christianised devil whether literal or implied, equally recalls God. Resistance against that or punishment of it recognises God's role in the play world, in the same way that orthodox Protestant doctrine claimed a role for God in the real world.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike God, the Devil had many names and took many forms. The *Who's Who of the Bible* lists eighteen.<sup>9</sup> Some, such as Satan, are proper names whilst others are adjectival, Father of Lies, or Enemy for example. They reflect the Devil's role in Christianity as primary opponent of God and enemy of humans, endeavouring to enlarge his own kingdom in hell at the expense of human salvation. Popular culture had a multiplicity of names, many of which

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<sup>6</sup> Darren Oldridge, *The Supernatural in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Routledge, 2016), p.70.

<sup>7</sup> See for example *Homilies; On the Salvation of Mankind* p.30, *Of True and Lively Faith* p.43, *Against a Fear of Death* p.107, and *Of Repentance* p.562.

<sup>8</sup> This relates to the contemporary doctrine of providence. See for example Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 90-132; Darren Oldridge *Supernatural*, pp. 21-67; Alison Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion* (London: Methuen Press, 2010), pp.175-222; William R. Elton, *King Lear and the Gods* (San Marino, California: Henry E. Huntington Library, 1966), pp. 9-33; Alan Sinfield, *Literature in Protestant England 1560 – 1660* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1983), p.132.

<sup>9</sup> Martin H. Manser and Debra K. Reid, *Who's Who of the Bible* (Oxford: Lion Hudson plc, 2012), p.251. It lists five names for God based on Yahweh and a further three with El found in the *Bible*, but these are all adjectival with the prefix Lord or God as in 'The Lord of Hosts' or 'God Most High', as are the additional twenty-two which they cite as 'Other common names and descriptions' for God on pp. 15–16. The names they give for the Devil are Abaddon, Apollyon (destroyer), Adversary, Angel of the abyss, Belial, Beelzebub prince of demons, Devil, Dragon, Enemy, Evil One, Father of Lies, God of this age, Liar Murderer from the beginning, Prince of this world, Ruler of the kingdom of the air, Satan, Snake, Tempter, p.251.

appear in contemporary drama, appearing in both Christian and folkloric contexts. In the 1567 play *The Bugbears* Trappola frightens Amedeus by listing sixty-four different demonic spirits that might be haunting his house.<sup>10</sup> Some are recognisable from classical sources such as fauni, nymphs, and dryads; others are folkloric like pucks, harpies, and gogmagogs. Others are proper nouns: *Cacodemon* was a commonly used name for the Devil, *Hecate* appears in *Macbeth* and other plays as a witch, and elsewhere as a classical goddess, Pluto was prince of the underworld in classical mythology, roots shared by Proserpina and Tisiphone. Still others appear from their linguistic roots to be completely fabricated.<sup>11</sup> Such non-Christian demons will not be discussed in this chapter.

It is not always easy to distinguish between folkloric or invented demons and the Christian Devil in contemporary drama as the characteristics merge. Some plays have devils or demon spirits named for particular vices, such as Unregarding or Gluttony. Although these seem like simple allegories, their purpose is often demonic. They encourage protagonists into vice to win souls for the Devil, often directly opposing virtuous or even divine characters. Such characters have explicitly demonic associations, linked to breaches of the Ten Commandments. Robert Hunter West suggests that demon names related to

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<sup>10</sup> Probably by John Jeffere, *The Bugbears: A Modernized Edition*, James D. Clark (ed.), (New York & London: Garland Publishing inc., 1979). All subsequent references to *Bugbears* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

<sup>11</sup> For example, *Caccubeoni* (5.2.13) is glossed in the footnotes as *cacca* from the Italian for excrement, 'plus the plural of *beone*, "an ale-knight, a tosspot, ... a great quaffer"', James D. Clark (ed.), *The Bugbears: A Modernized Edition* (London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1979), footnote to v.ii.13, p.177. The translation quoted for *beone* is taken from Florio's *First Fruits*, first edition published in 1578.

demonic history rather than defining an individual being. He explains, for example, that 'Lucifer' referred to the demon's heavenly brightness before his fall, with his name becoming *Lucifuge* at the fall in reference to his 'recession from God's light.'<sup>12</sup> James I in *Demonology* said that scripture indicates that Beelzebub and Satan are different names for the same spirit, whilst Lucifer is an allegorical alternative to these.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the godly minister, George Gifford noted the 'great multitudes of infernal spirits [... that] do so joint together in one that they can be called the Devil in the singular number'.<sup>14</sup> So, unlike God, who is unique and singular, albeit triune, the Devil is multiple, has many names and can take many forms.<sup>15</sup> This is in keeping with the idea that Lucifer was once an angel who challenged God's authority, fought with an army of other angels, and was ultimately thrown out of heaven along with them. As with angel beliefs, many supposed there was a hierarchy in hell with different devils deemed to be of higher or lower status than others.<sup>16</sup> In many ways then devils are analogous to angels. Despite this, Christian theology posits the Devil as the opposite of God and in a direct and constant battle with him, which is regularly reflected in early Elizabethan drama.

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Hunter West, *The Invisible World: A Study of Pneumatology in Elizabethan Drama* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), pp. 68–9. Endnote 7, p.235 notes however that the earliest reference the author could find for this is by Fludd in 1618. Hunter West discusses contemporary names for the Devil at length throughout this chapter. The etymology of the names of the Devil is also discussed by Brian P. Levack, *The Devil Within: Possession and Exorcism in the Christian West* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2013), p.47.

<sup>13</sup> James I and VI *Demonology* in Lawrence Normand and Gareth Roberts (eds.), *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland: James VI's Demonology and the North Berwick Witches* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), p.420.

<sup>14</sup> George Gifford, *A Discourse of the Subtill Practises of Devilles* (London: T. Orwin for Toby Cooke, 1587), D<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> As Keith Thomas says Satan was 'both one and many', *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.559.

<sup>16</sup> Hunter West, *The Invisible World*, chapter 2, p.15 – 34 and chapter 5 p. 65 – 85, though he notes that James I disagreed.

Unlike other supernatural beings, devils are a constant feature of drama throughout the period 1559 – 1642. There are one hundred and twenty-three pieces of drama explicitly involving the Devil and an additional thirteen with demons.<sup>17</sup> One hundred and four of these are Protestant, primarily commercial, plays which are spread throughout the period.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, many more plays include references to the Devil in the dialogue, in a variety of contexts ranging from relatively trivial swearing to more significant expressions of faith. The dramatic Devil has a variety of names and personas. He appears anthropomorphically, figuratively, and metaphorically, often facilitating a piece of social satire. However, that the target is a particular social ill, should not detract from the serious Christian reference. As Cox notes the increasingly 'secular subject matter' of plays does not imply 'a change of mental habit in the culture as a whole'.<sup>19</sup> The Devil reference, with its implicit inclusion of God, works because the fate of the soul was so important to most contemporaries. What could more effectively condemn an activity than to say that it would lead to eternal damnation? The Devil, then, is the one continuous supernatural dramatic feature who in and of himself might congruently represent God for contemporary audiences.

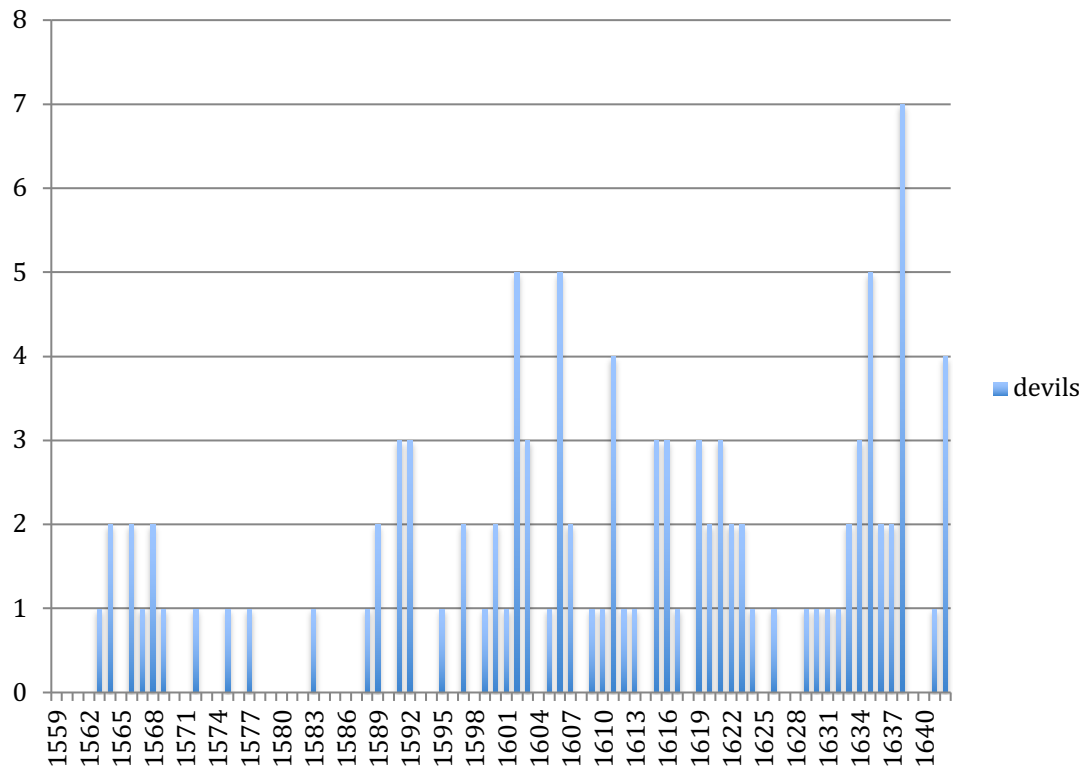
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<sup>17</sup> Martin Wiggins with Catherine Richardson, *Catalogue of British Drama, 1533 – 1642* volumes I – X, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012 - ).

<sup>18</sup> See figure 3.1 below.

<sup>19</sup> John D Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350 – 1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.109.

Figure 3.1 Number of plays with devils, 1559 – 1642.



Many plays discussed in chapter one for their direct representation of God, also involved the Devil. Demonic appearances support the plays' didactic purposes by highlighting God's nature through his antithesis with the representation of the Devil. Unlike God, it was acceptable to laugh at the Devil and this use of humour contributed to the effectiveness of the lesson by reducing the fear the Devil inspired and enhancing the relative power of God.<sup>20</sup> These plays, with their explicit roles for God and for the Devil, establish the

<sup>20</sup> Marina Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling and Making Mock* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp. 167–8 and pp. 326–347. In discussing Shakespeare's comic devils Gibson and Esra suggest it provided an 'edge' to the comedy and that the 'nervous, comforting or defiant laughter' emanated 'from genuine concern about Sathan's wiles' (*sic*). Marion Gibson and Jo Ann Esra, *Shakespeare's Demonology: A Dictionary* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017), p.60. Discussing the comic aspect of Devils in the interludes Peter Happé notes that the devils were clearly 'the enemy to be avoided' (p.43) and 'part of a divine structure' (p.45) and that 'laughing at him was one of the best antidotes' (p.46) whereby he 'could be overcome' (p.49). Peter Happé, 'The Devil in the Interludes' in *Medieval English Theatre* 11:1/2, 1989, pp. 42–56. This is similarly discussed by Hannes Vatter, *The Devil in English Literature* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1978), pp. 97–9.



relationship by which the appearance and activity of the Devil can equally represent the involvement of God once the latter no longer appears on-stage anthropomorphically. The relationship between the staged Devil and the unstaged God was refined until the early 1620s. After this the Christian supernatural relationships and associated doctrine stabilised. Later demonic involvement reflects patterns established in earlier plays.<sup>21</sup> For this reason, later plays will not form part of this chapter's analysis.

The Devil's role in contributing to the representation of God on stage takes four main forms in the plays to be discussed here.<sup>22</sup> The most prevalent references the perennial battle between God and the Devil so I begin with this. To emphasise the threat of the Devil, the battle often appears Manichaeic, but ultimately God had to be universally superior. Their characteristics were seen as opposite but not equal.<sup>23</sup> Hence a key attribute in the drama is a power imbalance between God and the Devil. This forms the chapter's second theme. The Devil was the original blasphemer, challenging God as the angel Lucifer. It was believed that the Devil gained access to a human rejecting God by blasphemy. Magicians and witches were deemed particularly vulnerable to this threat. Plays involving witches and magicians were hugely popular in the late 1580s – 90s and beyond, perhaps partly because of the opportunities for

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<sup>21</sup> There are many reasons why this might be despite increasing tensions with the establishment of Laudianism. Perhaps the increased focus on religious *practice* as distinct from theology was a contributory factor. However, it is beyond the scope of this study to explore this further.

<sup>22</sup> Burton Russell similarly identified four modes for understanding the Devil: independence from God, an aspect of God, a created being/fallen angel, and a symbol of evil. The similarities are evident. Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles*, p.23.

<sup>23</sup> Michael MacDonald notes that 'laymen often ignored theological niceties [by which devils required God's permission, ... attributing] great power and independence to the forces of evil.' Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.175.

spectacle generated by the newly established permanent theatres. Additionally, though, contemporary millenarianism with its fear of the impending apocalypse made anything associated with demonism a real threat. The associated theology therefore had particular significance then. The damnable consequence of blasphemy could be countermanded, if God willed it, by genuine repentance and subsequent reformation. This often resulted in characters, especially those wishing to repent of earlier blasphemy, citing Protestant doctrine. The third section considers God and the Devil in terms of blasphemy and repentance. Finally, God was believed to providentially control all human existence in a real and active manner. However, it was not necessarily direct. God's involvement needed to be interpreted and inferred from the actions of others, including the Devil. The chapter concludes by discussing demonic agents' enactment of God's will. Together these analyses will demonstrate how demonic interventions in the play world facilitated God's active participation, despite his apparent absence and potentially made associated doctrine more accessible to contemporary audiences.

### **God v the Devil**

The most common way the Devil facilitates the presence of God in the play world is through references to the battle between them. God and the Devil were often perceived as warring binary opposites, fighting over human souls.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Discussion of the oppositional nature of God and the Devil can be found in: Anna French, *Children of Wrath: Possession, Prophecy and the Young in Early Modern England* (Farnham:

Several early Elizabethan plays enact this 'God versus the Devil' scenario in a literal manner, performing for their audiences the origin of the battle. The Devil had long been portrayed in drama as attempting to undermine God's plan to replace the fallen angels with humans. The origins of this battle are articulated in various 'Creation' plays, for example *The Creation of the World* (1555) and continues in this period in the Norwich Grocers' play, *The Temptation of Man* (1565). Here, the Devil is represented by the Serpent, evidenced by the prologue which says that the play relates 'the Devil's temptation, deceiving with a lie/The woman'.<sup>25</sup> In the play itself the Serpent articulates in an apostrophe his motivation for tempting Eve: 'I can it not abide in these joys they should be' (p.14, l.37). This indicates his jealousy of humans, who have 'joys' from God which he has lost, and reflects the *Homilies* which explain that humans became unclean 'through the envy of the Devil, by breaking of God's commandment in our first parent Adam'.<sup>26</sup> God's intentions towards humans are evidenced by his

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Ashgate Publications Ltd, 2015), p.19; Jan Frans Van Dijkhuizen, *Devil Theatre: Demonic Possession and Exorcism in English Renaissance Drama, 1558 – 1642* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2007), p.90; Peter Lake, 'Deeds Against Nature: Cheap Print, Protestantism and Murder in Early Seventeenth Century England' in Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (eds.), *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England* (Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1994), pp. 257-283, p.270; John Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred*, pp. 1-4, 151; Nathan Johnstone, 'The Protestant Devil: The Experience of Temptation in Early Modern England' in *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 43, no. 2 (April, 2004) pp. 173-205, p.174; Keith Thomas *Religion and the Decline of Magic* p.559.

<sup>25</sup> Norman Davis (ed.), 'The Norwich Grocers' Play' in *Non-cycle Plays and Fragments*, (London: Early English Text Society, 1970), p.12, Prologue B, l.15 - 16. All subsequent references to The Norwich Grocers' play are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically. My modernisation. The prologues appear on pp. 11–12 and 12–13 and their lines are separately numbered. The play text itself is on pp. 13–18 also with separate line numbers. The *Homilies* refer to the Devil as a serpent eight times, particularly in association with idolatry.

<sup>26</sup> *Of the Misery of Mankind, and of his Condemnation unto Death Everlasting, by his Own Sin* in *Homilies*, pp. 11–19, p.17. Paul Whitfield White suggests that it is the 'joys of marital love' that motivates the serpent in this version of the play on the basis that the declaration follows immediately after hearing Adam and Eve's mutually affectionate parting. This affection is a particular difference between the two versions and White notes that 'Calvin maintained that the Fall was very much about Satan's attempt to defame the institution of marriage'. This has

asking the Serpent 'why didst thou this wise prevent my grace'(p.15, l.79) as 'grace' was granted to those destined for eternal salvation. The Serpent's response that 'my kind is so' (p.15, l.81) references himself as one of multiple devils, whilst that he wanted to 'clean out of this place these persons to exile' (p.15, l.82) directly opposes God. In a change from the 1533 version, despite the Devil's success in getting Adam and Eve ejected from paradise, God's ultimate victory is articulated through the final message from the Holy Ghost. He offers them 'the helmet of salvation' which, 'the devil's wrath shall lame' (p.17, l.141), explicitly defeating the Devil's stated purpose of preventing their ultimate residence with God.<sup>27</sup> This play, then, enacts the origin of the battle between God and the Devil for human souls. The audience is reminded that God has the ultimate victory in the promise of humankind's salvation by the Holy Ghost at the end of the play.

Lucifer is similarly motivated in the moral interlude *Like Will to Like* (1568). He describes his ejection from heaven through pride and employs Nichol Newfangle (the Vice) to sow 'such pride through new fashions in men's hearts' so that they 'may have the like overthrow'.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, in *The Most Virtuous and Godly Susanna* (1563), the Devil, outlining his desire to corrupt

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validity but does not necessarily negate the argument made here. Marriage was instituted so humans might avoid the sin of adultery, a heinous crime. Both motivations were available to contemporary audiences. Paul Whitfield White, *Drama and Religion in English Provincial Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.86.

<sup>27</sup> From a Calvinist point of view this whole speech was contentious as it essentially offers salvation to all rather than to a predestined minority but at this early stage that debate was on-going.

<sup>28</sup> Ulpian Fulwell, *Like Will to Like, Quoth the Devil to the Collier* in Peter Happé (ed.), *Tudor Interludes* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1972), pp. 318–364, l.105; 106. All subsequent references to *Like Will to Like* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically. My modernisation.

Susanna, challenges 'God with all his might,' to 'defend this soul from our ancient spite'.<sup>29</sup> His jealousy is evident in the 'spite' the Devil feels towards Susanna. The use of 'defend' metaphorically signals the battle in which Lucifer pits God's 'might' against his own 'ancient spite', with 'ancient' highlighting the continuity of this over time. He also identifies Susanna as one of God's elect whose soul Lucifer seeks to win from God, thus highlighting all the perceived elements of the battle between God and the Devil. His attempts inevitably fail when God intervenes through his agent Daniel to save Susanna, the elders are punished, Ill Report is hanged, and a disgruntled Satan carries him off to hell. Although Satan claims the soul of Ill Report, it is still clearly God's victory as the soul he aimed at was Susanna's. In all these early plays, the Devil's role underlines God's participation, even when, as in *Susanna* God may not appear.

Once God had been internalised, alternative protagonists were involved in depicting this battle, allowing God's continued involvement in the play world.<sup>30</sup> In Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* (1588) this battle is explicitly over Faustus's soul and is evident throughout the play as Mephistopheles fights to keep Faustus from repenting. He is aided by a plethora of devils, named and unnamed, and the attentions of the Evil Angel. God is represented both by the Good Angel, urging Faustus that it is 'Never too late, if Faustus can repent', and the example of the

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Garter, *The Most Virtuous and Godly Susanna* B. Ifor Evans (ed.), (Oxford: Malone Society, 1937), l.115 - 116. All subsequent references to *Susanna* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

<sup>30</sup> There is a parallel though incomplete process of internalisation of the Devil, which is implied within this chapter's analysis of temptation and conscience. However, it is beyond the scope of this project to explore this further and is a subject for future research.

Old Man.<sup>31</sup> Both the speech patterns and the content of the Good and Evil Angels' dialogues reflect the battle between God and the Devil. They speak alternately, articulating the doctrine of their respective master, whilst directly responding to and contradicting the other, enacting the battle between God and the Devil for Faustus' soul. Faustus's declaration 'I will renounce this magic and repent' is answered by the Good Angel's 'Faustus, repent yet, God will pity thee' (2.3.11; 12). The Evil Angel responds with 'Thou art a spirit. God cannot pity thee' (2.3.13). The Evil Angel answers Faustus's question 'Is't not too late?' with the assertion, 'too late' (2.3.77; 78). The Good Angel though reassures him that it is 'Never too late, if Faustus can repent' (2.3.79). The dialogue continues:

Evil: If thou repent, devils shall tear thee in pieces.

Good: Repent, and they shall never raze thy skin. (2.3.80 – 81)

The repetition of 'too late' and interlineal referencing of 'tear thee in pieces' and 'never raze thy skin', with the earlier 'God will pity thee', 'God cannot pity thee', all form echoes and create a sense of a tug-of-war between God and the Devil. In each encounter with the Angels the one who speaks last catches Faustus's attention. The Evil Angel's 'Faustus never shall repent' (2.3.17) leaves Faustus to conclude: 'My heart's so hardened I cannot repent' (2.3.18) whilst the Good Angel's final line on repentance triggers Faustus's prayer:

Ah, Christ, my Saviour,

Seek to save distressed Faustus' soul! (2.3.82 – 3)

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<sup>31</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *Dr. Faustus: the A- and B-texts (1604, 1616). A Parallel-text Edition* David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (eds.), (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2014), 2.3.79. A text used throughout. All subsequent references to *Faustus* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

This, however, suggests he has only partially heard the Good Angel. Faustus requests the action of Christ rather than acknowledging his own need to act through repentance. He is immediately undermined by Lucifer's 'Christ cannot save thy soul, for he is just' (2.3.84), 'cannot' here mirroring Faustus's earlier declaration that he 'cannot repent', the one action of his which could save him. Through these exchanges the battle between God and the Devil is played out by their representatives, giving God a presence in the play world.

Although Faustus conjured Mephistopheles, this was not the cause of either his, or the Angels', appearance, so the battle could equally apply to the audience. They are thus potentially reminded of the on-going battle for their own souls. Faustus' unawareness of the Angels' presence posits this as an external representation of an internalised experience which godly members of the watching audience, in particular, might have experienced. The staged intervention between the Good and Evil Angels externalises the crises of conscience frequently reported in spiritual autobiographies of the time.<sup>32</sup> As Stuart Clark notes, 'one of the most persistent themes of early modern casuistry, [...] was the spiritual combat fought out in every individual soul between the forces of good and evil'.<sup>33</sup> The complex nature of Faustus's engagement with these supernatural forces also allows for a variety of interpretations. Not everyone was equally accepting of reformed doctrine.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See for example David Booy (ed.), *The Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington, 1618 – 1654: A Selection* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>33</sup> Stuart Clark, *Thinking With Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.64.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England c. 1570 – 1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC*:

For some it went too far and for others not far enough. Experiencing alternative interpretations applied to quotidian contexts potentially encouraged audiences to consider alternatives and reflect on their own beliefs.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the dramatic presentation involving both God and the Devil facilitates audience member engagement with Protestant doctrine, understanding of its implications, and should they choose, application to their own lives.

Unlike Faustus, Alexander, in Barnabe Barnes 1606, *The Devil's Charter*, consciously rejects the route to his salvation in the pact he makes with the Devil. Nevertheless, a similar experience of psychomachia is presented. Alexander soliloquises on the high cost of buying the papal crown through his covenant with the Devil. As with Philologus in *A Conflict of Conscience*, discussed in chapter one, Alexander battles with his conscience not with his conjured devil. This is internalised using a soliloquy, and mimics two sides of a conversation between himself and the Devil:

But Astaroth my covenant with thee  
Made for this soul more precious than all treasure,  
Afflicts my conscience, O but Alexander  
Thy conscience is no conscience.<sup>36</sup>

Alexander directly addresses the absent Astaroth and refers to the 'covenant' enacted in a dumb show earlier. The caesura in line 356 marks a change in

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*Catechisms and Catechizing in England, c. 1530 – 1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) for a discussion of this.

<sup>35</sup> See below for a discussion of the way in which a battle for the soul might, for some contemporaries at least, be deemed routine.

<sup>36</sup> Barnabe Barnes, *The Devil's Charter* Jim C. Pogue (ed.), (New York: Garland Publications, 1980), 1.4.354 - 357. All subsequent references to *Devil's Charter* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.



voice, reflecting the Protestant emphasis on the Devil's role in temptation.<sup>37</sup> The internal devil calls his conscience 'leprous' and 'polluted' (1.4.358). The conscience was believed by some contemporaries to be God's mode of communication with the individual, guiding their actions and helping them avoid sin. William Perkins described it as 'the second subordinate unto God, bearing witness unto God either with the man or against him' emphasising the link with God.<sup>38</sup> Alexandra Walsham describes it as 'the Lord's lieutenant [...] implanted within the soul, as an invisible witness to give sentence against sin, as well as an instrument of divine vengeance and wrath'.<sup>39</sup> It may thus be seen as an agent of God, representing him in the perpetual fight against the Devil. Alec Ryrie argues that this shared mode of communication meant 'the human psyche [was] an arena for spiritual contest'.<sup>40</sup> The 'afflict[ion]' of Alexander's conscience caused by the 'covenant' for his soul, thus enacts the battle between the Devil and God. Alexander articulates Christian faith that the salvation of the soul was of greater value than any earthly treasure and was something which the Devil sought to seize.

This internal conversation also recalls the official Protestant emphasis on 'the internalised experience of Satan' as distinct from its physical

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<sup>37</sup> Catholics also recognised this internalised demonic activity but for Protestants it was the primary form. For a discussion of this see Nathan Johnstone 'The Protestant Devil'.

<sup>38</sup> William Perkins, *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience* (Cambridge: John Legat for T. Pickering, 1606), p.44. My modernisation.

<sup>39</sup> Alexandra Walsham, 'Ordeals of Conscience: Casuistry, Conformity and Confessional Identity in Post-Reformation England' in Harald Braun and Edward Vallence (eds.), *Contexts of Conscience and Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 32–48, p.33.

<sup>40</sup> Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.42.

manifestations.<sup>41</sup> Protestant divines published guides containing dialogues with the Devil to help the godly as a 'form of inverted catechism' where the Devil's insistence on human sin and weak faith, allowed the protagonist to express his Christian faith in defence.<sup>42</sup> That the Devil has more lines in this soliloquy shows he has already won this battle. Alexander confirms that the contract has been 'seal'd' and his 'cauteriz'd' conscience 'seared up' and made impotent (1.4.360 -1). Despite the Christian hope of God's grace, and the prompting of his conscience, thought to be God's inner voice, Alexander deliberately and knowingly chooses the other side – his 'charter' made with the Devil. He rejects God, 'banish[ing]' his 'faith, hope and charity' and determines to use his supposed Christianity as a 'stale' to hide his 'arcane plots and intricate designs' (1.4.362 – 4). Although Alexander only ascribes the role of 'witness' to the Devil, the Devil's active role is evident in the internal dialogue and in Alexander's subsequent reference to 'counsels held with black Tartarian fiends' (1.4.367). He 'dare[s] adventure hell' (1.4.391) to achieve his wishes, favouring worldly success and long-term fame over heavenly reward, just as Faustus had, concluding that:

In spite of grace, conscience, and Acheron

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<sup>41</sup> Darren Oldridge, *Supernatural* p.70. He notes that this 'both extended his power and hid him from view: [... as he] spread his influence through "poisonous suggestions"'. Nathan Johnstone notes that Protestants did not deny the Devil's power to do physical harm but downplayed it in favour of spiritual harm. They also emphasised the internal manipulation of the mind with thoughts concerning one's 'spiritual estate' a particular target. Nathan Johnstone, 'The Protestant Devil', p.185.

<sup>42</sup> Nathan Johnstone, 'The Protestant Devil', p.188, 195. Alex Ryrie cites a prayer by Edward Hutchins 'which is actually an adjuration addressed entirely to the Devil'. Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, p.32.

I will rejoice, and triumph in my charter. (1.4.373 – 374)<sup>43</sup>  
The juxtaposition of ‘grace’, bestowed by God and the ‘charter’, made with the Devil, reminds audiences of the contest over souls between the two powers. Alexander’s active choice challenges Calvinist doctrine that humans could neither accept nor refuse God’s grace if given.<sup>44</sup>

Not all dramatized examples of psychomachia involve magicians or demonic pacts. In Thomas Middleton’s 1605 play *A Mad World My Masters* Penitent uses his faith to fend off the Devil’s temptation, saving both himself and his would-be adulterous lover, Mistress Harebrain. From the opening scenes audiences are reminded of the demonic nature of adultery. Penitent criticises himself for ‘check[ing] wild passions’ in others, whilst ‘sooth[ing] up adulterous

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<sup>43</sup> ‘In spite of grace’ feeds into the debate as to whether humans could choose to reject God’s grace, as Alexander claims to do here, and as the most moderate Protestant divines did, or whether it was completely beyond any action of humankind as Calvinists believed.

<sup>44</sup> The Articles of Faith, reissued in 1571, do not clarify this crux. William Perkins’ ‘Table’, published in 1591, was intended to help show the different paths which the lives of the elect and of the reprobate may follow. Both experience pleasures and pains, seeming faith and no faith, but, as Erin Sullivan points out, the two paths are separate. There is no passing from one to the other. The individual will not know their status for certain, but God does. The implication is that any ideas of an active choice by humans is illusory. Contemporary pastoral care however did not usually emphasise this point. Erin Sullivan, ‘Doctrinal Doubleness and the Meaning of Despair in William Perkins’s “Table” and Nathaniel Woodes’s *The Conflict of Conscience*’ in *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 110, Number 3, Summer 2013, pp. 533–561. Perkins’ ‘Table’ was based on much earlier writings by the Reformed theologian Theodore Beza. The implications of this for associating Horror with Satan rather than God are discussed in chapter one. Burton Russell goes so far as to suggest that most Catholic and Protestant preachers were ‘practical Pelagians’, preaching free will rather than predestination in Jeffrey Burton Russell *Mephistopheles*, p.26; Maria Devlin discusses what she terms ‘rhetorical theology’ which is the theology as taught as being distinct from ‘systematic theology’. The former ‘carried implications that ran contrary to the predestinarian doctrines they were meant to teach’. Maria Devlin, “‘If it were made for man ‘twas made for me’”: Generic Damnation and Rhetorical Salvation in Reformation Preaching and Plays’ in Jonathan Willis (ed.), *Sin and Salvation in Reformation England* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), pp. 173–189, pp. 174–5. Similarly, Ian Green suggests that theologians adapted what they said on this according to their audience and the context in Ian Green, *The Christian’s ABC*, p.296. See also J. F. Merritt, ‘The Pastoral Tightrope: A Puritan Pedagogue in Jacobean London’ in Thomas Cogswell, Richard Cust and Peter Lake (eds.), *Politics, Religion and Popularity: Essays in Honour of Conrad Russell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 143–61.

motions' in himself.<sup>45</sup> Audiences are reminded of God through 'motion' which appears in a similar form in the *Book of Common Prayer*: 'That [...] we may ever obey thy Godly motions'.<sup>46</sup> He acknowledges this 'damns' him (1.1.91), implicitly involving the Devil. Adultery is explicitly condemned in the *Homilies* as a primary sin, leading to others in a hierarchical chain resulting in damnation and is directly associated with the Devil.<sup>47</sup> Penitent's referencing damnation may have helped to recall the other use of 'motions' to audiences familiar with the liturgy.<sup>48</sup> As he has not yet actioned his attraction to Mistress Harebrain, audiences are also reminded that thoughts are a source of sin and that the Devil's temptations may be internal.<sup>49</sup>

The association between adultery and damnation continues just after Penitent's consummation of his relationship with Mistress Harebrain. Reading the literature which Harebrain has provided for his wife Penitent notes that 'Adultery/ Draws the divorce 'twixt heaven and the soul' (4.1.1 – 2). Penitent feels he has 'played away' his 'eternal portion' for 'a minutes' game', indicating the psychomachia he is experiencing (4.1.4 – 5). This metaphor matches the

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Middleton, *A Mad World My Masters* in Michael Taylor (ed.), *A Mad World My Masters and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 1–65, 1.1.86; 90. All subsequent references to *Mad World* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

<sup>46</sup> Church of England, *The Book of Common Prayer, 1559: The Elizabethan Prayer Book*, John E. Booty (ed.), (Washington: Folger Books, 1976), p.109.

<sup>47</sup> *A Sermon Against Whoredom and Uncleaness* in *Homilies* pp. 123–140.

<sup>48</sup> See Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and their Audiences, 1590 – 1640*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.205 and Felicity Heal, 'Experiencing Religion in London: Diversity and Choice in Shakespeare's Metropolis' in David Loewenstein and Michael Witmore (eds.), *Shakespeare and Early Modern Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 57–78, for a discussion of this familiarity.

<sup>49</sup> See Nathan Johnstone on the post-Reformation change in emphasis as temptation becomes the primary example of the Devil's activity and "demonism" generally assumed the 'reality of pervasive satanic activity' as a wide-ranging experience centred particularly around temptation. Nathan Johnstone 'The Protestant Devil', p.176.

*Homily's* reference to how 'short that pleasure is' compared to the corresponding punishment which is 'intolerable and everlasting'.<sup>50</sup> He declares that if he meets her again 'hell and my soul be mixed' (4.1.26), resulting in his determination to give up the affair.

This prefaces a comic enactment of the cosmic battle with God, represented by Penitent, and the Devil, played by a Succubus disguised as Mistress Harebrain. The Succubus tries to tempt him out of his resolution whilst Penitent calls for 'Celestial soldiers' to 'guard me!' (4.1.31). His subsequent, 'Shield me you ministers of faith and grace!' (4.1.33) articulates the two necessary criteria for salvation – personal faith and God's grace. The exchange with the Succubus recalls the Devil's temptation of Christ and so reflects the battle between God and the Devil. The comedy arises from Penitent's mistaken belief, encouraged by the Succubus, that it is really Mistress Harebrain. Penitent says 'Th'art a devil' meaning it figuratively, whilst the Succubus' 'Feel, feel, man; has a devil flesh and bone?' takes it literally (4.1.34; 36).<sup>51</sup> Penitent is referencing the contemporary belief that the Devil tempted man through woman. This stems from the biblical story of Eve tempting Adam at the instigation of the serpent/Devil. The Succubus's reference to its own

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<sup>50</sup> *A Sermon Against Whoredom and Uncleaness in Homilies*, pp. 123–140, p.139.

<sup>51</sup> It is unclear whether there would have been any indication to the audience that this was a disguised Succubus. The stage direction following 4.1.29 reads 'enter the devil [as a Succubus] in her [Mistress Harebrain's] shape'. So perhaps some sign would have been present, adding to the humour of Penitent's uncertainty. Alternatively, greater tension would be achieved if the audience also remained unsure. We are not encouraged in this scene to laugh *at* Penitent nor is his obvious puritanism being mocked. The battle for his soul is serious though presented with a light touch.

corporeality recalls the contemporary theological debate on the subject.<sup>52</sup>

Penitent's 'I do conjure thee by that dreadful power' (4.1.37) affirms his uncertainty about the nature of the Succubus. The dual potential meanings of 'conjure' and 'dreadful' create ambiguity about which 'dreadful power' he is calling upon.<sup>53</sup> At this time 'conjure' could mean to stop someone by appealing to a sacred being in keeping with his earlier calls on God. But it also meant to invoke demonic spirits suggesting he intends to fight fire with fire. Equally, 'dreadful' could inspire both reverence and fear, applicable to both God and the Devil. The Succubus continues to try and tempt Penitent, but he rejects it, concluding:

Devil! I do conjure thee once again  
By that soul-quaking thunder to depart  
And leave this chamber freed from thy damned art. (4.1.69 – 71)

Again 'conjure' has a dual meaning. It is unclear what force provides 'that soul-quaking thunder' though its power against the spirit's 'damned art' implies a divine one, enacting the battle between God and the Devil. The Succubus then stamps its foot and disappears through the conventional trap door to hell.<sup>54</sup>

This confirms for audiences the intended demonic, spiritual nature of the character they have seen. When Penitent is finally assured that it 'was the devil in [Mistress Harebrain's] likeness there' (4.4.26), he concludes that he was saved from demonic possession by 'worthier cogitations' which 'blessed' him

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<sup>52</sup> Robert Hunter West, *The Invisible World*, pp. 15-34; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* p.567; Brian P. Levack, *The Devil Within*, pp. 58–9.

<sup>53</sup> This ambiguity of meaning also provides some of the comedy of course.

<sup>54</sup> In the endnotes to this stage direction on p.312, Michael Taylor notes this was the usual signal for the trapdoor to open. It is interesting to consider how this might have been staged, given the actor playing the succubus would presumably have been wearing a farthingale as part of his disguise as Mistress Harebrain.

(4.4.28). This attests to the dual role of God and his own faith in his victory in the battle for his soul. Penitent calls up God to aid his reformation and is thus successful in resisting the Devil's temptations. This scene thus presents a potential model for resisting temptation which the audience might apply to their own lives.

The examples discussed so far have involved literal devils visible to the off-stage audience in some form.<sup>55</sup> After about 1590 however dramatic representation of the battle between God and the Devil is more typically internalised within protagonists, becoming less explicit over time. This reflects the Protestant emphasis on the Devil's internal manipulation of the mind rather than on any external activity.<sup>56</sup> The ambiguous presentation of conjuration in Shakespeare's 1591 *The First Part of the Contention Betwixt the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster* provides an example.<sup>57</sup> In this play, Henry and Gloucester are both presented as godly whilst their opponents are directly associated with the Devil. Beaufort and Suffolk sponsored the conjuration which resulted in Eleanor's conviction, facilitating Gloucester's fall and subsequent murder. Suffolk admits that he has 'lim'd a bush for [Eleanor]' (1.3.88) and their subsequent failure to protect their agent, Hume, from the

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<sup>55</sup> Alexander's conjuring of the Devil is enacted in dumb show during the prologue.

<sup>56</sup> See Nathan Johnstone, 'The Protestant Devil' for a discussion of this. More extreme Protestants did continue to claim to engage directly with physical manifestations of the Devil and be tempted by them. Protestant divines accepted that it was theoretically possible, but such incidents were largely considered fraudulent by the authorities. James I said it was impossible and the divine, William Perkins also wrote against it. See also Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles*, p.31; Darren Oldridge, *Supernatural*, pp. 287–8; F.W. Brownlow, *Shakespeare, Harsnett, and the Devils of Denham* (London: Associated University Presses, 1993).

<sup>57</sup> William Shakespeare, *The First Part of the Contention Betwixt the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster* in Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus (eds.), *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York & London: W.W. Norton, 2008), pp. 229–316. All references to *Contention* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

consequences resembles the Devil's desertion of his victims in contemporary pamphlets and plays.<sup>58</sup> Beaufort and Suffolk are thus linked directly and explicitly to the demonic activity that is staged. York and Buckingham's arrival to witness the conjuration, implicates them in the conspiracy by association, so they also carry the taint of demonism.<sup>59</sup> Many in contemporary audiences would have recognised the Devil's hand in the machinations of the various rival factions, especially as they worked against the obviously godly Henry, and only slightly less pure Gloucester. This could all serve to remind the audience of the Devil's internal role in encouraging sin and thus represent for contemporaries the perennial battle between God and the Devil.<sup>60</sup>

Similarly, despite the physical presence of the witches, the battle between God and the Devil is primarily internalised within Macbeth and his wife. The demonic elements of *Macbeth* have been the subject of widely variable critical assessment but the divine thread that runs through the play in parallel with this is less commented upon.<sup>61</sup> The battle between God and the Devil is

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<sup>58</sup> For example, as the Dog deserts Elizabeth Sawyer in William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, John Ford, Etc., *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621).

<sup>59</sup> Cox claims that Shakespeare 'separates this kind of destructive ambition [political infighting] from literal demonic activity' and denies any demonic association to Gloucester's death or in the York/Cade rebellion. However, this is an overly secular reading which takes insufficient account of contemporary demonic beliefs. John D. Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred*, pp. 146–7.

<sup>60</sup> Johnstone notes the emphasis on the role of internal temptation by the Devil in contemporary murder pamphlets See Nathan Johnstone, 'The Protestant Devil', p.196.

<sup>61</sup> These can be crediting and sceptical, religious, and secular, but they all have the play's demonic elements as their starting point. See for example: Hilaire Kallendorf, *Exorcism and its Texts: Subjectivity in Early Modern Literature of England and Spain* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 145–8; Jan Frans Van Dijkhuizen, *Devil Theatre*, p.95, 190; John D. Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred*, pp. 176, 182; Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 253-316; Ryan Curtis Friesen, *Supernatural Fiction in Early Modern Drama and Culture* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), pp. 122-142; Robert V. Caro, 'Rules for Discernment: Another Context for *Macbeth*' in *Notes and Queries* Vol. 47, Issue 4, December 2000, pp. 455–458; Bryan Adams Hampton, 'Purgation, Exorcism, and the Civilising



internalised and implicit, shared with the audience through soliloquy. Macbeth's diametric 'this [...] Cannot be ill, cannot be good' when he first ponders the meaning of the weird sisters' prophecies exemplifies this.<sup>62</sup> Neither clearly 'good' nor 'ill', the temptation he is experiencing, is personal, internal and, essentially, 'supernatural' (1.3.129). Banquo recognises the danger and warns Macbeth that the witches as 'instruments of darkness', acting for the Devil, might 'tell us truths' to 'win us to our harms' and 'betray's/ In deepest consequence' (1.3.121 – 124). The references to winning and 'deepest consequence' recalls the battle for the soul which for many contemporaries was of the greatest importance.

Lady Macbeth's soliloquies similarly use diametric comparisons between the Devil and God. She pits hell against heaven, calling on 'thick night' (1.5.46) to 'pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell' (1.5.47). Her reference to hell acknowledges the demonic nature of the planned murder. She hopes that hell's 'smoke' will obscure the act from heaven, which would otherwise cry 'Hold, hold!' (1.5.52). Thus, God and the Devil are set in opposition. From this point on the Macbeths are increasingly associated with hell and opposition to God whilst their opponents are linked to heaven. Lady Macbeth urges Macbeth to 'be the serpent' (1.5.64) recalling the Devil as serpent in paradise. The biblical

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Process in Macbeth' in *Studies in English Literature, 1500 – 1900*, Spring 2011, vol. 51, no. 2, (Spring 2011), pp. 327–347; Ewan Fernie, *The Demonic: Literature and Experience* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 50–68. The introductions to most editions of the play will also discuss its demonic aspects.

<sup>62</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* in Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus (eds.), *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York & London: W.W. Norton, 2008), pp. 2569–2632, 1.3.129 - 130. All subsequent references to *Macbeth* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

reference implicitly also recalls God. Like contemporary representations of the Fall, she is the temptress, simultaneously overturning the contemporary sense of God-given hierarchical order by demanding to take control of 'This night's great business' (1.5.66). This will give them 'solely sovereign sway and masterdom', the sibilance of which recalls the serpent's hissing temptation, associating her directly with the Devil (1.5.68).<sup>63</sup> This conversation between the Macbeths would necessarily have been secret so a whispered performance could enhance this serpentine representation.

The Macbeth's demonic natures continue to be stressed when Malcolm and Macduff repeatedly refer to the 'devilish' and 'black' Macbeth (4.3.118; 4.3.53). This contrasts to the English king, whose touch provides the 'miraculous work' of curing scrofula (4.3.148). 'Such sanctity hath Heaven given his hand', aided by 'holy prayers', and 'a heavenly gift of prophecy' which all 'speak him full of grace' (4.3.145; 155; 158; 160) represents God through him. That this agent of God is directly supporting their cause, evidences Malcolm's assertion that 'the powers above/ Put on their instruments' (4.3.240 – 1) for them and represents the fight against Macbeth as one of God against the Devil.<sup>64</sup> Banquo is also associated explicitly with God. He invokes 'merciful

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<sup>63</sup> For Lady Macbeth's 'willed submission to demonic powers' see W. Moelwyn Merchant, 'His Fiend-Like Queen' in *Shakespeare Survey* 19 (1996), pp. 75–81, p.80. The slippery linguistic nature of Lady Macbeth's soliloquy is discussed in Stephen Greenblatt, 'Introduction' to William Shakespeare *Macbeth* in Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus (eds.), *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York & London: W.W. Norton, 2008), pp. 2569–2577, p.2574. Lady Macbeth's power over Macbeth is discussed by Janet Adelman, "'Born of Woman": Fantasies of Maternal Power in *Macbeth*' in Marjorie Garber (ed.), *Cannibals, Witches and Divorce: Estranging the Renaissance* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 90–121.

<sup>64</sup> See Alan Sinfield on this as a reflection of contemporary resistance theory and the distinction between a tyrant and a legitimate, absolute monarch. Alan Sinfield, '*Macbeth*: History, Ideology,

powers' to 'restrain' the 'cursed thoughts' his 'nature/ Gives way to in repose' (2.1.7; 8 - 9). The active imperative 'restrain' is directed at God and contrasts to the Macbeths' earlier invocation of hell. The speech indicates that Banquo has also been affected by the witches' prophecies, but that he seeks God's help to resist their temptation. Ten lines later, when he tells Macbeth: 'I dreamt last night of the three weird sisters' (2.1.19) Macbeth's glib lie 'I think not of them' (1.5.20) reinforces Macbeth's association with the Devil, especially as he immediately follows it with 'yet', undermining his own assertion. Banquo continues to associate himself with heaven when, after Duncan's murder, he declares: 'In the great hand of God I stand,' (2.3.125) placing himself squarely against the Macbeths. The play paints a picture of God's battle with the Devil, enacted by representative forces within the commonwealth. Although Banquo is defeated by Macbeth, the prophecy for his progeny's kingship posits him, or rather God, as ultimate victor. The play demonstrates the power that the Devil can achieve through human ambition and pride but ultimately asserts that God's power is stronger and will prevail. Stephen Greenblatt rightly questions the likelihood of long-term peace in the play world given the supernatural and human absences of the witches and Donalbain.<sup>65</sup> For contemporaries, however, this may have indicated the perpetual nature of the battle between God and the Devil, reminding them to be ever-alert to the Devil's activities within themselves.

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and Intellectuals' in Richard Danson Brown and David Johnson (eds.), *A Shakespeare Reader: Sources and Criticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 129–141.

<sup>65</sup> See for example Stephen Greenblatt 'Introduction' to William Shakespeare *Macbeth* p.375.

The ultimate occasion for an individual to experience the battle between God and the Devil was the deathbed. Traditionally this involved the Devil and an individual's guardian angel hovering over the passive body of the dying, while relatives and others clustered round praying in support.<sup>66</sup> Although these spiritual forces were constantly fighting over the human soul, they became visible to the dying, who needed to accept the offer of salvation actively.<sup>67</sup> This contradicted Protestant belief in predestination so post-Reformation the emphasis was placed on the deathbed as an opportunity to express faith rather than hope for a last-minute intervention. Nevertheless, the concept remained. It was seen as 'the last and greatest spiritual confrontation of the Protestant life'.<sup>68</sup> Supported by ministers' arguments against the temptations and doubts proffered by the Devil, the dying Christian fought the Devil within their conscience.<sup>69</sup> *Dr Faustus* enacts two deathbed scenes; the Old Man's and Faustus' own. The former presents an idealised, predominately physical engagement between the godly and Satan. Mephistopheles has already told Faustus that, though he can afflict his body, the Old Man's 'faith is great. I cannot touch his soul' (5.1.79). The devils attack him physically but, unlike Faustus, he acknowledges God's ultimate control, seeing the physical pains as

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<sup>66</sup> See for example, Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (eds.), 'Migrations of Angels in the Early Modern World' in *Angels in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 1–40; Laura Sangha, *Angels and Belief in England, 1480 – 1700* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), pp. 13-40; David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 379-400.

<sup>67</sup> Peter Marshall, 'Angels Around the Deathbed: Variations on a Theme in the English Art of Dying' in Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (eds.), *Angels in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.83–103.

<sup>68</sup> Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant* p.464.

<sup>69</sup> Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism*, pp. 2–3.

a 'furnace' in which 'God shall try my faith' (5.1.115). God is represented in this battle by his faith. He rejects the demons, asserting his 'faith, vile hell, shall triumph over thee' causing 'the heavens smiles' as he 'repulse[s]' the demons, sending them 'hence' so he 'fl[ies] unto my God' (5.1.116 - 119). The physical and spiritual elevation of 'fly' articulates his certainty of salvation and implies God's victory.<sup>70</sup>

Faustus's death in contrast, emphasises his lack of faith. It begins with his despairing intent to commit suicide. When Mephistopheles hands him a dagger audiences are silently reminded that this act was deemed the ultimate sin, resulting in certain damnation. The Old Man, on God's behalf, tries to help Faustus to resist calling up the image of a guardian angel. He assures Faustus that salvation is 'o'er [his] head', and that the angel 'offers' to 'pour [...] into [his] soul' 'a vial full of precious grace' if he 'stay [his] desperate steps' and 'call for mercy and avoid despair' (5.1.54 – 57). The imperatives 'stay', and 'call' demand an active response from Faustus to accept the conditional 'offer' of 'precious grace'. Guardian angels were predominately a pre-Reformation belief but the idea of them persisted, in part because they had scriptural status.<sup>71</sup> Post-Reformation the individual was expected to fight for themselves, but angels were still thought to hover around the deathbed to take the soul up to heaven, signalling the gift of divine grace. It is this service that the Old Man

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<sup>70</sup> Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, p.464 describes the more typical internal, spiritual experiences that Protestants should expect at this point, based on temptation and doubt of election.

<sup>71</sup> Post-Reformation focused on angels as more general guardians rather than an individual having a specifically allocated guardian angel. For further discussion of the pre- and post-Reformation role of guardian angels see for example, Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism*, pp. 1-26; Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham, (eds.), *Angels in the Early Modern*, pp. 1-40, 83-103; Laura Sangha, *Angels and Belief*.

imagines for Faustus to help him resist the Devil's threats and temptations. The battle continues within Faustus' conscience but alone he cannot find the faith needed. He is torn between repentance and despair as 'hell' and 'grace' fight 'for conquest' (5.1.65). However, having sent away the Old Man, God's representative, only Mephistopheles remains. He threatens to punish Faustus with physical torment, 'for disobedience to *my* sovereign lord' (5.1.68), causing Faustus to plead 'entreat *thy* lord' for forgiveness (5.1.70).<sup>72</sup> Faustus's use of the personal possessive 'thy' in contrast to Mephistopheles' 'my' suggests an attempt to distance himself from the Devil. He is disowning him. However, this resistance is short-lived and eight lines later Faustus renews the contract and accepts his place in '*our* hell' (5.1.78).<sup>73</sup> The change in the possessive to 'our' implies a closeness to Mephistopheles. It signals his acceptance of the Devil as his master and thus his ultimate choice between salvation through God and damnation with the Devil.<sup>74</sup>

The end of the final scene consists of one continuous soliloquy in which Faustus enacts the battle for his soul in his head. He alternates between thoughts of damnation and salvation in a manner that recalls the dialogue of the Evil and Good Angels earlier in the play. The sense of an internal battle is emphasised through caesurae marking the change between the divine and the demonic in 'Oh, I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down!', and 'Yet will I call

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<sup>72</sup> My emphases.

<sup>73</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>74</sup> This feeds into contemporary discussions about whether Christians have choice of acceptance of grace and seems to contradict the dominant Calvinist view. However, his lack of faith in God's mercy is equally emphasised and it may be read that this is not a real choice he is making. Contemporaries might also have considered that Mephistopheles' success is only possible because God allows it.

on [Christ]. Oh, spare me, Lucifer!' He will 'leap up' to God but Lucifer 'pulls [him] down', the opposition of 'up' and 'down' adding to the tension. He imagines he sees 'Christ's blood stream[ing] in the firmament' (5.2.78). The reference to Christ's blood suggests faith but 'would' instead of 'will' in 'One drop would save my soul' highlights his uncertainty (5.2.79). His call, 'Ah, *my* Christ' is immediately followed by an address to the Devil, 'Ah, rend not my heart for naming of *my* Christ' (5.2.779 – 80).<sup>75</sup> The personal pronoun 'my' with reference to Christ and God indicates a faith which might yet save him and suggests an intimacy with God in contrast to his earlier rejection of Satan as 'thy lord'.<sup>76</sup> This is increased as he immediately turns his thoughts back to Christ and 'Yet I will call on him' sounds determined, 'yet' seemingly rejecting the Devil addressed in the previous line and 'will' is firm (5.2.81). However, it is future tense, like his earlier request for more time 'That Faustus *may* repent and save his soul' (5.2.73).<sup>77</sup> He has not accepted that the time to resist Satan is now. Ultimately, he turns to the devils: 'Oh, spare me, Lucifer', causing his vision of Christ's redeeming blood to disappear: 'Where is it now? 'Tis gone' to be replaced by God's 'ireful brows!' (5.2.82 - 3). This reflects Christian belief that Christ's blood sacrifice assuaged God's just anger at man's sinfulness. Faustus' blasphemy in calling on Lucifer to 'spare' him has finally ended the battle, leaving only 'the heavy wrath of God' (5.2.85) from which he cannot hide.

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<sup>75</sup> My emphases.

<sup>76</sup> This contrasts to the use of personal pronouns serving to distance the protagonist from God discussed in chapter one.

<sup>77</sup> My emphasis.

*Dr Faustus*' contrasting death scenes demonstrate for audiences people's multiple opportunities to repent and show faith, along with the ultimate cost of failure. The Old Man presents an exemplar for the elect whilst Faustus demonstrates the ultimate failure of the damned. The torment that Faustus evidently endures potentially arouses audiences' sympathy. A modern audience might wonder that God does not hear and respond positively, seeing in this an absence of God. For contemporary audiences, however, this epitomises the awful consequence of reprobation. As Alan Sinfield notes, contemporary doctrine emphasised God's power over his goodness, underlining the importance of divine justice. Many Protestants would not have seen Faustus's damnation as unjust.<sup>78</sup> The doctrine these scenes portray remained hugely complex for contemporaries as well as for modern audiences. It is beyond the scope of this project to explore the doctrine thoroughly. However, such visual representation might help explicate it and make it more accessible for its contemporary audiences, acting as a springboard perhaps for their own subsequent engagement with the subject.<sup>79</sup>

Beaufort's death scene in *Contention* presents a much simpler interpretation of the cosmic battle for the human soul. It is less spectacular and the doctrine more orthodox. The suggestion of choice evident in *Dr Faustus* is absent in *Contention*. Supernatural beings have no physical presence in the

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<sup>78</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Literature in Protestant England*, p.10.

<sup>79</sup> Peter Marshall notes the apparent willingness to discuss contentious religious ideas in a variety of contexts and social/religious groups including alehouses, inns and at private dinner tables. Peter Marshall, 'Choosing Sides and Talking Religion in Shakespeare's England' in David Loewenstein and Michael Witmore (eds.), *Shakespeare and Early Modern Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 40–56, p.49.



scene, although they are explicitly assumed to be present spiritually. Henry supports Beaufort, as the Old Man does Faustus, but lays the power explicitly and exclusively with the 'eternal mover of the heavens' (3.3.19). He calls on God to 'Look with a gentle eye' on Beaufort and 'beat away the busy meddling fiend' and 'purge this black despair' (3.3.20 – 23). His imperatives to 'look' at Beaufort and 'beat away' the Devil urge God to act. Beaufort's relative helplessness is articulated in his 'black despair' while the 'fiend' who 'lays strong siege' to Beaufort's soul signals God's battle with the Devil (3.3.22). The conditional 'if' in Henry's 'Peace to his soul, if God's good pleasure be' (3.3.26) emphasises orthodox Calvinist doctrine that salvation depended on God's predestined choice. An individual could only show faith in God's mercy.<sup>80</sup> Henry urges Beaufort to '[think] on heaven's bliss' and 'Hold up thy hand, make signal of thy hope' (3.3.26 – 7). Ultimately, however, like Faustus, Beaufort does not signal 'hope' of God's mercy. Nevertheless, whilst Faustus is spectacularly taken off to hell, leaving no doubt of his damnation, Beaufort's fate is more open. Henry's prayer 'O God, forgive him' reminds audiences that it is not too late for God's mercy to be affected (3.3.29). Audiences are thus reminded that God's judgements are inscrutable so despite Beaufort's apparently Godless death, he could still be amongst the elect.<sup>81</sup> God is

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<sup>80</sup> Strictly speaking, even that was only possible through God's grace although this was not generally emphasised in pastoral contexts. This is discussed for example by Jeffery Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles* p.26 and Maria Devlin, 'If it were made for man'.

<sup>81</sup> It could also simply reflect the play's pre-Reformation setting. Catholics believed sinners spent time in purgatory after death before ultimate salvation and that the prayers of the living might help to shorten their term of suffering. The play can thus speak to both Catholic and Protestant audiences.

presented as having a clear and active role in the play-world through the battle for human souls at the deathbed.

These representations ensure the plays reflect the real-world beliefs of many of their contemporary audiences. The various death scenes explored here provided audiences with an audio-visual representation of key tenets of their faith concerning the battle for their souls between God and the Devil.<sup>82</sup> They demonstrate the multiple opportunities even the most hardened sinners have to repent, reflecting the positive hope perceived by theologians to be inherent to the doctrine of predestination.<sup>83</sup> The Thirty-nine Articles describe the doctrine as 'full of sweet, pleasant and unspeakable comfort'.<sup>84</sup> The fate of Faustus spectacularly demonstrates the awful cost of failure. His apparent choice, however, albeit theologically unsound, combined with the Old Man's example, ensures the doctrine's hopefulness is not undermined. Complex doctrine is thus explicated and made more accessible. The evident ambiguities presented avoid dogmatism and encourage those audience members with the inclination to reflect on what they have observed and interrogate their own faith.

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<sup>82</sup> Such representation might previously have been experienced in churches through the combined use of the doom scenes painted on the walls and the priests' sermons, either literally, if he used them as an aid, or through the congregations' own imaginations. Early in the Reformation attempts were made to defend such images on the basis that they served as educational tools for the illiterate. Eamon Duffy notes that the painting of the apostles in the Judgement of Christ on the rood screen gave parishioners 'a pictorial rendering of a standard examination of conscience' whilst the presentation of the Apostles on another rood screen 'suggests a heightened awareness of the importance of preaching and catechesis in parishes.' Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400 – 1580* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 81, 82.

<sup>83</sup> Eric Ives, *The Reformation Experience: Living Through the Turbulent Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Lion Hudson plc, 2012), p.101; Darren Oldridge, *Supernatural*, p.23. For Calvin on this see Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing*, pp. 346–50, 371–2.

<sup>84</sup> Article XVII in the *Church of England Articles of Religion*, in the *Church of England Homilies* book but appearing at the end with its own pagination. *The Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical, and the Thirty-Nine Articles* (London: printed for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1851), p.92.

Modern scholars attempting to read the plays through contemporary eyes can equally gain a clearer understanding of the operation of Reformed faith.

### God and the Devil - Not Equals but Opposites<sup>85</sup>

Demonic dramatic involvement helped contemporary audiences understand the supreme power and nature of God. Sometimes the Devil's self-descriptions draw attention to God's characteristics, especially in pre-1580 plays. *Conflict* opens with Satan drawing parallels between himself and God. He complains 'my kingdom' is being usurped by the increasing number of true Christians who 'all my laws, and statutes do distain'.<sup>86</sup> His claim to rule the earth was a demonic conceit to which contemporaries often subscribed.<sup>87</sup> However, 'my' also emphasises a distinction from God's kingdom which is continued through the reference to 'my laws'. The contrasting 'God's laws' (l.37) were newly emphasised post-Reformation.<sup>88</sup> Satan's assertion that he has 'assigned the Pope' to rule 'in my stead' (l.97; 96) mirrors the concept that a monarch was

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<sup>85</sup> Summarising Stuart Clark's discussion in *Thinking With Demons* John Cox notes that 'demons were inherently oppositional [...] because they were constructed as the subordinate term in a hierarchical polarity.' John D. Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred*, p.2

<sup>86</sup> Nathaniel Woodes, *The Conflict of Conscience* Herbert John Davis and Frank Percy Wilson (eds.), (London: Malone Society, 1952), l.2, 4. All other references to *Conflict* are keyed to this edition and line references will be given parenthetically.

<sup>87</sup> Oldridge cites Perkins, citing from John 12:31, that human propensity to sin made Satan 'the prince of this world'. Darren Oldridge, *Supernatural*, p.73; Anna French, *Children of Wrath*, p.19 notes the idea that the Devil ruled the physical world as 'a common conceit'; Nathan Johnstone says that as all who succumbed to temptation were deemed part of the Devil's kingdom, then the earth was his'. Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism*, p.4.

<sup>88</sup> See for example Jonathan Willis, *The Reformation of the Decalogue: Religious Identity and the Ten Commandments in England, c.1485 – 1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 1-14. Satan says in this line that his favourite 'doth pursue God's laws with deadly hate'.

divinely appointed as God's earthly representative, simultaneously disparaging the Pope by positing him as Satan's agent.

Satan's utterings in *Conflict* primarily serve an anti-Catholic agenda. In *Susanna* Satan's opening speech focuses more explicitly on both the power of God and the Devil's dependence upon God's permission to act against humans:

Among the plagues of thee O God,  
Wherewith thou plaguest man,  
Plague such as I would have thee plague,  
Or let me if I can. (l.27 – 30)

The repeated association of 'thou/thee' with 'plague' emphasises God's control. Human suffering was God's will.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, 'let me' and 'if I can' highlight respectively God's power over Satan and the latter's relative impotence. Ultimately, Susanna's successful resistance through faith demonstrates the inferiority of the Devil's power of temptation. This insistence on the limitations of Satan's power continued throughout the period, maintaining his status as less than God, even when his threat was being emphasised.

Despite the seemingly Manichaeian battle between them then, God's omnipotence and superiority was articulated through his constraint of the Devil's powers. James I described how demons could raise tempests but only 'in such a particular place and prescribed bounds as God will permit them so to trouble'.<sup>90</sup> Similarly in *Conflict* Woodes ensures the audience does not perceive God and Satan as equals. Satan's powers are clearly constrained by God,

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<sup>89</sup> Burton Russell notes from Calvin that 'God not only permits but actively wills evil' Jeffery Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles*, p.46. This belief raised the so called 'problem of evil'. If God was good how and why did he allow, much less pre-plan, bad things to happen to seemingly good people? For a discussion of the problem of evil see for example, Brian P. Levack, *The Devil Within*, p.60 and Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*, p.14.

<sup>90</sup> King James I and VI, *Demonology*, p.395.

reminding the audience of God's superiority. Satan 'might not destroy' Moses 'because he was of the Lord appointed' as leader of his people (I.73 – 4). Similarly, he 'attempted' (I.80) to tempt Christ but the verb acknowledges his failure.<sup>91</sup> Even his use of 'Lord' for God is a tacit acknowledgement of his own inferiority in comparison to God.

This distinction continues in plays post-1580. It is made clear, for example, that Mephistopheles' power is subjugated to God. Mephistopheles uses distractions repeatedly throughout the play whenever Faustus shows an inclination to think of God. Furthermore, he avoids answering Faustus' questions about God and the cosmos as such revelations were deemed God's prerogative, and thus forbidden to him. Even more earthly desires are beyond him. Faustus' first request is for a wife, but all Mephistopheles can produce is a devil disguised as a woman, as the Devil could not enact the holy sacrament of marriage.<sup>92</sup> Unlike the earlier plays though Mephistopheles does not admit his inferiority. It is left to the audience to recognise this weakness or, like Faustus, be fooled by Mephistopheles.

Thomas Middleton's 1616 tragicomedy, *The Witch* also refers to this sacramental restriction. Hecate tells Sebastian that only 'time' can separate his beloved from her new husband. She 'cannot disjoin' the marriage sacrament

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<sup>91</sup> Hunter West explains that the Devil's ability to achieve his aims depended on God's permission and the state of grace of their victim. Robert Hunter West, *The Invisible World*, pp. 75, 95. See also Brian P. Levack, *The Devil Within*, pp. 21, 59-60.

<sup>92</sup> See *An Homily on the State of Matrimony, Homilies*, pp. 534–549.

because of 'heaven's fastening', indicating God's superior power.<sup>93</sup> The play world is subject to God's rules. Although she uses the royal 'we', she is also referring to the Devil, whom she later describes as 'our master' (1.2.175). She acknowledges that she 'may raise jars/ Jealousies, strifes and heart-burning disagreements' (1.2.173 – 4) within a marriage, contrasting what she 'may' do with what she 'cannot'. Using 'may' and 'cannot' imply permission as well as ability. That she 'may raise jars' means she has the necessary knowledge and power but also implies she is allowed to. Similarly, that her 'power cannot disjoint' indicates that she lacks both the power and God's permission. God gives and limits her powers as well as granting and refusing permission. God's control is evident both through the references to heaven and to the Devil 'rais[ing] jars' against 'that patient miracle' (1.2.176) Job. Contemporary audiences, familiar with the scriptures, would have recognised the reference to Job, whose faith God tested through the Devil's torments. This infers that it is God who allows her to make a couple's married life difficult but ultimately, she, and therefore also the Devil, lacks the power to 'disjoint' it (1.2.177) if the couple remain faithful to their vows. This limitation on demonic powers is used to comic effect in Nathan Field's 1609 *The Woman is a Weathercock* when Nevill's disguise as a Devil is one reason Bellafront's marriage is invalid.<sup>94</sup> As with the earlier plays, the Devil's limitations, and in particular his subordination to God's

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<sup>93</sup> Thomas Middleton, *The Witch* in Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge (eds.), *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 85-142, 1.2.172 - 3. All subsequent references to *The Witch* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

<sup>94</sup> Nathan Field, *A Woman is a Weathercock* in William Peery (ed.), *The Plays of Nathan Field* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1950), pp. 57-139. All references to *Weathercock* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

laws are emphasised. References to God's superiority over the Devil continue throughout the period, helping to establish God's presence in the play world from which contemporary religious sensitivities demanded his anthropomorphic exclusion.

In *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) the Devil is represented in the form of a black dog. This was a common image at the time associated with demonic activity.<sup>95</sup> The dog confesses he cannot kill Old Banks as his power 'is circumscribed/ and tied in limits'.<sup>96</sup> That it is God that sets this limit is implicit in the reasons the dog gives. He describes Old Banks as 'loving to the world' and 'charitable to the poor' (2.1.159 – 160). Thus he 'live[s] without compass of our reach' (2.1.162). The focus on good deeds appears unorthodox in a Protestant environment but such charity was deemed an important indicator of a true and lively faith in God. The *Homilies* advised parishioners that 'thy deeds and works must be an open testimonial of thy faith; otherwise thy faith, being without good works, is but the devil's faith [...] and not a true Christian faith.'<sup>97</sup> Similarly Mephistopheles declares that the Old Man's 'faith is great. I cannot touch his soul' and can only 'attempt' physical pains (5.1.79; 81). Such statements

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<sup>95</sup> Lucy Munro usefully discusses a variety of examples in contemporary literature, woodcuts, and even another, albeit lost, play of 1603 in her edition of the play. Lucy Munro (ed.), 'Introduction' to Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley etc. *The Witch of Edmonton* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing plc, 2017), pp. 55–64. Similarly, Darren Oldridge discusses incidents in which the Devil was perceived to have appeared as a black dog in *Supernatural*, p.78. *The Witch of Edmonton* was written by John Ford, Thomas Dekker and William Rowley with possibly another unidentified author.

<sup>96</sup> John Ford, Thomas Dekker and William Rowley *The Witch of Edmonton* in Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge (eds.), *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 143–209, 2.1.157 – 8. All subsequent references to *Witch of Edmonton* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

<sup>97</sup> *Homilies* p.45.

highlight for contemporary audiences the importance of faith for protection against the Devil and remind them of God's superior power.

A similar demonstration of faith protects the virtuous Justina from the lecherous attentions of Cyprian, in *The Two Noble Ladies* (1621).<sup>98</sup> Cyprian conjures demons to force Justina to have sex with him. The play has already comically shown a woman changing the focus of her desires at a demon's instigation. This earlier episode emphasises by contrast the demon's powerlessness against Justina's faith in God. When she refuses his advances, Cyprian threatens to change her 'white thoughts' with 'his black art', the opposite adjectives positing them as representatives of God and the Devil respectively.<sup>99</sup> He is confident that 'hell's hooks she cannot 'scape' (4.5.1641). The superior power of heaven becomes apparent through his devils' failure. Justina is the object through which God overpowers the Devil. The depiction of her defeating Cyprian's demons whilst peacefully asleep with a prayerbook in her hand emphasises the inequality of the fight between the Devil and God. The devils' potential power is emphasised by the alliterative description of them as 'fierce fiends' (5.2.1753) but they are 'charm[ed]' by her, making them simultaneously full of 'rage' and 'wonder' (5.2.1753). Ultimately Cyprian's spirit admits that 'her prayers have prevailed against our spells' and that 'her faith beats down our incantations', proving God the stronger (5.2.1799; 1802). Cyprian feels himself 'forc'd to worship' (5.2.1752) her 'in spite of hell'

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<sup>98</sup> Author unknown.

<sup>99</sup> Rebecca G. Rhoads (ed.), *The Two Noble Ladies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), 4.5.1634, 1635. All subsequent references to *Two Noble Ladies* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.



(5.2.1751) and begs her to 'teach [him] the sense and use of this strong spell/ Call'd faith' (5.2.1817 – 1818). Cyprian uses her prayer book to prevent the devils from harming him, maintaining the superior power of Christian faith against the Devil. Simple faith is shown as the most powerful protection against the Devil. God's ultimate victory is achieved by the appearance of the angel which earlier prophesied that 'it is the gracious heaven's will' that Cyprian 'Shall renounce magic and turn Christian' (3.3.113; 114). This is the realisation of that prophesy. God is shown as both more powerful than the Devil and as giver of faith. The devils' primary role in this scene is to demonstrate demonic powerlessness against the faithful who are protected by the superior power of God. Their presence enabled God's superior, and active, power to be staged. Calvinist emphasis on the Devil's power of temptation along with the doctrine of predestination risked positing God's involvement with humanity as distant or even in the past, rendering him irrelevant.<sup>100</sup> Introducing God's presence as a form of protection against the wiles of the Devil achieved through faith potentially counters this, enabling audiences to see the importance and relevance of faith in their own lives.

Just as the faith of the virtuous represents God, the Devil is represented through the activities of plays' villains, whose subsequent downfall also shows God's superior power. In the comedy *The Two Merry Milkmaids*, 1619,

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<sup>100</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Literature in Protestant England*, p.132.

Raymond is frequently described as demonic, both by himself and others.<sup>101</sup>

Pretending to offer support to Dorigen, he says in an aside:

So the devil, when he means to seduce  
Puts on an angel's shape.<sup>102</sup>

Frederick tells Raymond that 'the great Devil and you are all one', suggesting the Devil is internalised within Raymond (4.2.178). Similarly, Frederick declares that Julia 'has given away her maidenhead to the Devil' (4.2.272) through her agreement with Raymond since 'an old whoremaster is little better' (4.2.273).

Though on one level these are all metaphorical examples, for audiences used to hearing that the Devil worked his evil by manipulating human behaviour they may also be taken literally.<sup>103</sup> Raymond, then, represents the Devil in this play but there is no straightforwardly virtuous hero or heroine to represent God directly. Nevertheless, the battle between God and the Devil is performed explicitly in the play's courtroom scene. Raymond recalls the original battle between God and the Devil when he falsely describes Dorigen as:

Fallen by a sin equal to Lucifer,  
From her clear heaven where she stood a star. (3.3.377 – 8)

Conversely Dorilus, rendered invisible by a demonically acquired magic ring, declares he comes from 'The All preserver that guards innocence' (3.3.448), positing God on Dorigen's side. Dorilus' invisibility mirrors God's invisible presence in the real world, whilst Raymond represents the Devil acting through

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<sup>101</sup> Author J.C. or I.C.

<sup>102</sup> G. Harold Metz (ed.), *The Two Merry Milkmaids* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1979), 3.1.44 - 5. All subsequent references to *Merry Milkmaids* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically. Punctuation adjusted in line with editor's footnote to 1.44.

<sup>103</sup> The inward temptation by the Devil is referenced in the *Homily* attacking adultery, p.139, and the *Homily of Repentance, Homilies*, pp. 562 and 571. This is also discussed, for example, by Nathan Johnstone, *Devils and Demonism* p.76; Darren Oldridge, *Supernatural*, p.70; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 562, 569.

humans. Raymond ultimately acknowledges the Devil's role in his behaviour and asserts his own reformation:

How had the devil blinded me, I could not  
See your rare virtues? O let my penitence,  
Which if it be not zealous, just heavens strike  
That breath into my throat again, which forms  
The words I utter and let them strangle me. (4.3.818 – 822)

The juxtaposition of the past tense reference to the Devil in 'blinded' and the present tense request for the heavens to 'strike', articulates the traditional dichotomy of the two powers. He was formerly with the Devil but ends recognising God's ultimate power. However, Raymond's apparent conversion is undermined by his curse which calls on 'Hell and the devils' (4.3.836) to ply future traitors and misogynists with torments. This puts power back into the Devil's hands rather than God's. Although the comic nature of the play intends redemption for all, his status therefore remains in doubt. The virtuous characters' safe and happy ending signals God's ultimate victory and superior power, but the play warns the Devil may also get his own. The off-stage audience have observed Raymond's villainy throughout so do not have the difficulty of identifying the true Devil from the false devil experienced by the on-stage characters. Huston Diehl suggests that 'according to Heywood stage plays invite their spectators to adopt the perspective of an omniscient and judging God, and thus internalise the divine spectator in the theatre of the world'.<sup>104</sup> Dramatic irony in this play gives the audience God-like omniscience.

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<sup>104</sup> Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), p.206. He is discussing Heywood's interpretation of the *theatrum mundi* trope in his *Apology for Actors*. *Apology* was written around 1608, first published 1612. Of course, this was a defence of drama

By observing the consequences of the plays' characters' false identification of wrongdoers, audiences may better understand the seemingly arbitrary world they live in. They might then also apply the doctrinal lessons rehearsed in the plays to their own lives.

In some later plays the Devil's anthropomorphic role occurs only at the beginning and the end, but this serves as a reminder to audiences that he is present through the actions of the villains. Keith Thomas notes that 'men saw the Devil in any manifestation of social wickedness or religious unorthodoxy [...] and the Devil's agency was generally recognised'.<sup>105</sup> Protagonists acting villainously represent the Devil, and their ultimate overthrow reflects God's victory. *The Devil's Charter* articulates the power imbalance between God and the Devil in just such a manner. Both the Devil's and God's involvement are made clear from the outset when the Chorus warns the audience to expect a tragic tale 'full/ Of God's high wrath and vengeance for that evil,/ [...] imposed upon her by the Devil' by the 'strumpet of Babylon' (Prologue; l.8 – 10; l.7).<sup>106</sup> The use of 'imposed' emphasises the Devil's control and power as opposed to the human protagonist who will appear to be enacting the play's wickedness. God's 'wrath and vengeance' reminds audiences that the Devil's power is under God's ultimate oversight. The dumbshow showing Alexander conjuring the

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against its detractors, so that he claims this, does not necessarily mean audiences did respond in this way, merely that for one contemporary it was a possible response. David Kathman cites Clark that Heywood was probably the son of a rector in Lincolnshire. Kathman also says he went to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and possibly also Peterhouse, giving him clerical training. David Kathman, "Heywood, Thomas (c. 1573–1641), playwright and poet." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). The on-line edition has been used throughout.

<sup>105</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.569.

<sup>106</sup> Unsurprisingly for a play performed so soon after the Gunpowder Plot, this play is actively anti-Catholic, though its thrust is primarily anti-papal.

Devil, makes the link between the two explicit. The Devil need make no further personal appearance until the end when a troupe of devils come, *Faustus*-like, to carry Alexander off to hell.

Nevertheless, there are constant reminders throughout the play of both the fearful and real influence of the Devil as driver of the evils that Alexander affects and of God's ultimately superior providential power. In the second scene two gentlemen accuse Alexander and his son, Caesar, of all seven deadly sins and 'such devilish incantation' (1.2.184). The second gentleman prays to the 'glorious guider of the golden Spheres,' who 'makes gods and men in heaven and earth to dance' (1.2.201; 203).<sup>107</sup> For many in a Renaissance audience this was a reference to the Christian God. Classical imagery could be used in cautious circumvention of the new law against mentioning God's name on stage, to bring the Christian God into the play world as the Devil's opponent.<sup>108</sup> The juxtaposition of the references to the Devil and the deadly sins to that of the golden spheres, facilitates the Christianisation of the classical reference and places them in direct opposition. However, the power of a

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<sup>107</sup> For a discussion of the connotations of the music of the spheres see for example, Jonathan Willis, *Church Music and Protestantism in Post-Reformation England* (London: Routledge, 2016). For a more in-depth consideration linked to poetry see John Hollander, *The Untuning of the Sky: Ideas of Music in English Poetry, 1500 – 1700* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

<sup>108</sup> This play was written approximately six months after the Act to Restrain Abuses of Players was passed, essentially forbidding references to God on the stage. This act was not immediately or ever, fully effective. References to the Christian God seem to have already been in decline but never completely disappear. Nevertheless, the use of God's name in its various forms did decline, seemingly replaced by those to non-Christian deities or more circumspect references to 'the heavens'. Andrew Gurr discusses the evidence of censorship and proliferation of pagan gods following this act's introduction in *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574 – 1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 95–6. The act is entitled 'An Act to restrain the abuses of players' and forbids 'any person or persons [...] in any stage play [...] jestingly or profanely [to] speak or use the holy name of God', Jac. 1. c.21.

'guider' which can 'make' gods and men act, is thus independent of men, in contrast to the actions of the Devil which are posited here as a response to human 'incantation'. God's power is affirmed as superior.

God could also be understood in terms of his difference to the Devil. This is evident in Macbeth's diametric soliloquy. Macbeth puzzles over the seeming contradictions in the weird sisters' prophecies:

If ill,  
Why hath it given me earnest of success  
Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.  
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion  
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair. (1.3.130 – 134)

The primarily positive connotations of 'success' and 'truth' would not normally be associated with 'ill' nor should 'good' prophecies make him 'yield' to 'horrid' suggestions of murder. The repeated conditional 'if' with 'why' articulate his struggle to rationalise these contradictions, which continue with 'nothing is/ But what is not' (1.3.140 – 141). Contemporary divines argued that, following the Fall, humans lost the ability to distinguish between painful experiences sent by God for one's good, and positive events used by the Devil to draw humans into sin and damnation.<sup>109</sup> Macbeth's internal debate illustrates this and encapsulates the theological 'problem of evil' which troubled many people. If God is entirely good, why does he allow evil in the world, why are 'good' people subjected to temptation or suffering, and how should you distinguish between 'good evil' sent by God as a test or punishment and 'bad good' used by the

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<sup>109</sup> See for example Nathan Johnstone, 'The Protestant Devil', p.181.

Devil as temptation?<sup>110</sup> Theologians provided answers, but they may have seemed as unsatisfactory to contemporaries as they do to modern readers. What this long soliloquy of Macbeth's illustrates with its diametric 'see-saw rhythm' is that for contemporaries, good and evil, God and the Devil, were not separable.<sup>111</sup> As on a see-saw, both were necessary for the world to operate. Greenblatt identifies 'a bleeding of the demonic into the secular and the secular into the demonic' throughout the play but this secularisation ignores contemporary assumptions about the diametrical relationship between God and the Devil.<sup>112</sup> In 1550 Roger Hutchinson said 'If there be a God [...] there is a Devil also; and if there be a Devil [...] there is a God'.<sup>113</sup> James I said, "Since the Devil is the very contrary opposite to God, there can be no better way to know God, than by the contrary".<sup>114</sup> John Weemes made a similar assertion in 1636.<sup>115</sup> Any discussion of one 'bleeds into' the other and it is difficult to

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<sup>110</sup> See for example Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* p.568; Nathan Johnstone, *Devils and Demonism* pp. 8–11; Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion, 1250 - 1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 212–221; Darren Oldridge, 'Light from Darkness: The Problem of Evil in Early Modern England' in *The Seventeenth Century* 27:4, 2012, pp. 389–409; Stuart Clark, *Thinking With Demons* pp. 43–68.

<sup>111</sup> L. C. Knights, 'How may Children had Lady Macbeth?' in Richard Danson Brown and David Johnson (eds.), *A Shakespeare Reader: Sources and Criticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 115–129, p.121. The God-Demonic association of this speech is also discussed by W. Moelwyn Merchant in 'His Fiend-Like Queen' pp. 77–8.

<sup>112</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, 'Introduction' to *Macbeth*, p.2574.

<sup>113</sup> Roger Hutchinson, *The Works of Roger Hutchinson* John Bruce (ed.), (Cambridge: Parker Society Publications, 1842), pp. 140–141. Many contemporaries made similar statements throughout the period. For discussions and further examples see Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* pp. 567–8; John Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred*, p.152; Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles*, p.33.

<sup>114</sup> James I, King of England, 1566–1625, *Daemonologie in Forme of a Dialogue, Diuided into Three Bookes* (Edinburgh: Printed by Robert Walde-graue printer to the Kings Majestie, 1597), p.55.

<sup>115</sup> Speaking of atheists, he said that they 'cannot deny but that there are devils, and [...so] they must grant also that there is a God' John Weemes, *A Treatise of the Foure Degenerate Sonnes* (London: Thomas Cotes, 1636), p.11.

distinguish between them. Malcolm articulates this most clearly when, questioning Macduff's trustworthiness, he notes that:

Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell.  
Though all things foul would wear the brows of grace,  
Yet grace must still look so. (4.3.23 – 25)

The first line associates the fall of Lucifer, whose name means brightness, with Macbeth's fall. Nevertheless, he asserts, angels are still predominately associated with heaven and God, so good. Although evil beings might 'wear the brows of grace', so appear heavenly, true grace 'look[s]' unchanged. The positive repetition of 'still' with the assertive 'are' and 'must', associated with the true good of heaven, contrasts with the undermining sense of 'though', and the unfulfilled desire of 'would' that is tied to the faux good of hell, highlighting the distinction between them. Macbeth is again associated with Lucifer at the end of the play, this time by Macduff. He tells Macbeth to:

Despair thy charm,  
And let the angel whom thou still hast served  
Tell thee Macduff was from his mother's womb  
Untimely ripped. (5.10.13 – 16)

Associating Macbeth with an 'angel' at this stage in the play, reminds the audience of Macbeth's positive beginning, highly favoured by the King. It highlights the parallel with Lucifer's fall. Now, at the end, he is inextricably associated with the Devil. In Macbeth's person the bad has seeped into the good and God has been brought onto the stage in the language of opposition used to describe the Devil. God's ultimate victory is epitomised in the defeat of Macbeth, whose faith in the demonic promises of the weird sisters proves



unfounded. Their absence reflects the Devil's desertion of his followers once they are inextricably lost.

These references provide a contextualised picture of the relative strengths and capabilities of God and the Devil as they might apply to human existence. The plays' protagonists are shown responding to the Devil's temptations in circumstances which, if not exactly mundane, represent real-world scenarios. The Devil, both staged and implied, is shown leading characters into evil through lust, ambition, greed, and jealousy. Spectators might have experienced all these emotions, albeit to different degrees, providing the plays, and their inherent religious lessons, with a sense of realism. Protestant doctrine's inclination to emphasise the threat of the Devil had a concomitant risk that God's power might be down valued. In these plays however, the involvement of the demonic provides the faithful with the opportunity to express their trust in God. The virtuous are protected from the Devil's snares through explicitly God-given faith. Those from whom God withholds faith are evidently damned. God's ultimate control and thus superior power is thence made clear. The interactions described in this section demonstrate God's active presence in the play worlds and his superiority over the Devil. The quotidian nature of the scenarios implies a similar presence in the real world. The faith that contemporary divines, and indeed the State, urged on the community is thus illustrated practically. Those audience members who wished to could identify lessons for themselves. The condensed timeframe in which most plots operated gave audiences an over-view of the workings of

God's providential control, seeing events and their consequences from beginning to end, in a manner that was impossible in the real world. Audiences might thus use the experience of seeing the Protestant faith enacted on the stage to understand better its operation and relevance to their own lives.

### **Blasphemy, Repentance, and the Enactment of Doctrine**

It was widely believed throughout this period that the apocalypse foretold in the Book of Revelation was approaching and so the Devil was presumed to be particularly active.<sup>116</sup> The Elizabethan communion service warned sinners that the Devil could enter and destroy them whilst James I contended that the Devil acted as God's hangman.<sup>117</sup> Although some contemporary writers, such as Reginald Scot, seem entirely sceptical of demonic powers, they denied neither the power nor the existence of the Devil himself.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, Scot acknowledged that as 'supposed witches' 'know no religion' this made them easy prey for the

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<sup>116</sup> This is discussed with contemporary examples by Jan Van Dijkhuizen, *Devil Theatre*, pp. 90–94 and Victoria Brownlee, *Biblical Readings and Literary Writings in Early Modern England, 1558 – 1625* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 169–171, 173, 189.

<sup>117</sup> The prayer book warns against taking communion without repentance lest 'the Devil enter into you [...] and destroy you', Church of England, *The Book of Common Prayer*, p.276. James describes the Devil as God's 'instrument and second cause' and acting 'as God's hangman' but that the two have quite different intentions. God's is to punish the wicked or test and correct the faithful, whilst the Devil aims to 'perish either the soul or the body (or both of them)'. King James I and VI, *Demonology*, p.355.

<sup>118</sup> As Van Dijkhuizen warns, it is important not to ascribe too much modern, rational scepticism to comments by Scot or other contemporaries, such as Harsnett, who cast doubt on the power of alleged witches. Scot had an anti-Catholic agenda and Harsnett, in the early seventeenth century, had a political agenda that encompassed both Catholics and radical Protestants. Furthermore, most Protestant writers were far less sceptical than Scot on matters involving the Devil. Jan Van Dijkhuizen, *Devil Theatre*, p.94. Philip Almond provides a useful study of Scot's text within its contemporary contexts in Philip C. Almond, *England's First Demonologist: Reginald Scot and 'The Discoverie of Witchcraft'* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2011).

Devil.<sup>119</sup> Such religious ignorance rather than lack of knowledge more generally, could equally describe magicians. Both were liable to unconscious blasphemy, attracting to themselves the attentions of the Devil.

One of the ways in which the actions of dramatic magicians bring God into the play world is through such blasphemy. In *Demonology* James I notes that actively consorting with the Devil was a sin against the Holy Ghost.<sup>120</sup> Although the magician believes himself master, this is only with the Devil's consent. The price is the practitioner's soul. This is evident in *Dr Faustus*, where, from the outset, it is Mephistopheles' power which achieves the magic not Faustus' and ultimately Faustus is taken off to hell. Faustus' blasphemy is also explicit, helping to bring God into the play world. The play opens with Faustus selectively quoting from the *Bible*. This was not an unusual form of debate, but his omissions consistently and blasphemously undermine the scripture's Christian message.<sup>121</sup> Faustus' desires are blasphemous too. He wants to 'reign sole king of all our provinces' (1.1.96), and taste of 'princely delicacies' (1.1.87) undermining the supposed God-given social hierarchy of kingship by wanting to move out of his God-given vocational position.<sup>122</sup> In the opening sentence of this speech Faustus describes himself as 'glutted' with the

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<sup>119</sup> Extract from Reginald Scot, *The Discovery of Witchcraft* 1584 presented as document 6 in James Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), p.95.

<sup>120</sup> James I, *Daemonologie*, p.25.

<sup>121</sup> David Bevington discusses this in his introduction to the play, pointing out that the play is not necessarily condemnatory of this. David Bevington, 'Introduction' to Christopher Marlowe *Dr Faustus* in David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Eisaman Maus and Eric Rasmussen, (eds.), *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002), pp. 245–249, p.246.

<sup>122</sup> Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.96 discusses Calvin's view that carrying out one's divinely appointed vocation indicated election.

ideas he imagines (1.1.80). This adjective signals the dangerous nature of his desires, recalling for contemporaries the sin of gluttony. It follows directly on from the Evil Angel's tempting him to:

Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,  
Lord and commander of these elements. (1.1.78 – 9)

Here he is echoing Faustus' stated determination to 'try [his] brains to gain a deity' (1.1.65) and directly associating such wishes with the Devil. The blasphemous nature of these dreams was signalled earlier when he described his magic books as 'heavenly' (1.1.52) and promising 'omnipotence' (1.1.56). Although Faustus actively conjures the Devil, Mephistopheles admits this only facilitated his appearance '*per accidens*' (1.3.47). He was really summoned by Faustus 'rack[ing] the name of God', and 'abjur[ing] the Scriptures and his Saviour Christ' (1.3.48 – 9) – 'that was the cause' and 'Nor will we come unless he use such means' (1.3.47; 51). It is the blasphemy, and only that, which really summoned him. However, Mephistopheles also reveals that one-off blasphemy alone does not guarantee damnation. He comes only 'in hope' of Faustus's soul which is 'in danger to be damned' (1.3.52). The Devil continuously encourages blasphemy throughout the play to achieve his end.

Mephistopheles repeatedly distracts Faustus from any thoughts of the divine. This begins with his rejection of the marriage sacrament as 'a ceremonial toy' which Faustus should 'think no more of' (2.1.154, 155), passes through his refusal to name the world's creator followed by Lucifer's instruction that 'thou should'st not think of God' (2.3.92), and ultimately calling him 'traitor' (5.1.67) for daring to consider repentance in the penultimate scene. These

urgings arise because Faustus does keep thinking of God. The Devil's blasphemy facilitates the demonstration of Faustus' continued, underlying faith in God. Darren Oldridge concludes that as Mephistopheles needs God's permission to do harm 'the fate of Faustus and every character in the drama – both human and supernatural – is scripted by the divine hand'.<sup>123</sup> The play demonstrates to its contemporary audiences the control which God has over the lives of the characters and by implication their own. Faustus' ultimate damnation means this is not necessarily reassuring. However, the Old Man's contrary fate illustrates the alternative which Faustus might have had. God's underlying involvement in the play presents audiences with a 'there but for the grace of God' moment of reflection which they can apply to their own lives.

Such uses of blasphemy are evident throughout the period. For example, in *The Witch of Edmonton* much of the play's evil is triggered by the dog's appearance. Initially Elizabeth Sawyer complains that the local people label her a witch and blame her for their problems simply because she is 'poor, deformed, and ignorant' (2.1.3). This conforms with the views expressed by Reginald Scot, that those suspected of witchcraft were commonly 'old, lame, blear-eyed, pale, foul and full of wrinkles; poor, sullen, superstitious, and papist; or such as know no religion'.<sup>124</sup> Sawyer is shown beaten and abused by members of the local community until she ultimately exclaims that she will 'abjure all goodness', 'be at hate with prayer', and learn how to make 'blasphemous speeches' to avenge herself on her persecutors (2.1.112; 114).

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<sup>123</sup> Darren Oldridge, *Supernatural*, p.22.

<sup>124</sup> James Sharpe, *Witchcraft*, document 6, p.95.

Only then does the dog appear saying 'Ho! Have I found thee cursing? Now thou art mine own' (2.1.121). Her blaspheming has allowed him to come. Her response, 'Bless me' (2.1.123) when he says he is the Devil indicates her underlying faith in God. This expression could have a literal meaning for contemporaries. God's part in the play world is thus articulated in response to the appearance of the Devil, occasioned by blasphemy. Sawyer and Faustus engage in similar contracts. Both renounce God, give their bodies and souls to Satan, and shed blood to seal the pact. It was a very fine line between learned magician and illiterate witch, and both were blasphemers.<sup>125</sup> Also, neither got what they hoped for from the Devil. His role as tempter and liar was unchanged and his victims suffered the consequent damnation, for the edification of the off-stage audiences.

Even comic magicians relied on blasphemy to conjure and control their devils. In Robert Greene's 1589 *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* Bacon boasts that he can 'by books' make 'Boreas thunder from his cave' and 'dim fair Luna', whilst 'The great archruler, potentate of hell,/ Trembles' when 'Bacon bids him [...] bow'.<sup>126</sup> His mention of books posits it as an intellectual pursuit but his reference to hell positions it firmly within demonic activity. Further, his claim to make the Devil 'tremble' blasphemously usurps God's superiority over the Devil.

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<sup>125</sup> James I 'allows a distinction between magic and witchcraft in difference of motivation, learning, class and practice, but disallows any in kind: both are equally damnable and the practitioners of both operate with diabolical assistance'. King James I and VI, *Demonology*, p.343.

<sup>126</sup> Robert Greene, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* in David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (eds.), *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Ltd, 2002), pp. 129–181, 2.46 - 51. All subsequent references to *Friar Bacon* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

In the conjuring scene of *Contention* it is 'God whose name and power' the Devil 'tremblest at' (1.4.24 – 5) not that of the conjuror. Equally, controlling the weather was associated with witchcraft and eclipses were part of God's mystery, so his claiming these powers is also blasphemous. His blasphemy continues. Bacon tells Miles the brazen head will prophesy 'by the enchanting forces of the devil' (11.18), explicitly situating the expected activity as demonic. Furthermore, 'uncouth aphorisms' (11.19) indicates knowledge not revealed by God, which the Church therefore considered to be forbidden. This is exacerbated from a Christian point of view when he calls on 'the immortal God' who 'holds the souls of men within his fist' (11.28 – 9) for help before returning his thoughts to his 'magic art' (11.33), casually combining his faith in the powers as if they were equal. Bacon's acknowledgement of Protestant belief about God's control of human salvation becomes significant later in the scene when he usurps this power. Following the destruction of the brazen head he curses Miles:

Some fiend or ghost haunt on thy weary steps,  
Until they do transport thee quick to hell! (11.129 – 130)

Later a devil tells the audience that 'Bacon hath raised me from the darkest deep/ To search' for Miles (15.6 – 7) and ultimately Miles is shown 'transport[ed] quick to hell' (11.130). Bacon's curse and Miles' consequent damnation overrides God's power of predestination. Ultimately, in his repentance speech Bacon admits this blasphemy, telling Bungay that he 'us[ed] devils to countervail his God' (13.98) for which he deserves damnation.

Both Bacon and Faustus set themselves up as God for control of the Devil and the blasphemous nature of this dooms them to inevitable failure. Bacon's blasphemy is punished by the ultimate destruction of his brazen head. Bacon attributes the destruction to his demons. Despite their previous compliance, he assumes they now 'grudge' his power, 'tremble[]' at his spells and 'frown[]' that he could control them (11.109; 110; 111). The stage directions however potentially offer a different interpretation, given the blasphemous nature of Bacon's activities:

Here the Head speaks, and a lightning flasheth forth, and a hand appears that breaketh down the Head with a hammer.<sup>127</sup>

God's interventions were frequently illustrated in woodcuts as a hand coming from the clouds, whilst thunder and lightning were often also associated with divine involvement.<sup>128</sup> A hand from above is a performance option, which would suggest divine, not demonic anger. Traister notes that contemporaries believed that God allowed magic so he could demonstrate his power in its overthrow.<sup>129</sup> Both interpretations are signalled in Miles' exclamations that 'Hell's broken loose!', 'there's such a thunder and lightning' and 'The latter day is come' (11.77; 78; 80). The first indicates a demonic reaction, while thunder and lightning were associated with any supernatural activity, both demonic and divine. Miles' reference to 'the latter day', God's ultimate day of judgement, reinforces the involvement of God.

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<sup>127</sup> Stage direction between 11.75 and 11.76, p.169.

<sup>128</sup> See Leslie Thomson, 'The Meaning of Thunder and Lightning: Stage Direction and Audience Expectation' in *Early Theatre* pp. 87-104. For woodcuts of divine intervention see figures 2.1 – 2.3 in chapter two.

<sup>129</sup> Barbara Howard Traister, *Heavenly Necromancers: The Magician in English Renaissance Drama* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984), p.3.



Dramatic blasphemy was not restricted to magical activity, however. Alexander in *The Devil's Charter* blasphemes in rejecting the prompting of his conscience. Audiences could more easily relate to this personally. The Calvinist view on degeneracy meant that humans could only respond to their conscience given 'redemptive grace' so the conscience acts as a register of guilt, except in the elect where it can '[reform] the will and [control] the passions'.<sup>130</sup> Alexander articulates this doctrine when he says his 'conscience is no conscience' (1.4.357) because it alerted him to his guilt but failed to prevent his sinful pact with the Devil. He takes responsibility for this on himself, citing the Devil as merely 'witness' when 'I seal'd it' (1.4.360). There is an assumption of finality and active rejection in his 'cauteriz'd' (1.4.361) conscience and banishment of 'faith, hope and charity' (1.4.362). Doctrinally this also presumptuously usurps God's prerogative, akin to Faustus' and Bacon's desires for God-like power. The Calvinist doctrine of double predestination asserted that the ability to believe was granted through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Banishing faith is therefore blasphemous, although it is the loss of hope which will ultimately damn Alexander. His blasphemy is completed when he uses 'the name of Christian as a stale' (1.4.363). Having begun the speech acknowledging his soul is 'more precious than all treasure' (1.4.355), which, given up through the contract to the Devil, afflicts his conscience, Alexander ultimately actively rejects the grace which he believes God has offered him, closing his ears to his conscience. Whether one could reject God's grace once

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<sup>130</sup> John S. Wilks, *The Idea of Conscience in Renaissance Tragedy* (London, New York: Routledge, 1990), p.42.

given had been contested early in the Reformation, but the orthodox Calvinist position was against such freedom, further illustrating Alexander's blasphemy. Unlike Faustus, whose battle with his conscience is unrelenting throughout the play, Alexander has no further converse with his.<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless, this intervention so early in the play definitively establishes God's presence within the play world.

Blasphemy was also the way by which God becomes evident in the workings of internalised devils. In *The Witch of Edmonton* Frank becomes open to the attentions of the Devil as soon as he bigamously marries Susan. This blasphemously breaks a holy sacrament. In making his vows to Susan he curses God just as Mistress Sawyer does before the dog appears to her.<sup>132</sup> There is no verbal communication between Frank and the dog, but Frank's behaviour is clearly influenced by him. The dog thus acts as a physical reminder to the audience of the Devil's involvement in all sin. Frank conceived the murder before the dog engages with him. He tells Susan 'death would rather put itself to death/ Than murder thee' (2.1.141 – 2). However, he follows this immediately with 'but' indicating he contemplates murder (2.1.142). This implication is reinforced later by the dog's 'the mind's about it now' (3.3.1). The Devil's involvement is signalled by his 'One touch from me/ Soon sets the body

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<sup>131</sup> It is important to note however that whilst Faustus was clearly defined as Protestant, Alexander is explicitly Catholic, so potentially, for Protestant audiences, already damned. The play does contain explicit anti-Catholicism, but it is this willing contracting of his soul and rejection of God that damns him, rather than his Catholic faith.

<sup>132</sup> Adultery of course broke the Seventh Commandment, 'thou shalt not commit adultery' and it was the subject of a three-part *Homily*. Jonathan Willis cites the puritan preacher William Gouge (1622) who argued that such a breach was the worst sin as it not only affected everybody (literally – he includes the nation and the Church as sufferers) but more particularly the three persons of the Trinity. Jonathan Willis, *The Reformation of the Decalogue*, p.123.

forward' (3.3.1 – 3). When the dog rubs against him, providing the 'touch' Frank responds in an aside:

Thank you for that. Then I'll ease all at once.  
'Tis done now what I ne'er thought on. (3.3.15 – 16)

It is unclear whether he is thanking the Devil for the final push or Susan for the warning about approaching witnesses. The mixture of tenses in 'I'll' and 'done' indicates his confusion of mind. Corbin and Sedge rightly note that the dog's contact 'confirm[s] Frank's hidden impulses'.<sup>133</sup> Frank is 'subconsciously responding to the dog's action' whilst his aside 'articulat[es] the inner stirrings of his murderous intent'.<sup>134</sup> However, contemporary audiences may have seen the Devil's involvement as more active than Corbin and Sedge imply. The Devil's influence on human behaviour was a given for most contemporaries.<sup>135</sup> Frank tells Susan that the decision to kill her is 'this minute's decree, and it must be' (3.3.23), 'decree' and 'must' also suggesting an external impetus. His list of the chain of sins to which his adulterous marriage to her has led, includes theft of the dowry and murder. This reflects the *Homilies*' warning that adultery will lead to other, more serious sins, including murder.<sup>136</sup> Frank claims 'The devil did not prompt me' (3.3.37), denying demonic inspiration. However, the juxtaposition

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<sup>133</sup> Endnote to stage direction after 3.3.3, p.240

<sup>134</sup> Endnote to 3.3.15, p.240

<sup>135</sup> For a discussion on the perceptions of murderous intentions during this period see Martin Wiggins, 'Macbeth and Premeditation' in Arthur Marwick (ed.), *The Arts, Literature and Society* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 23–47.

<sup>136</sup> Similarly, in *The White Devil* when Monticelso says of Vittoria: 'You know what whore is: next the devil Adult'ry/ Enters the devil Murder' (3.2.110 – 111). John Webster, *The White Devil* David Bevington (ed.), in David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Eisaman Maus, Eric Rasmussen (eds.), *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002), pp. 1659–1748. The *Sermon Against Whoredom and Uncleaness*' notes that 'through adultery we fall into all kinds of sin and are made bond-slaves to the Devil'. *Homilies*, p.134.

with 'Till this minute' (3.3.37) links the decision to the dog's rubbing him. The caesura draws attention to the line, simultaneously joining and separating the two phrases, whilst his assertion that she has 'dogged [her] own death' (3.3.39) removes any doubt. This is a demonically inspired act triggered by Frank's adultery, an evident sin against the Holy Ghost.

The anthropomorphic rendering of the Devil through the character of the dog makes him an influential force with a real presence. The dog's invisibility to Frank and other characters reminds audiences not only of the real but invisible presence of the Devil but also of God in their own lives. Frank's intended murder of Susan allows for the articulation of God's presence. The audience has already been reminded through the dog's conversation with Sawyer, that the Devil is constrained by God and cannot directly kill one of 'so rare a goodness', (2.1.140). Susan's response to Frank's threat articulates both her own faith and God's involvement in human affairs. She considers her death 'some good spirit's motion' (3.3.41) because it prevented her from repeatedly committing adultery. Corbin and Sedge note the irony of this given the dog's involvement and suggest it reflects a Catholic belief in protective good spirits, denied by most Protestant theologians.<sup>137</sup> Susan's response can be interpreted this way, but her evident innocence legitimises her belief, whilst the absence of personal possessive in 'some' minimises any sense of a personal guardian

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<sup>137</sup> Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge, 'Commentary' to *The Witch of Edmonton* in Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge (eds.), *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 232–245, 3.3.41, p.240.

angel.<sup>138</sup> The Good Angel in *Faustus*, though arguably unsuccessful is similarly given legitimacy by the clearly orthodox faith of the Old Man, who refers to an angel waiting to provide *Faustus* with God's grace if he can only repent.

Although there is no direct relationship to the angel he mentions and the Good Angel who has been trying to encourage *Faustus* back to God, the messages of the two are consistent. Reference to the protection of good spirits is not uncommon in contemporary drama, and despite lacking orthodoxy, it was something many lay Protestants subscribed to as a metaphor for the protection they perceived as coming from God.

Demonic appearances initiated by blasphemy in these plays introduce God into the play world. Either the protagonists reject this blasphemy, such as Bacon and Susan, and have hope of salvation, or, like *Faustus* and Alexander, they do not and are damned. Blasphemy takes many forms across the plays, highlighting for their audiences the various ways they may be guilty and so risk attracting the Devil's attention. Conjuraton is explicitly not a prerequisite in the plays with magic. The plays therefore provide a visual rendering of contemporary Calvinist doctrine in everyday scenarios allowing audiences the opportunity to apply the lessons demonstrated by the protagonists to their own lives.

In contrast to blasphemy and false doctrine, play devils also cited religious truths. Examples include admissions of their own limitations, and their

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<sup>138</sup> Hunter West discusses the various contemporary views ranging from Reginald Scot and James I's rejection, through Aquinas's conditional acceptance to the Protestant Lavater's suggestion that everyone has many guardian angels. Robert Hunter West, *The Invisible World*, p.30.

subjectivity to God's ultimate control, discussed above. It is one of the ways that they help to explain the complex Protestant theology of predestination.<sup>139</sup> Hope of God's mercy and repentance for one's sins were key elements of the type of faith deemed necessary for salvation. Faustus could not maintain either, resulting in his vividly portrayed damnation. Similar ends are meted out to other protagonists as discussed elsewhere in this thesis. Salvation, being subject to God's predetermined unknown and unknowable choice was harder to represent. Indeed, priests were keen to assure parishioners that no one could absolutely *know* their predestined status, any more than anyone could avoid sin. Hence no plays written in this period show absolutely their protagonist attaining heaven, though a happy ending implies they have God's favour. The important thing was to repent, have faith in God's mercy, and then hope to be saved. The articulation of such doctrine, along with a happy outcome for the protagonist then implies ultimate salvation.

Magicians' direct engagement with the Devil facilitated the articulation of this Protestant doctrine of salvation. Fabell, in the opening scene of *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*, 1603 expresses regret that his pride caused him to 'strive to know more than man should know' referencing the blasphemous search for forbidden knowledge for which 'God cast the angels down'<sup>140</sup>. These lines

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<sup>139</sup> As has already been indicated this was a complex doctrine related to the nature of God. Leif Dixon provides a useful discussion of the Calvinist ideas about God in this doctrine as indicated by the writings of one preacher from the late Elizabethan period, Richard Greenham. Leif Dixon, 'Richard Greenham and the Calvinist Construction of God' in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* vol. 61, no. 4, October 2012, pp. 729–745.

<sup>140</sup> Possibly by Thomas Dekker. Nicola Bennett (ed.) *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* (London: Nick Hern, 2000), Induction: 47 – 8. All subsequent references to *Merry Devil* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically. Martin Wiggins' date argument for the play at early

summarise Faustus' predicament, which also parallels Lucifer's fall as the blasphemy of 'seeking to be a God' results instead in damnation, that is Man 'becomes a devil' (Induction: 58). Fabell's recognition that he has risked 'this soul, that cost so great a price/ As the dear precious blood of her redeemer' (Induction 42 – 3), acknowledges Christ's sacrifice for his salvation. His repeated references to God, the Devil, heaven, and hell remind audiences of the perpetual battle between God and the Devil. Fabell expresses regret, if not full repentance, so his ultimate fate remains in question. The Devil does not reappear in the extant play.

Bacon's more explicit repentance speech reflects both hope and faith. It exemplifies the way that demonic activities facilitated the articulation and demonstration of faith in these plays. Bacon has strong faith, and recognising his magic caused two deaths, he renounces magic in remorse. He recognises the inherent blasphemy in his magic and concludes he 'must be damned/ For using devils to countervail his God' (13.97 – 8). This parallels the arguments of the Evil Angel and Mephistopheles in *Dr Faustus*. His immediate subsequent 'Yet' signals his faith (13.99) and the remainder of his speech reflects the arguments of the Good Angel and the Old Man. He articulates Protestant doctrine that God shows 'mercy' and 'justice' provided humans 'drown not in despair' but show 'repentance' centred on Christ's sacrifice (13.99 – 101). Although his consorting with devils caused Christ's 'wounds' to 'bleed afresh', from this 'the dew of mercy drops' to 'wash' away his sins and God's justifiable

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1603 notes the parallel with *Dr Faustus*, coincident with a revival of that play in November 1602 *Catalogue vol. 5* entry 1392, p.22.

anger (13.102 – 105). Bacon ultimately promises to spend the rest of his life 'praying to my God' in hopes of 'sav[ing] what Bacon vainly lost' (13.108 – 9). Provided Bacon repents and does not despair, Faustus's ultimate sin, then Christ's sacrifice can bring him God's mercy. He completes the process for redemption by affirming his commitment to God through life-long prayer. This speech paraphrases conventional doctrine on salvation and highlights God's presumed role in the play world. Bacon provides a model for any who wish to follow. Miles' trip to hell, although orchestrated by Bacon, follows Bacon's repentance which, with the comic nature of the scene, diverts attention from the associated blasphemy. Miles actively wants to see hell, hoping to get a job as a tapster there and happily rides off on the Devil's back, complete with spurs. This is a comedy, and having achieved Bacon's redemption, the religious niceties have been sufficiently observed perhaps. The important lesson for contemporary audiences is that redemption requires repentance, and that salvation is always undeserved.

Discussing murder pamphlets Peter Lake comments that 'the power of repentance [...] was deemed to be considerable [...]representing] the ultimate triumph of the justice and mercy of God over sin and the devil'.<sup>141</sup> Repentance on the scaffold was an essential element in such pamphlets and it is notable that both Sawyer and Frank ultimately repent. Lake suggests repentance, accompanied by confession, signalled certain salvation.<sup>142</sup> The pamphlets

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<sup>141</sup> Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), p.149.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p.138.



emphasise the role of God's providence in both catching the criminal and in their repentance.<sup>143</sup> The *Homily of Repentance* offers assurance that despite sin, God's grace can be restored through true repentance.<sup>144</sup> As Alec Ryrie notes, 'the paradox at Protestantism's heart is that [...] you can only be redeemed when you recognise that you are beyond redemption.'<sup>145</sup> Bacon's assertion that he 'must be damned' for his sins but 'hopes' to be saved articulates this precisely.

Although the plays' audiences were unlikely to have had such direct dealings with the Devil, this portrayal of clear sinfulness accompanied by well-justified hope of redemption through repentance, could provide reassurance and demonstrate how the theology could work in audiences' own lives.<sup>146</sup> It also helps modern scholars understand what can otherwise seem a dismal theology. Heywood suggested that the enactment of evil on the stage would stir 'the consciences of the spectators', enabling them to see themselves from the outside, as God did.<sup>147</sup> As Paul Whitfield White suggests religious rhetoric 'may be more effective in reaffirming religious ideology' when 'interwoven into

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<sup>143</sup> Peter Lake 'Deeds Against Nature', pp. 280–1. He also notes the emphasis on the Devil's role as 'instigator' of the evil acts, p.268.

<sup>144</sup> *A Homily of Repentance and of True Reconciliation unto God, Homilies*, pp. 560–586, p.562.

<sup>145</sup> Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant* pp. 37–8.

<sup>146</sup> It should be noted that some, particularly amongst the most godly, did believe themselves to have had direct dealings with the Devil, but I would suggest this made up an insignificant part of any theatre audience.

<sup>147</sup> Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (1612) sig. F 3<sup>v</sup>. Heywood cites several incidents of audience members, observing their own crimes re-enacted on the stage, who are in consequence overcome with guilt and confess. Thomas Heywood, d.1641. *An Apology for Actors Containing Three Briefe Treatises*. (London: Nicholas Okes, 1612), sig. G1<sup>v</sup> – G2<sup>v</sup>

character and situation'.<sup>148</sup> The enactment of subsequent repentance and hope for redemption reminds audiences that God was just but also merciful. There was hope of salvation even for the most sinful, if they possess enough faith, so that audiences' own, more mundane sins, might also be forgiven if they were sufficiently sorry and tried to atone.

This is not to suggest that playwrights necessarily had didactic intent in writing their plays. However, Greene's manner of providing a comic ending, for example, might have that effect for audiences mindful of the contemporary Protestant doctrine the play performs. Orthodox faith and repentance are articulated in post-1580 drama primarily to render the play world recognisable to their audiences rather than for didactic purposes, unlike the earlier moralities.<sup>149</sup> *Friar Bacon* was first performed by the Queen's Men company at The Rose so would have had a religiously and socially diverse audience. A playwright's primary aim was to write drama the playing companies would buy. It must pass the censor and not embarrass the company's patron, as well as entertain the paying public.<sup>150</sup> However, Nathan Johnstone notes that contemporary pamphleteers may have recorded witches' or murderers' repentance and hopes

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<sup>148</sup> Paul Whitfield White, 'Theatre and Religious Culture' in John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (eds.), *A New History of Early English Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 133–151, p.149.

<sup>149</sup> See Adrian Streete on the roles of pre- and post-1580 representations of religion in plays. Adrian Streete, 'Drama' in Andrew Hiscock and Helen Wilcox (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 166–184, p.170.

<sup>150</sup> Robert Greene is described by his biographer L. H. Newcomb, as 'England's first celebrity author' and he had a particular attraction towards prodigal son narratives involving repentance, positioning himself in the role of penitent. However, perhaps like Bacon, 'he seemed to honour repentance more in the breach than the observance'. L. H. Newcomb, "Greene, Robert (bap. 1558, d. 1592), playwright and poet", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

for salvation to counter concerns that pamphlets' sensationalism detracted from their moral lesson or made readers suppose God was absent or non-existent.<sup>151</sup> Perhaps orthodox doctrine occurs in these plays for similar reasons.

Another way in which demonic references articulate God's presence in the play world is by association with contemporary doctrine from the *Homilies*. In *Contention* Cade was consistently associated with the Devil. Saye tells Cade that 'Unless [he] be possessed with devilish spirits,' he cannot murder him (4.7.69), but less than twenty lines later, Cade sends him off for execution, suggesting he is so possessed. The historical Cade was purported to have raised the Devil to help him with his rebellion.<sup>152</sup> York describes Cade's fighting style as like a 'devil' (3.1.371) but also claims to have 'seduced' Cade 'to make commotion' (3.1.356; 358). York is thus demonised by association. York's demonism would have been more evident to contemporary audiences because he rebelled against a legitimate and godly prince. The *Homily Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion* was read regularly in Church services. It cites the Devil as 'the first author' of rebellion three times, while those who rebel against a good prince are worthy of 'most dreadful damnation' and are 'captives' and 'slaves' of 'Satan'.<sup>153</sup> The Devil 'doth chiefly stir up' ambitious men to incite 'the ignorant multitude' to help them just as York admits to 'seduc[ing]' Cade and what Cade does with his followers.<sup>154</sup> The *Homily* defines ignorance as 'the

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<sup>151</sup> Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism*, pp. 151–2.

<sup>152</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.276.

<sup>153</sup> *Homily Against Rebellion*. The instruction for the reading of the *Homilies* was set out in the Thirty-Nine Articles. The *Homily Against Rebellion* was introduced in 1571 after the Northern Rebellion. *Homilies*, p.588, p.625, p.626; p.606

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p.626.

lack of knowledge of God's blessed will' and states that rebellion directly challenges God's law.<sup>155</sup> In *Contention* Saye describes ignorance as 'the curse of God' whilst knowledge is 'the wing wherewith we fly to heaven' (4.7.67 – 8), paraphrasing the *Homily*. Although some audience members might have sympathised with Cade's attitude towards the learned, most would also have recognised Saye's homiletic reference. Rebellion in this play then, explicitly recalls the *Homilies*, associates Cade's rebellion with the Devil, and places it in direct opposition to God, staging God's presence in the process.<sup>156</sup> Audiences can recognise God's presence in the historical past and see the *Homilies* enacted through their national history, contextualising them and making them more readily accessible.<sup>157</sup>

More everyday dramatic scenarios also refer to the Devil's powers to enact the doctrine of salvation, using the trials and tribulations of the plays' characters. These characters' demonic nature is sometimes ambiguous. Like their audiences they are neither absolute villains nor angels and are subject to temptations and tests of faith. In George Chapman's 1604 *Bussy D'Ambois* the anthropomorphic devils primarily act to support the internalised devils operating within the various protagonists. Tamyra's status as villain or victim is constantly questioned. Contemporary norms situated this adulterer as an inveterate sinner. However, her circumstances are presented sympathetically. She is

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<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> In an overly secular, modern reading of the play, Cox denies any demonic incitement anywhere in the play, including for Cade, despite York calling him a devil. John D. Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred*, pp. 146–7.

<sup>157</sup> Victoria Brownlee notes that contemporaries applied a topographical reading of the scriptures to situate themselves within a continuous history as part of the providential plan of God. Victoria Brownlee, *Biblical Readings*, pp. 174–180.

encouraged in her adultery by the 'godly' friar, whose own status is ambiguous. His first appearance to Tamyra, accompanied by Bussy, is 'from below', traditionally the Devil's entry point. Tamyra draws attention to this parallel:

See, see, the gulf is opening that will swallow  
Me and my fame forever.<sup>158</sup>

The 'gulf' that will 'swallow' her recalls the depiction of hell in the doom paintings that had once adorned church walls, and which was still evident in contemporary woodcuts. These showed the entrance to hell as a giant pit into which sinners fell or were pushed by devils. She declares that she will 'cast myself off, as I ne'er had been' (2.2.179). Maurice Evans suggests this means 'cast off her old self and begin again with Bussy', but adultery was explicitly considered demonically inspired.<sup>159</sup> This with Bussy and the Friar's demonic entry may have signalled to contemporaries the damnable consequences of her contemplated sin, resulting in her permanent death. This speech signals Tamyra's subjection to demonic temptation.

Like Alexander in *The Devil's Charter*, Tamyra consciously chooses a path she believes is damnable. Her 'I will in/ And cast myself off' is active. The *Homily* describes adultery as 'a monster' that is 'hateful to God, damnable to man, and pleasant to Satan.'<sup>160</sup> It advises auditors who feel 'inwardly that Satan [...] tempteth us unto whoredom,' not to 'consent to his crafty

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<sup>158</sup> George Chapman, *Bussy D'Ambois* Maurice Evans (ed.), (London: Ernest Benn Ltd, 1965), 2.2.177 - 8. All subsequent references to *Bussy* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

<sup>159</sup> Maurice Evans (ed.), Footnote to l.179, George Chapman *Bussy D'Ambois* Maurice Evans (ed.), (London: Ernest Benn Ltd, 1965), p.88. For adultery's link with the Devil see the discussion above.

<sup>160</sup> *Homilies*, p.131.

suggestions'.<sup>161</sup> 'Inwardly' emphasises that the relationship between the potential sinner and the tempting Devil is internal. Tamyra recognises Satan's role and the 'damnable' consequences of her intentions. She describes her inner conflict, reminiscent of the *Homily*. Responding to the Friar's attempted assurances of secrecy, she brings God into the scene:

yet there is One  
That sits above, whose eye no sleep can bind;  
He sees through doors, and darkness, and our thoughts.  
(2.2.262 – 4)

This metaphor of God's sleepless, all-seeing omniscience was a common warning against sinful thoughts as well as more open acts. However, her immediate attraction to Bussy is stronger than the more remote fear of God. She ignores her religious scruples, concluding lamely that they must be careful. The *Homilies* taught that the Devil believed all the elements of Christian faith but still sinned.<sup>162</sup> Humans, like Tamyra, who do likewise therefore have only a devilish faith, not the true and lively faith needed for justification. Tamyra continues to articulate her religious knowledge after she and Bussy have become lovers. She compares her state of redemption 'before' when she 'was secure against death and hell' to 'now' when she suffers 'heartless fear/ Of every shadow' (3.1.4 – 6). Her previous sense of security may have been presumptuous but its contrast with her current suffering under the 'tyranny' of sin's 'siege' (3.1.9; 10) shows she recognises the implications of her actions.

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<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, p.139.

<sup>162</sup> The *Homily* which is *A Short Declaration of the True, Lively and Christian Faith* describes 'the faith of devils, which believe God to be true and just, and tremble for fear: yet they do nothing well, but all evil', in contrast to a true and lively faith which 'worketh by charity'. The *Homily of the Salvation of Mankind*, p. 20–32, similarly asserts that 'even the devils know and believe' about Christ's life and sacrifice, *Homilies*, pp. 33-4, 30.

Her reference to 'siege' and the personification of sin with 'he', associates this experience with the actions of the internalised Devil and the battle with God for human souls. Tamyra is presented as a Christian with religious knowledge whose earthly desires over-ride her hope for eternal salvation. Her struggle is presented sympathetically, helping audiences empathise with her and perhaps recognise similar dilemmas in their own lives.<sup>163</sup> The references to God highlight his constant presence in both play and real worlds. The play only shows one route through the dilemma it presents but the explicit Christianisation reminds audiences of others available to her. It encourages audience members to engage with their own religious views when responding to temptation.<sup>164</sup>

One such alternative path is taken by the protagonists in *Merry Milkmaids*. Here, as in other later plays, demonic involvement is more subtle, often reflected through a simple reference linking the action to internalised demons. Dorilus explains that 'the pensive soul/ fighting with sin, the devil and with death'(3.3.496 – 7) avoided adultery. He concludes that this battle indicates true virtue and through 'victory' the soul 'sings/ Eternally amongst the blessed angels' (3.3.498 – 9). This articulates the Protestant view that life was a battle against sin and the Devil to avoid eternal death in hell, in the hope of

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<sup>163</sup> Nathan Johnstone notes that murder pamphlet writers similarly encouraged active empathetic engagement with their protagonists, describing the 'commonplace emotions and drives' which led to their crimes. This 'allowed [their audiences] to experience diabolic agency vicariously'. The pamphlets emphasised Christian ideas of human sinfulness and the potential for anyone to fall into crime. Nathan Johnstone, *Devils and Demonism*, pp. 153–4 (quotation p.154).

<sup>164</sup> Jonathan Willis notes the wide range of 'sins' which were incorporated within the injunction to not commit adultery, so this is not limited to those audience members who were married and might stray. Jonathan Willis, *The Reformation of the Decalogue*, pp. 122–9.

achieving eternal salvation.<sup>165</sup> The *Homilies* exhorted hearers to actively fight their sinful urges, signs of the Devil's temptation, in the hope of ultimate redemption so practicing Christians in the audience might identify with Dorilus' imagery.<sup>166</sup>

In the plays discussed in this section, the Devil's anthropomorphic or internal appearances, were associated with blasphemy. This might indicate reprobation, but if followed by repentance, could equally signal salvation. The consequences were reinforced by characters' articulation of Protestant doctrine, associating the plays with the lessons audiences heard in church. The plays thus helped contextualise doctrine, allowing audiences to apply it to their own lives.

### **The Devil as an Agent of God's Will**

Sometimes dramatic devils acted as agents of God for the benefit of virtuous characters. Luther saw the Devil as God's tool, commensurate with contemporary belief in God's power over the Devil discussed above. However, he stressed their different motives – God always benevolent and the Devil

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<sup>165</sup> In contrast to strict Calvinist doctrine of double predestination, this suggests humans have some input into their post-mortal fate. This was however a common interpretation, justified by priests on the grounds that it was God-given grace which allowed a human to win the battle.

<sup>166</sup> For example, the *Homily* against adultery said we should keep 'our hearts pure and clean from all evil thoughts and carnal lusts: [...which we shall] easily do, if, when we feel inwardly that Satan, our old enemy, tempteth us unto whoredom, we by no means consent to his crafty suggestions'. Congregants should remember God's threats against sinners and how 'short that pleasure is, whereunto Satan continually stirreth and moveth us' whilst the corresponding punishment is 'intolerable and everlasting'. *Homilies*, p.139.



always destructive.<sup>167</sup> Landoff repeatedly uses Asmody to assist the young lovers in *Merry Milkmaids*.<sup>168</sup> Initially he performs this off-stage when he produces the impossible wreath. As the wreath might enable their adultery, its production could be sinful. However, Dorigen clearly believed the task was impossible despite her contrary assertion 'It is not dangerous, nor impossible'. (2.1.100). Subsequently her chastity and the Duke's apparent generosity and honour persuade Dorilus to waive his reward. Their virtue mitigates the potential sin. The wreath's production demonstrates that devils can be made to serve the virtuous. Later Landoff orders Asmody to produce a ring of invisibility to enable Dorilus to save Dorigen's life. Dorilus's demonically enabled disembodied voice is initially associated with the heavens. A courtier suggests that the voice has come 'Out of the clouds' (3.3.435). The Duke however recognises the demonic potential of the voice, and declares 'hearing shall determine/ Whether he be a spirit of truth or lies' (3.3.446 – 7). For many Protestants hearing was a more reliable witness of the truth than sight as it was regarded as being less prone to deception.<sup>169</sup> As Tom McAlindon notes,

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<sup>167</sup> Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles*, pp. 34–7. He explains that for Luther 'God does good [...] in and through the Devil' and that 'though the devil does evil under God's command, God also hates the evil and wishes us to fight against it', p.38. Burton Russell also notes however that Luther (and Calvin) took a much more uncompromising position on God's absolute omnipotence than most contemporary theologians because of the difficulty that it apparently made God responsible for evil.

<sup>168</sup> In the play's introduction Metz discusses the significance of Scot's *Discovery* to the play, in particular, the provision of Asmody and the invisible ring, (pp. xxxviii–xlvi) whilst the background to Asmody in Persian, Jewish and Christian literature is also discussed, (pp. xlvi–xlix). It is notable that among Asmody's literary characteristics is lust and, specifically, adultery – key themes of the play and particularly what the human demon in the play, Raymond, is also guilty of. Harold G. Metz (ed.), 'Introduction' to *The Two Merry Milkmaids* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1979), pp. vi–cxvii.

<sup>169</sup> See Margaret Aston, *Broken Idols of the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 883–977 in which Aston discusses the changing hierarchy between seeing and hearing, pp. 883–4. She says that God was described as the 'ear that hears all'

Faustus is repeatedly deluded by Mephistopheles through visual feats.<sup>170</sup> Here, as the voice is disembodied, the Duke has no choice but to prioritise hearing. Dorilus claims the voice is divine, citing several religious truths. He refers to God's redemptive powers as 'All preserver', 'guard[ing]' the innocent, who, although they might 'pine' under earthly suffering, ultimately will 'never perish', because of God's eternal salvation (3.3.448 – 9). God's omnipotence is asserted through his ability to 'raise a voice from the stones, or trees, or winds' (3.3.450). The off-stage audience knows the voice has its origins in the magician's conjurations of a devil, but this speech associates that with God, thus the Devil is shown to act as God's agent.

In *The Two Noble Ladies* Cyprian also conjures the Devil to work for God. He counters the Sultan's 'by heav'n I'll have his head' (2.1.487) with 'By heav'n and hell you shall not' (2.1.480) using magic to render the guards immobile. The joint call to heaven and hell suggests that his demons are acting as God's agents. He similarly summons demons for good when he rescues Justina. The divine authority of his magic is suggested by an unsolicited angel who comes 'by that pow'r that in yond palace dwells', implying heaven

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(p.891) and that later catechisms such as Bernard in 1609 and Crawshaw in 1629 both taught that faith came through hearing not sight (p.895). This, she says was associated with the emphasis on sermons although there was also criticism of those, like James I himself, who only attended the sermon, missing the liturgy completely (p.947). She concludes there was a shift in the pre-eminent sense from eye to ear, (p.979). See also Aston's *England's Iconoclasts: Vol 1 Laws against Images* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.436 in which she discusses the perceived dangers of sight for idolatry. Patrick Collinson, *Iconoclasm to Iconophobia: Cultural Impact of the Second English Reformation* (University of Reading, 1986) discusses the criticism of theatre as encouraging the 'idolatrous eye', p.12. Inevitably the *Homilies* stress the importance of hearing the word of God (along with reading), with twenty-eight such references whilst there are 116 uses of 'hear'. 'Seeing' and 'see' are more prevalent but often this is metaphorical in the context of understanding rather than physical sight. *Homilies*.

<sup>170</sup> Tom McAlindon, *Shakespeare Minus Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publications Ltd, 2004), pp. 156–159.

(3.3.1118). The angel tells Cyprian that as he is virtuous 'heaven's will' has decided he will 'turn Christian' (3.3.1112; 1114). The reference to 'heaven's will' implies that Cyprian's magic was permitted by God because of his beneficent intentions. Magicians often claimed purity as an essential part of the conjuring process.<sup>171</sup>

In *Weathercock*, a fake devil undertakes God's work by preventing the unsuitable marriage between Bellafront and Frederick. Characters repeatedly claim Heaven's opposition to the match. Scudmore wonders 'what heinous sin' Bellafront 'committed [that] God should leave her' (2.1.195 - 6), causing her to break her promise to him. Kate assumes 'If God love innocency' (2.1.295) Strange will defeat Pouts in their duel over her alleged wantonness. Indeed, throughout the play, characters refer to God as helping the innocent. Scudmore, agreeing to follow Nevill's plan prays:

shine, thou eye of Heaven,  
And make thy lowering morn, a smiling even! (4.1.119 - 120)

Similarly, Strange, having defeated Pouts, concludes 'I thank thee, Heaven, for my success in this' (4.2.121). Bellafront's marriage to Frederick is comically proved to be the Devil's work when Nevill, disguised as a devil disguised as a priest, is revealed to have conducted the marriage ceremony. Scudmore metaphorically declares Nevill 'a devil in a parson's coat' (5.2.69), at which

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<sup>171</sup> Those who sought knowledge that we might now consider scientific were then likely to arouse suspicion. Their work often did involve attempts to summon spirits. Practitioners, often called magicians, maintained that purity of soul and purpose was essential in seeking unrevealed knowledge and to this end they used prayer with pseudo-religious rituals. For detailed discussion of this see Robert Hunter West, *The Invisible World*, pp. 355-53, 110-135; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 58-89; Barbara Howard Traister, *Heavenly Necromancers*, pp. 1-31.

Nevill 'puts off the Priest's weeds, and has a Devil's robe under' proving the metaphor true.<sup>172</sup> Nevill tells them that 'Who married her, or would have caused her marry' anyone other than Scudmore was 'no better' than a devil' (5.2.72 – 73). This signals Bellafront's father as the play's true devil for encouraging her to marry for money not love.

Conversely Nevill, as a fake devil, has acted as God's agent in making an invalid marriage, since the Devil cannot carry out the sacraments. God's involvement is highlighted by Sir John Worldly's conclusion that:

Ne'er was so much (what cannot heavenly powers,  
Done and undone, in twelve short hours. (5.2.235 - 6).

The fake devil's role allows the play's declaration of God's will to be done. As Cox notes, the devil costume 'does not signify a "real" devil, it is designated as an "emblem" that has the same effect as a "real" devil.'<sup>173</sup> Although the wedding would still have been invalid had Nevill simply disguised as a parson, the devil disguise served to reinforce the play's message - marriage for money is the Devil's work whilst that for love is God's. God's part was enacted through the fake, non-devil demonstrating to audiences the varied guises in which God and the Devil participate in human affairs, which they may then choose to apply to their own lives.

The unexpected ways in which God might turn demonic actions to good are demonstrated in John Webster's 1618 *The Devil's Law Case*. Romelio

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<sup>172</sup> *A Woman is a Weathercock* stage direction, 5.2.70.

<sup>173</sup> Cited by John D. Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred*, p.161. Cox also notes that the presence of fake devils in contemporary drama never challenges 'the real existence of devils or their association with human evil', p.158.

plans to murder Contrarino in a manner he describes as ‘treacherous’ but his use of ‘yet’ at the beginning of the following line marks the juxtaposition between the wicked treachery of his plot and its consequent, positive outcome.<sup>174</sup> In unwitting prophecy, he declares that the knife ‘shall prove most merciful’ (3.2.113) in saving Contrarino from execution by providing ‘an absolute cure’ (3.2.116). Mercy is God’s attribute and God’s absolution through the spilling of Christ’s blood was the ‘cure’ from ultimate death. By stabbing Contarino in the same wound as before Romelio unwittingly removes the clot, allowing the infection that was slowly killing him to clear. Romelio thus literally does ‘cure’ Contarino. The surgeon’s declaration ‘The hand of heaven is in’t’, (3.2.162) makes God’s role clear. Thus, the demonically inspired villain acts as God’s agent. This is an example of Calvin’s conception of wicked people acting as ‘instruments of Divine Providence’.<sup>175</sup> The Monk identifies a similar act of God, focusing this time on his justice. He notes that the failed attempted murder of Contarino which saved his life, simultaneously saved Romelio from a murder charge. Conversely his own aim in coming to see Romelio to save him will, by Romelio’s action, result in Romelio’s death. Thus ‘heaven/ Can invert man’s firmest purpose!’ (5.5.14 - 15). He attributes the contradictions of human fortune to both God’s ability to manipulate the outcome of human action, turning bad to good, and the Devil’s power to make things go wrong for the wicked. The virtuous, such as Contarino, are thus protected by God. Despite trying to

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<sup>174</sup> John Webster, *The Devil’s Law Case* in David Gunby, David Carnegie, and MacDonald P. Jackson (eds.), *The Works of John Webster* Volume Two (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 75–260, 3.2.112, 113. All subsequent references to *Law Case* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

<sup>175</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Literature in Protestant England*, p.107.

'do themselves most right', those 'wretches' with 'hidden sins' are ruined by 'the devil that rules i'th air' (5.5.18 – 22). Their 'presumption'(5.5.20) lies in trying to affect the fate of others and control their own. Men cannot accomplish good or evil without supernatural help and of these, God's is the most powerful.

Religiously inclined audience members might read in this an example of the unknowable workings of God and apply this understanding to their own misfortunes or joys.

As discussed above, the Devil's appearance as a succubus before Penitent in *Mad World* draws the audience's attention to the on-going battle between God and the Devil. This experience, and its narration to Mistress Harebrain, also affects her reformation, so the Devil here unwittingly acts on God's behalf. Their repentance and reformed lives, plus that of the jealous Harebrain, sets them back on an appropriate path for the elect. Although Calvinist belief in double predestination meant that the elect were always unalterably redeemed, despite any actions of their own, this did not mean they were free to, or from, sin. The *Homily of Repentance*, having cited multiple cases from the scriptures of sinners subsequently redeemed warned 'that these examples are not brought in, to the end that we should thereby take a boldness to sin, presuming on the mercy and goodness of God' but rather to help avoid despair.<sup>176</sup> Sin was inevitable, so the elect might well have committed heinous crimes but with God's grace would ultimately repent and reform, demonstrating faith and grace as the characters do here. Choosing to sin might be a sign of

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<sup>176</sup> *Homily of Repentance, Homilies*, p.571.

reprobation but even the righteous sometimes erred. Perkins' table showing the disparate paths of the reprobate and the redeemed includes diversions into sinfulness by those ultimately destined to be saved as well as the reprobate. The key feature, as noted by Erin Sullivan, was that the two paths of the saved and the damned were always in parallel indicating that their status was pre-determined though not necessarily their path through life.<sup>177</sup> The elect would eventually recognise their sins and show true repentance and a reformed life as Penitent, and Master and Mistress Harebrain do.

The Devil's presence in this play has another role in relation to the other plot, involving Sir Bounteous and Follywit. The two plots run in broadly alternating scenes and are largely separate, only linked by the role of the courtesan, Gullman. The scene with the Succubus is followed by one in which Follywit, disguised as the courtesan, tricks Sir Bounteous. Follywit's disguise essentially parallels that of the Succubus-cum-Mistress Harebrain and the audience is thus reminded of the Devil's role in all such licentious behaviour. As John Cox noted, the play uses a literal devil to show 'the demonic identity of vice'.<sup>178</sup> This is emphasised by the structure of the play's alternating scenes. Penitent's experience with the real Devil exactly parallels Sir Bounteous' internal devil, externalised by the disguised Follywit. This is reinforced by the link provided through the sexually promiscuous Gullman. Follywit's trick ultimately causes Sir Bounteous' reformation, again showing the Devil acting to serve God's purpose. The parallel nature of the plots and their eventual coming

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<sup>177</sup> Erin Sullivan 'Doctrinal Doubleness'.

<sup>178</sup> John D. Cox *The Devil and the Sacred*, p.177.

together with the Harebrains' and Penitent's attendance at the feast, demonstrates in a light-hearted way the contemporary belief that 'ordinary' life is part of the cosmic scheme, with God and the Devil always involved. Johnstone notes the importance in contemporary doctrine of the concept that satanic activity might be hidden in everyday events.<sup>179</sup> In some cases, as in the Penitent adultery plot, it was external and explicit but more often, as in the Follywit and Sir Bounteous plot, the Devil's role is undertaken unwittingly by human agents aided by the Devil's internal presence in everyone. God's ultimate superiority is evidenced in the final universal good fellowship and restoration of order. Thus, the demonic experiences in this play may have helped audiences to apply difficult elements of Protestant theology to their own lives.

In some ways the play looks backward to the moralities in the way it delivers its religious message, making fun of the Devil and laughing at and with the sinful characters. The scene with the Succubus is very funny and Penitent, with his long, rather pompous speeches is a satire of puritanism, evident in his full name of Penitent Brothel. Neither Follywit's theft nor Sir Bounteous' lechery are really punished and the play ends in good charity for all. As one of its editors, Peter Saccio says, '*Mad World* is quite an amiable play'.<sup>180</sup> That, however, reinforces the Christian message that everyone sins, and anyone can be forgiven. Penitent's 'repentance cannot be insincere' and should not be read

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<sup>179</sup> Nathan Johnstone, *Devils and Demonism*, p.289.

<sup>180</sup> Peter Saccio, 'Introduction' to *A Mad World, My Masters* in Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (gen. eds.), *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 414–417, p.414.



as such.<sup>181</sup> The play was not a sermon to be taken too seriously, but neither was it to be ignored. It is significant that all the characters repent and reform at the end of the play. Gary Taylor describes Middleton as firmly Calvinist but not puritan, noting his more 'oppositional' religious politics in the 1620s as Arminianism's political power rose.<sup>182</sup> The doctrines expressed in the play and the manner of their representation both reflect this. The scenes which relate most directly to the *Homilies* have a serious undercurrent but without undermining the predominant comic tone of the play, well-suited to its original performance by The Children of St Paul's.

## Conclusion

Dramatic representation of the Devil in early Elizabethan plays helped to demonstrate patterns of relationship between God and the Devil. This was reinforced by the fact that they articulated the same Protestant religious teaching which audiences experienced during their regular compulsory church attendance.<sup>183</sup> So, from the late 1580s the Devil's dramatic appearances could

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<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.* p.415.

<sup>182</sup> Gary Taylor, "Middleton, Thomas (bap. 1580, d. 1627), playwright", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>183</sup> It is accepted that not all audience members did attend church regularly, or even at all. For discussions of religious involvement among the lay population see Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550 – 1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Alec Ryrie, 'Counting Sheep, Counting Shepherds: the Problem of Allegiance in the English Reformation', in Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie (eds.), *The Beginnings of English Protestantism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 84–110; Jeremy Boulton, 'The Limits of Formal Religion: The Administration of Holy Communion in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart London' in *London Journal* 10, (1984), pp. 135–154; Ian Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 90–1; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 189–

be associated with the battle with God for human souls, their contrasting characteristics, and God's use of agents, to help articulate God's presence in the play world without God or his representatives physically appearing.

As God became internalised, the visible dramatic Devil became potentially more threatening. The absence of a physical representation of God made the Devil's power more immediate, and God's protection more distant. Despite doctrine insisting Satan's powers were limited by God and depended on his permission to act, contemporary beliefs 'emphasised the dangers of the conspiring enemy, as both equal and opposite to God'.<sup>184</sup> Chapter one demonstrated that Horror in *Conflict* is clearly a frightening apparition, and although devils in later years continue to have a comic side, if they are Christianised rather than folkloric their threat is always visible to the audience. For Protestants, God-given faith was the sole means of protection from the Devil but also a sign of election. As I have shown, such faith is frequently articulated by the virtuous characters, to overcome demonic threat. This helps to highlight God's presence in the play world and undermine the power of the Devil. When such assertions of faith are accompanied by demonic appearances, they work with relevant associated patterns of relationship between God and the Devil. Thus, the explicit presence of the Christian Devil in later plays can remind audiences of the concomitant presence of God to

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190. Arnold Hunt notes however that 'It was impossible to avoid exposure to the Protestant preaching ministry, even if for some, it was merely part of the background hum of urban life.' Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing*, p.205.

<sup>184</sup> Anna French, *Children of Wrath*, p.19.

counterbalance the Devil's power and bring about a safe resolution for the virtuous characters.

For Calvinists, faith, or the lack of it, is the key to salvation but even those predestined for salvation sometimes lose faith. These references to aspects of Christian faith assert God's presence in the play worlds and provided contemporary audiences, and modern critics, with a demonstration of Protestant faith in action. It offers a context for the theology audiences were hearing in church and at public sermons, facilitating understanding and application to individuals' own lives. The threat of the Devil and damnation was a real one for many of these plays' audiences but so also was the promise of eternal life. Theologically, God controlled the gateway to both. Once his physical presence on the stage was proscribed, the Devil was used to portray both. Ultimately the presence of a Christianised Devil facilitated, sometimes necessitated, the airing of aspects of Christian doctrine that therefore invoked the presence of God. God was brought into the play world through protagonist's acts of blasphemy and repentance in their demonic activities, through the Christian doctrine such activities aired, as well as through specific acts of the Devil, either as God's named antagonist or as his agent. The dramatic application of concepts heard regularly in sermons and church services, when, for example, priests read out the *Homilies*, could help audience members apply them to their own lives, making them more accessible.

## CHAPTER 4 – ‘THE LORD CAN MAKE HARD THINGS EASY’<sup>1</sup>: STAGING GOD IN A TIME OF CRISIS

### Introduction

This chapter shows how late-1630 tragicomedies brought God onto the stage through their explicitly providential conclusions. It demonstrates that this was a distinctive use of providence delivered through a previously unacknowledged alteration in the tragicomic genre. The tragicomic genre helped the plays enact an instability that reflected the contemporary real-world experience for many audiences. This was enhanced using plots which paralleled contemporary concerns. It further suggests that the providential solutions used had a specific value in the contemporary context, reflecting audiences’ hopes that providence would similarly, ultimately, bring resolution and reconciliation to real-world issues.

For many years literary critics considered that the form of tragicomedy changed little after Fletcher, even when, like Frank Humphrey Ristine, they identified exceptions.<sup>2</sup> Ristine usefully notes a distinction between earlier tragicomedies and post-Fletcher plays in that in the former the audience knows about the disguised person who will save the day, whereas in the latter ‘the absolute concealment of [this] character [...] becomes a most important and

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<sup>1</sup> Lady Brilliana Harley, *Letters of the Lady Brilliana Harley, Wife of Sir Robert Harley of Brampton Bryan, Knight of the Bath, with Introduction and Notes by Thomas Taylor Lewis A.M.* (London: Printed for the Camden Society, 1854), Kessinger Legacy Reprints. Letter dated 23 July 1640, p.135. My modernisation of spelling throughout.

<sup>2</sup> Fletcher’s pastoral tragicomedy, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, with its defence of the genre was written in 1608. On the unchanged nature of later tragicomedy see for example, Walter Cohen, ‘Prerevolutionary Drama’ in Gordon McMullan and Jonathan Hope (eds.), *The Politics of Tragicomedy: Shakespeare and After* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 122–150; Frank Humphrey Ristine, *English Tragicomedy: Its Origin and history* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1910), pp. 111-149.

determining factor'.<sup>3</sup> This creates uncertainty regarding the resolution that applies to the tragicomedies of the late 1630s but what is new is their insistence on its providential nature.

The genre's trajectory from tragedy to comedy could provide contemporaries with familiar spiritual reassurance which was particularly pertinent during the unsettled times of the late 1630s. As Subha Mukherji and Raphael Lyne note:

God's workings were often seen as tragicomic in the providentialist literature of the period and in sermons, most famously by Donne who calls the Book of Job "a tragique comedy, lamentable beginnings comfortably ended"<sup>4</sup>.

Verna Foster identifies the tragicomic nature of early Christian drama as Christ's resurrection turns sorrow into joy and notes the way this pattern of fall/redemption or death/resurrection continued into secular Renaissance drama particularly in tragicomedy.<sup>5</sup> Alison Shell records 'the rise of tragicomedy against the fall away from high Calvinism and the search for doctrinal alternatives to it.'<sup>6</sup> She also suggests that the inherent pastoral difficulties associated with strict Calvinist predestination theology caused 'further theological enquiry, as Armenians challenged the so-called "Calvinist consensus"', resulting in greater emphasis for providence.<sup>7</sup> This carries with it,

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.123.

<sup>4</sup> Subha Mukherji, and Raphael Lyne, 'Introduction' to Subha Mukherji and Lyne Raphael, (eds.), *Early Modern Tragicomedy* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), pp. 1-14, p.7.

<sup>5</sup> Verna A. Foster, *The Name and Nature of Tragicomedy* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), p.35. Alison Shell makes a similar point in Alison Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion* (London: Methuen Press, 2010), p.198.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

of course, an assumed active involvement for God, which, as I demonstrate, is articulated explicitly in the tragicomedies of the late 1630s.

Alexandra Walsham's seminal study defines providence in terms of God's on-going involvement in human affairs with reference to punishments and rewards.<sup>8</sup> Providential events were perceived as multi-layered, working at both individual and commonwealth levels.<sup>9</sup> Providence might take various forms: punishment for sins; reward for faith; a test of faith; and, at community level, a sign of God's anger or approbation through, for example, extreme events of nature. There were two strands to providence that were recognised by contemporaries. General or universal providence was God's plan for the universe, established at Creation. Walsham's technical definition is that 'God had foreseen every eventuality and all that came to pass accomplished predetermined ends', linking events of the past, present and the future.<sup>10</sup> It does not incorporate the more active form of providence which contemporaries considered 'special' or 'particular' providence. Walsham describes this as: 'His spontaneous interruptions of the normal sequence, the individual dispensations He dealt out as occasion demanded, to uphold the moral order and to admonish, chastise, and reward.'<sup>11</sup> A play character calling for aid from, or attributing their experiences to, God, or more typically by the 1630s, the

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<sup>8</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). I am indebted to Alexandra Walsham's work for the summary discussion of providence presented here.

<sup>9</sup> For contemporaries, 'a commonwealth' could refer holistically to a household, local or national community, though it was most commonly used for the latter. Here I intend it to cover all meanings.

<sup>10</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12. Darren Oldridge, *The Supernatural in Tudor and Stuart England* (London & New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 21-47 provides similar definitions.

heavens, is therefore calling for or assuming special providential involvement. Although the Act to Restrain Abuses aiming to ban the utterance of God's name on the stage in 1606 was only partially successful, synonyms were frequently used to reference God. Providence and heaven were two of those commonly used in the 1630s and both are treated as indicating God and his presence in this chapter.

There was an increase in the percentage of plays in which characters make such calls or attributions to providence in the 1630s – 1640s.<sup>12</sup> For example, we have thirty-five known plays in the year 1639 of which four involved providence, that is, just over eleven percent. In the ten-year period from 1633 – 1642 every year but one (1640) has at least one play in which providence has an attributed role to play. Prior to 1618 providence was referred to only spasmodically. From 1618 – 1628 there were only two years with no plays involving providence - 1621 and 1627 - but the numbers of plays involved were lower than in the 1630s.<sup>13</sup> Many of these can only be identified by reading the plays, and of course I have not read all the extant plays so percentages cannot be exact. Similarly, there is an element of subjectivity in determining the

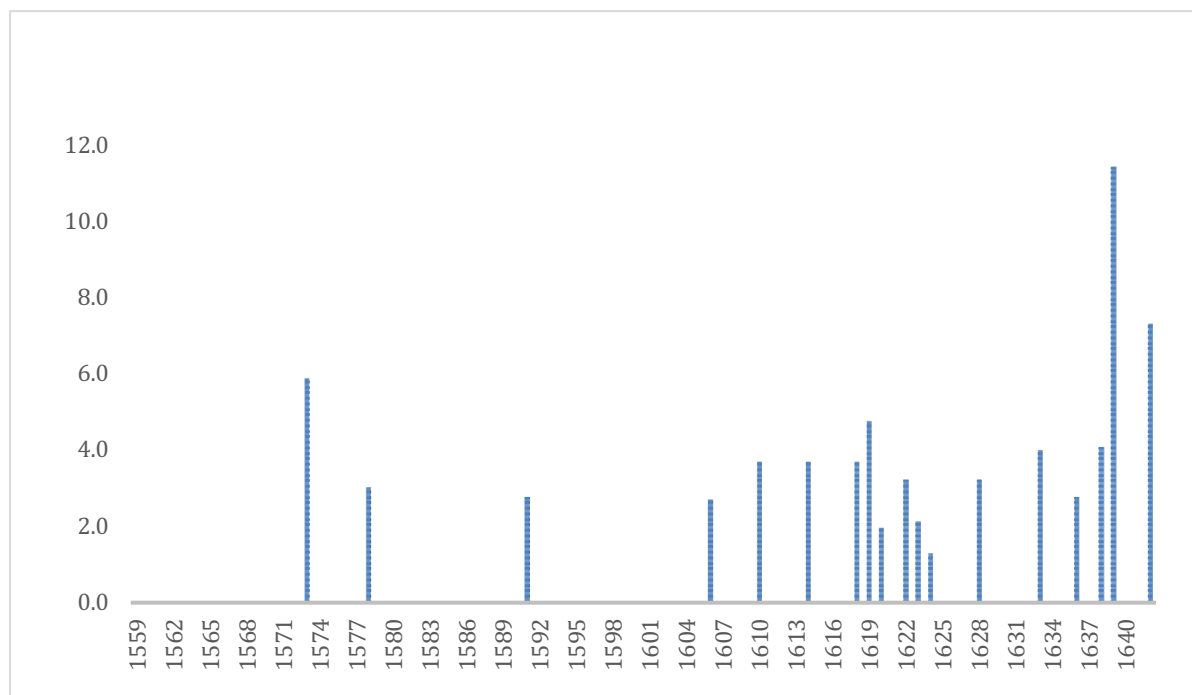
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<sup>12</sup> See figure 4.1.

<sup>13</sup> The timing of this first cluster may not be arbitrary. 1618 marked the beginning of what was later known as the Thirty Years War in Europe. This caused significant anxiety in England as political tensions arose with the development of a war party, rallied behind Prince Charles and Buckingham, challenging James I's policy of non-intervention. Simultaneously the domestic religious status quo began to be disrupted by the growing influence of Arminianism. For a discussion of these political tensions see for example Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490 – 1700* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), pp. 513–520. For the impact of the growth of Arminianism see Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored: The Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547 – c.1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 74-125; Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation* pp. 513–520; Michael J. Braddick, *God's Fury England's Fire: A New History of the English Civil Wars* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2008), pp. 18–23, 40-80.

presence of intentional, rather than incidental, providential activity. I have only said providence is involved in plays where the characters articulate its presence. Nevertheless, the figures indicate an increased role for providence in the plays of the late 1630s.

Figure 4.1: Percentage of plays involving providence in each year, 1559 – 1642.



The plays discussed in this chapter are predominately concerned with special providence, although the continuity inherent in general providence is provided by characters' frequent reference to it throughout. All events were always controlled by God for all creatures. God was presumed to use intermediaries for this, although he could operate directly through miraculous means if required. The apparent contradiction between a concept of general providence in which everything was pre-planned, and special providence which seems more contingent was explained through reference to God's 'secret' and



'revealed' will. Individuals did still act freely but in doing so, unknowingly brought about God's plans. Furthermore, trust in providence did not mean an individual should not take steps to ensure his or her own survival. It was legitimate to take medicine and to work to maintain or improve one's financial situation for example, to avoid tempting providence.<sup>14</sup> For the purpose of this study, the important aspect is that providence is the active involvement of God in earthly affairs, and someone referencing providence is, effectively, referring to God. Such references by characters bring God into the play world and onto the stage.

The chapter starts with an overview of the unstable political and theological context in which the plays were written and first performed. Providence was accredited with quotidian agency, and it suggests that many contemporaries found hope in providential doctrine during the anxious years prior to the wars of the three kingdoms. It shows that tragicomic plots reflected key contemporary issues of tyrannous rule and untrustworthy advisors. The uncertainty of the contemporary context is also represented by tragicomedy. The second section explores the plays' creation of anxieties for audiences by placing characters in situations which appear unresolvable. Audiences were encouraged to identify with characters' experiences through the mirroring of concerns associated with national political and social issues. Equally unsettling was protagonists' uncertain moral status with the consequent difficulty of

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<sup>14</sup> This is discussed in its various forms by Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin University Books, 1973), pp. 90–178; also, more briefly by Alexandra Walsham in *Providence*, pp. 15, 18.

distinguishing between villain and hero. This discussion of plays' reflection of contemporary issues provides a foundation against which the representation of providence in the plays can be interrogated. The third section highlights dramatists' use of providential references to bring God onto the stage and argues that this was a change in the use of providence. Cyril Tourneur's doctrinal presentation of providence in his 1610 play *The Atheist's Tragedy* is compared with late 1630s tragicomedies' focus on placing faith in providence to resolve conflict. Ultimately, these late plays solve their characters' problems in explicitly providential ways, bringing peace and reconciliation to all. The fourth section demonstrates the way tragicomedies brought about providential solutions. Their characters explicitly, and almost universally, attribute the resolution of conflict to God's providence. The chapter argues that the dramatization of contemporary concerns with reconciliation through providential agency potentially encouraged hope for a similar providential solution to the nation's difficulties, providing reassurance and comfort to those who sought it. It concludes by arguing that the tragicomic genre was fundamental in achieving resolution and such explicit providentialism constitutes a change in the genre itself.

Many of the plays that will be discussed in this chapter are neither ostensibly highly political nor explicitly religious. They do not contain allegorical characters representing providence, nor miraculous events, as happened during Elizabeth's reign for example. Instead, they used a providentialist framework to bring God into the play world. The changed articulation of providence enables

the plays to reflect contemporary anxieties, and thus their providential endings could provide hope that God can indeed 'make hard things easy'.<sup>15</sup>

Several features of English Protestantism increased the concern with providence. A person's relationship with God was deemed direct and personal, the intermediaries of priest and saints which underpinned Catholic faith had been removed. Conversely, the individual was seen as powerless, inveterately sinful, and utterly dependant on God's mercy for ultimate salvation. Although providence was primarily concerned with temporal affairs, the apparent providential punishments and rewards meted out to individuals and the commonwealth were variously interpreted as indicative of a person's ultimate salvation or damnation.<sup>16</sup> This inevitably raised anxiety about God's plan at both individual and national levels which was not limited to the godly. The extent of this concern is evidenced by references in both published sermons and the more popular press. As Walsham says:

both were saturated with references to divine providence; both shared a preoccupation with the blessings and punishments God showered down

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<sup>15</sup> Harley *Letters* Letter dated 23 July 1640, p.135.

<sup>16</sup> The extent to which one's predestined status could be considered part of God's providential plan was somewhat blurry. Discussing 'experimental providentialism' Alexandra Walsham says that 'the real hallmark of Calvinist teaching on this subject, however, was an anthropomorphic emphasis on the intimate link between the dispensations of providence and the enigma of predestination' and that the elect's redemption 'took pride of place in the divine master plan' and that everything that happened to an individual provided 'a signpost concerning the Lord's soteriological intentions', Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*, p.15. Conversely Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England c. 1530 – 1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) notes that God's 'providential preservation of his creation was not necessarily tied to double predestination thinking and can be found in many non-Calvinist works', p.363. Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.66, discussing the importance of preaching, says it was suggested that it might 'provid[e] God's providence with the means to be fulfilled: he may grant holy desires to someone [important for the elect] but do so through the medium of your preaching'.

upon mankind to reward virtue and correct vice; both cried in unison for repentance and amendment.<sup>17</sup>

Explicitly providential works, such as *The Theatre of God's Judgement* by Thomas Beard or the multi-editions of *The Mirror for Magistrates*, with their ambiguous combination of God's judgement and causal human sins were also very popular.<sup>18</sup> These described the rise and fall of sometimes well-known individuals, who committed various sins and so were punished by God, often immediately and with a singularly appropriate form of punishment.

Domestic political and religious tensions were rife across the country throughout the 1630s, increasing in the latter half. Archbishop Laud's religious policies in England were causing consternation for more godly Protestants who saw and feared in avant-garde conformism and later, Laudianism, a return to popery.<sup>19</sup> This was fuelled by fears of court Catholicism caused by the influence of Charles I's Catholic wife, Henrietta Maria. Some courtiers fully converted, and others were perceived by many outside court to adhere to unacceptably proto-Catholic practices.<sup>20</sup> Archbishop Laud reinforced laws

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<sup>17</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*, p.33.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the providentialism in these texts see for example: Frederick Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*, (Huntingdon Library, 1983), pp. 30-59; Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*, pp. 65-115; Paul S. Seaver, *Wallington's World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1985) discusses Nehemiah Wallington's understanding and application of God's providence in his life pp. 45-66; Peter Lake, and Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 425-479. Beard's *Theatre* went through six editions between 1598 and 1642 inclusive, two of which were published in 1631.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored*, pp. 74-273 for a discussion of specific sources of contention.

<sup>20</sup> Julie Sanders, *Caroline Drama: The Plays of Massinger, Ford, Shirley and Brome* (Plymouth: Northcote House Publications, 1999), pp. 34-5; Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 304-5.

against recusants in 1637 causing a rebellious response from the Queen.<sup>21</sup>

Charles's fiscal policies during his period of personal rule were also unpopular from both financial and political perspectives, seen as usurping Parliamentary prerogative.<sup>22</sup>

Religious tensions intensified in 1637. On June 30 the puritan lawyer and pamphleteer William Prynne was tried with two colleagues in the Star Chamber, a highly unpopular institution, for publicly criticising Laud's ecclesiastical policies. They were found guilty and had their ears cropped, the barbarity of which caused a public outcry.<sup>23</sup> Less than a month later, the first attempt to use Archbishop Laud's prayer book in Edinburgh resulted in a riot. In November 1637 the Venetian ambassador noted that Charles would 'be very fortunate if he does not fall into some great upheaval' because of the 'diminution of the liberty of the people' and his religious reforms.<sup>24</sup> The imposition of the prayer book ultimately led to the circulation and widespread signing of the Scottish National Covenant, early in March 1638. Later that year troops were being impressed across England to address the challenge presented by the

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<sup>21</sup> Julie Sanders, *Caroline Drama*, pp. 34–5.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Braddick, *God's Fury*, pp. 40-80; For a detailed treatment of Charles' personal rule see Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I*.

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of Prynne's case see Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I*, pp. 758–765. Sharpe comments that the three men had little public support before the punishment was exacted and that they had been treated fairly by the court to which they responded insolently. However, their speeches from the pillory sites and the barbarous implementation of the punishment against three professional gentlemen aroused significant and widespread support and damaged 'Charles' government in church and state', p.765.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Leanda de Lisle, *White King: Charles I, Traitor, Murderer, Martyr* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2018), p.137.

Scots and the summer of 1639 saw the first Bishops' War.<sup>25</sup> These events caused widespread anxiety.

Alexandra Walsham has demonstrated that, despite contemporary clergy fearing that most people did not engage with the doctrine of providence, the reality across the broad period of the early seventeenth century she discusses was different.<sup>26</sup> There is also some evidence that individuals across the religious spectrum interpreted these specific events providentially. Lady Brilliana Harley, a moderate puritan, had no doubt of God's active involvement in everything, both nationally and personally.<sup>27</sup> All her extant letters to her husband and son refer frequently to God, but from 1639 she explicitly attributes current events to providence. For example, speaking about the deployment of troops to Scotland and Berwick governorship, she concludes:

these things are of the Lord, and as none thought of such a business as this is, so we are ignorant what the issue be: the Lord give us hearts of dependencies upon him.<sup>28</sup>

This indicates her expectation that however strange and worrying the situation might seem, it is part of God's master plan and will turn out for the best. Lady Harley was particularly precise in her religious observation, and all her letters to her son urge the importance of maintaining proper religious deportment, but her references to providence are increasingly specific from 1639.

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<sup>25</sup> For further details on this see for example: Michael Braddick, *God's Fury*, pp. 3-112.

<sup>26</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*, p.31 – 2.

<sup>27</sup> Jacqueline Eales, "Harley [née Conway], Brilliana, Lady Harley (bap. 1598, d. 1643), parliamentarian gentlewoman." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). The online edition has been used throughout.

<sup>28</sup> Lady Brilliana Harley, *Letters*. Letter xl, 10 May 1639, p.52. She also calls on providence for more personal matters around this time. She tells her son to rely on providence, hopes it will ensure his safe journey, and even attributes to it her difficulties with a maid servant.

The attribution to providence was not unique to the godly. Sir Henry Slingsby was a royalist throughout the war, despite election as an MP in both the Short and Long parliaments. David Scott describes his religious attitude as combining ‘something of the “painful” earnestness of the godly with the reverence for order and decency of the Arminians.’<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless a sense of providentialism is evident in the extra-ordinary unease about current events expressed in his diary in January 1639. He describes the idea of preparing to fight Scots, fellow subjects of the king, as ‘a thing most horrible’ and comparable to seeing ‘a flock of birds ... fight and tear one another’.<sup>30</sup> His belief in the providential nature of these events is evident in an earlier entry in which he concludes: ‘there is no event that hath not an Almighty providence to direct it for God is the author of every action’.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, both Charles I and Oliver Cromwell recognised God’s special providence in their lives.<sup>32</sup> This brief survey is of course insufficient to unequivocally prove a widespread attribution of contemporary events to providence and it is beyond the scope of this project

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<sup>29</sup> David Scott, 2004 “Slingsby, Sir Henry, first baronet (1602-1658), royalist army officer and conspirator.” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). Scott suggests that this was probably a consequence of his ambivalent religious background. In 1619, aged 17, he became a pupil of the ‘discriminating godly divine John Preston’. However, in 1631 he married the daughter of a church-papist, and he had no sympathy with the grievances of the Scottish Covenanters, while in 1641 he opposed the bill to abolish the episcopacy.

<sup>30</sup> The Rev. Daniel Parsons (ed.), *The Diary of Sir Henry Slingsby of Scriven, Bart* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1836), p.11. My modernisation throughout. For a discussion of the link between prodigies and providence, and the prevalence of the belief in both see Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 103–112; Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*, pp. 167–203, 218–224, for her discussion of prodigies. Protestant attitudes to them are discussed on pp. 176–80.

<sup>31</sup> The Rev. Daniel Parsons (ed.), *The Diary of Sir Henry Slingsby*, p.28.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Cust, ‘Charles I and Providence’ in Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake (eds.), *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), pp. 195-198; Alexandra Walsham *Providence* pp. 6, 67, 70. For more detail see John Morrell, *The Nature of the English Revolution* (London: Longman, 1993), pp. 124–133; Blair Worden, ‘Providence and Politics in Cromwellian England’ in *Past and Present*, 1985, Vol. 109 (1), pp. 55–99.

to do this. However, these examples are indicative of a state of mind across the religious and political spectrum at that time. As Tessa Watt has shown popular literature was similarly suffused with providential thinking, suggesting it was a very broad and shared culture.<sup>33</sup> This chapter shows this is matched by the increased use of providence to resolve conflict in the tragicomedies of the late 1630s.

### **Playing the Contemporary Context - Uncertain Plays for Uncertain Times**

In the late 1630s and 1640s then, it was common practice to attribute contemporary events to providence, irrespective of where one sat on the religious or political spectrum. Walsham notes that providentialism at this time 'supplied a conceptual framework within which these cataclysmic events were explicable'.<sup>34</sup> Darren Oldridge discusses the comfort to be gained from believing in 'God's unfailing and universal benevolence' especially during difficult times, suggesting that the belief in special providence was particularly 'widespread [...] in the mid-1600s'.<sup>35</sup> As Muriel Bradbrook noted, 'in an age of religious tension, all social and political problems tend to formulate themselves in religious terms'.<sup>36</sup> It is therefore not surprising that plays of the pre-war period saw an increased engagement with providence. The rest of this chapter explores the ways tragicomedies of the late 1630s used providence to resolve

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<sup>33</sup> Tessa Watts, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550 – 1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>34</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*, p.6.

<sup>35</sup> Darren Oldridge, *Supernatural*, p.25.

<sup>36</sup> Muriel C. Bradbrook, *The Rise of the Common Player: A Study of Actor and Society in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1964), p.33.



their conflicts and the potential comfort and reassurance they could have had for their audiences.

Sir John Suckling's play *Aglaura* (1639) involves an evil counsellor, an unfaithful wife, and a tyrannous ruler.<sup>37</sup> Although there was never any suggestion that Henrietta Maria was unfaithful, her Catholicism and influence over Charles, along with that of other counsellors, was resented, whilst some of Charles' policies during his period of personal rule were deemed tyrannous by many. It thus has contemporary relevance. It is an unusual play as it comes with two different endings, one tragic and the second tragicomic.<sup>38</sup> The two possible outcomes are achieved by the simple expedient of changing the prologue and the final act: the first, a type of Armageddon, with everyone dying; the second, a happier ending with only the evil counsellor and the unchaste queen punished, whilst the tyrannous King is returned to virtue by pious repentance. As will be discussed later, the tragic ending is avoided only by inexplicable providential intervention. Contemporary audiences who saw both versions could recognise the similarities with real world circumstances and receive assurance that horrible bloodshed could be avoided through faith in the ultimate beneficence of God's providence.

The socio-political contexts of several other plays also mirrored the contemporary world. This encouraged audiences to identify in a direct manner

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<sup>37</sup> Sir John Suckling, *Aglaura* in L.A. Beaurline (ed.), *The Works of Sir John Suckling: The Plays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 33–119; second version appears on pp. 96–114. All subsequent references to *Aglaura* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically. Quotations from the tragicomic ending will be indicated by 't-c'.

<sup>38</sup> The tragic version of *Aglaura* was written in 1637 and presented to the Court at Christmas that year. The tragicomic version was presented at Easter the following year, as the tragic version had proved so popular.

with the uncertainties and tensions presented, enhancing their effectiveness. It also offered audiences the hope of similar providential help. In 1639 Sir Henry Spilsby noted as ‘strange spectacles’ the mustering of troops in a nation ‘that have lived thus long peaceably without noise of shot or drum’.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, in James Shirley’s *The Doubtful Heir* war is imminent following a long period of peace. Although exact performance dates are unknown, it seems likely to have been performed in Dublin between the first and second Bishops’ Wars and in London around the start of the second.<sup>40</sup> The Captain’s celebratory ‘there’s no recovery/ Without the smell of gunpowder’ would therefore have seemed apposite to contemporary audiences.<sup>41</sup> Then follows a dispute between himself and two citizens about who should pay for the army, another pertinent issue. Many had been unhappy about the extension of Ship Money across the whole country to pay for coastal defences in 1635.<sup>42</sup> More immediately, troops were being raised to fight against the Scots, raising the issue of who should pay for their training and upkeep, causing some areas to refuse. This was exacerbated by the sympathy some, opposed to Laudian changes, felt for the Scottish position.<sup>43</sup> That similar issues arise in the play’s opening scene immediately encourages audiences to apply what they are going to see to contemporary

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<sup>39</sup> The Rev. Daniel Parsons (ed.), *Diary of Sir Henry Slingsby*, p.11.

<sup>40</sup> First performed Dublin, 1639, first London performance 1640.

<sup>41</sup> James Shirley, *The Doubtful Heir* in William Gifford, (ed.), *The Dramatic Works and Poems of James Shirley* vol. IV, (London: John Murray, 1833), pp. 275–362, 1.1; p.282. All subsequent references to *The Doubtful Heir* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

<sup>42</sup> This was a tax nominally intended to pay for naval protection. It had formerly only been levied on coastal towns. Charles argued that the coast was the first line of attack for an invasion and that therefore it was a form of protection for the whole country, for which everyone should pay. For a detailed discussion of payment issues see Kevin Sharpe, *Personal Rule of Charles I*, pp. 545–600.

<sup>43</sup> The difficulties Charles faced including that of raising troops against Scotland are discussed in Michael Braddick, *God’s Fury*, pp. 40-112.

circumstances, even though the play's full political situation is different. No-one challenged Charles' legitimacy as king, but many were concerned about the way he was ruling and the advice he was getting.

James Shirley's 1637 play *The Royal Master* was also very topical. It concerns the undue influence of a Machiavellian counsellor. Many contemporaries disliked the influence that Laud, Strafford, and the Queen had on Charles' policies. In the play the virtuous characters fear that unassailable supernatural elements are at work blinding the King to the vices of his favourite, Montalto. Riviero hopes to expose the constant flattery of Montalto's minions to the King, provided there has been 'No witchcraft exercised upon his senses'.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Octavio, Riviero's son, believes 'there's some magic' (1.1; p.110) behind the King's continued affection to Montalto. This anxiety is voiced repeatedly throughout the play. When the King seems to prefer to be merciful towards the disgraced Montalto rather than just, Riviero remarks in an aside:

I begin

To fear there is some spell upon the King. (5.2; p.178)

These repeated supernatural references raise tensions as there was no legitimate way to deal with demonic involvement.<sup>45</sup> Despite the interjection of frequent comic scenes, the virtuous characters' repeated inability to deal with the treacherous Montalto creates continuous, and topical, anxiety for audiences.

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<sup>44</sup> James Shirley, *The Royal Master* in William Gifford (ed.), *The Dramatic Works and Poems of James Shirley* vol. IV, (London: John Murray, 1833), pp. 101–188, 1.1; p.107. All subsequent references to *Royal Master* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

<sup>45</sup> There was no suggestion that Charles was literally bewitched. The parallel lies in the intractability of the situation. An anointed king was believed to have God's protection and inspiration, so rebelling against his poor choice of counsellor was problematic as has been discussed in chapter 3, and below.

It becomes apparent that only providence can resolve the problems. The intractability and nature of the protagonists' difficulties mirrored the real world, encouraging audience engagement, so that the positive providential ending the play ultimately provides is potentially reassuring.

Another contemporary concern related to the period of personal rule was the problem of how to deal with a tyrannous ruler. Towards the end of *The Doubtful Heir* it is revealed that Olivia made adultery a felony. Although adultery broke the Seventh Commandment and was the subject of a three-part official *Homily*, to make it a capital offence could seem tyrannous to some audience members.<sup>46</sup> It might also remind some of the dangers of such a law as illustrated in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*.<sup>47</sup> Olivia's response that they are her subjects and that she, as Queen, is above the laws also chimed with some contemporaries' concerns about Charles. During his period of personal rule, he imposed a variety of novel taxes, reinstating obsolete laws which were widely regarded as abusive. These were challenged, resulting in

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<sup>46</sup> See Church of England, *Certain Sermons or Homilies appointed to be read in churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth of famous memory* (London: For the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1851), pp. 123–140. In 1650 adultery was made a felony and more radical puritans had been arguing for it for some time as a scripturally endorsed punishment. Jonathan Willis, *The Reformation of the Decalogue: Religious Identity and the Ten Commandments in England, c. 1485 – 1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 122–9, also pp. 220–280. The introduction of the law is discussed at length in Keith Thomas, 'The Puritans and Adultery - The Act of 1650 Reconsidered' in Donald Pennington and Keith Thomas (eds.), *Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays in Seventeenth-century History Presented to Christopher Hill* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 257–282.

<sup>47</sup> Martin Wiggins indicates a presumptive performance sometime in the 1640s. Martin Wiggins with Catherine Richardson, *British Drama 1533 – 1642: A Catalogue Volume V: 1603 – 1608*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.63. As Martin Butler notes many plays of this period depended upon audiences recognising references to much earlier plays, make comparison with much earlier performances and asserts that their audiences were the first 'to leave traces of widespread critical discussion of plays', in his *Theatre and Crisis, 1632 – 1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.107.

court cases which the King inevitably won, but only narrowly.<sup>48</sup> The legal victory reinforced the views of some that Charles was putting himself above the law.<sup>49</sup>

Domestic tyranny in these tragicomedies was no less pertinent. Julie Sanders notes James I's self-presentation as 'father of his subject-people' meant 'that criticism of domestic patriarchal tyranny serves as a criticism of the monarch's patriarchal and paternalistic behaviour', whilst setting drama in a city-state ruled by a single family effectively parallels the English patriarchal court.<sup>50</sup> Charles similarly presented himself as father of the nation. Sanders discusses several plays of this period centring on 'restrictive paternalism' and children's reluctant rebellion and notes that in *The Sparagus Garden* the question of whether it is ever acceptable to disobey one's father is articulated explicitly.<sup>51</sup>

William Berkeley's 1637 *The Lost Lady* is a play about parental tyranny regarding the choice of a spouse. At the heart of the play are two tyrannous patriarchs whose authority is challenged alternatively by patient virtue and by mild rebellion. Both patriarchal figures are willing to inflict extreme punishments, much like Charles in the case of Prynne. In Henry Glapthorne's 1638 *The Ladies' Privilege* Chrisea behaves tyrannously towards both her lover and her younger sister, Eurione. As a love test Chrisea orders Doria to give her up in favour of her sister's lover, Vitelli. This causes Doria to act similarly towards his friend, demanding Vitelli give up Eurione and love Chrisea as proof

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<sup>48</sup> For a detailed discussion of the Hampden Ship Money case see Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I*, pp. 717–730; Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, p.57.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Braddick, *God's Fury*, pp. 40-80.

<sup>50</sup> Julie Sanders, *Caroline Drama*, p.26.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52–3.

of his friendship. Like Chrisea, Conari, in Shirley's *The Gentleman of Venice* (1639), manipulates his wife into agreeing to do whatever he asks by a sort of love test. Contemporary norms considered the master of a household to be a miniature 'king' of that commonwealth.<sup>52</sup> Both Florelli and Claudiana are effectively subjects to Cornari, Florelli as his captive, and Claudiana as his wife. Conari behaves as a tyrannous ruler towards her attempting to get her pregnant through an adulterous relationship with a foreign stranger so that his profligate nephew will not inherit his wealth.

There had long been debate about how to deal with a tyrannical ruler. It was widely accepted that the monarch's authority came from God so an attack on the magistracy was essentially an attack on God. Furthermore, as Jonathan Willis shows, respect for authority from parental, through employer to monarchical was an inherent part of the Fifth Commandment to honour one's parents.<sup>53</sup> There was a hierarchical chain of authority directly from God through all of society. Alexander Henderson, a leading Covenanter, acknowledged the need to honour an evil ruler who might be a punishment from God. Conversely, a ruler who orders evil things had 'stepped out of the line of divine hierarchy so that his inferior was acting in direct response to God' by resisting.<sup>54</sup> However, who should determine when this point was reached was left unclear and inevitably created anxiety. Ultimately the standard view favoured passive resistance. Interpreting everyday events was important for knowing whether

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<sup>52</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Literature in Protestant England, 1560 – 1660* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1983), p.66; Walter Cohen, 'Prerevolutionary Drama', p.128; Julie Sanders, *Caroline Drama* pp. 26, 49–50, 52–55, 68.

<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Willis, *The Reformation of the Decalogue*, pp.72-132.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Braddick, *God's Fury*, p.107.

God was pleased or not with your own behaviours so that, if necessary, remedial action could be taken to demonstrate your true and lively faith. It was also important to trust in God's providence to ensure your own safety and ultimate salvation. This was the crux of the active/passive response to tyranny. In demanding she commit adultery Conari, in *The Gentleman of Venice* explicitly breaks God's law. Claudiana addresses the issue of rebellion directly and reflects Henderson's view. She asks Conari's forgiveness for disobeying him but says she only found courage to do so:

when your reason, and religion  
Were under violence of your will.<sup>55</sup>

She is here also engaging with contemporary arguments about the role of the will in relation to reason and faith. A similar point is made in *The Atheist's Tragedy* discussed below, but here it is not subject to debate. Conari is clearly wrong for having allowed his wish for a different heir to rule his behaviour. The use of the past tense in 'were' suggests that he has regained appropriate control of himself, although this is temporarily undermined for the off-stage audience when he hands Florelli over to the kidnapping Bravos. Ultimately however her trust in him is justified as he shows faith that his nephew may repent.

Equally, commentators on the Fifth Commandment were clear that with authority came responsibility. Significant for the plays of this period was the parental responsibility to find suitable marriage partners but not 'to force them to

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<sup>55</sup> James Shirley, *The Gentleman of Venice* in Wilson F. Engel (ed.), *Salzberg Studies in English Literature: Jacobean Drama Studies 62* (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1976), 5.2; l.2366 – 7. All subsequent references to *Gentleman of Venice* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

marry such as whom they affect not'.<sup>56</sup> Clearly not all parents or rulers fulfilled their responsibilities, raising the question of how to respond to this failure.<sup>57</sup> The most radical commentators, especially when matters of religion were involved, approved rebellion. Officially, the *Homily Against Wilful Rebellion* argued that any rebellion was the work of the Devil and identified Lucifer as the first rebel when he challenged God.<sup>58</sup> Most writers urged peaceful protestation as the only legitimate form of resistance, with patient submission to the consequences, even death. The imposition of the *Book of Common Prayer* in Scotland, and perceived tyranny in England made this a live issue in the late 1630s. Rebellion, peaceful protestation, and patient submission are all evident as character responses to perceived tyranny in contemporary plays.

The tyrannised women in *The Lost Lady* favour different responses.<sup>59</sup> Both are confident of God's involvement, but they differ in how they believe this works in practice. Acanthe subscribes to the view that God expects people to act on their own behalf, taking responsibility for their lives within God's laws. Conversely Hermione has absolute faith in God's beneficence and is unwilling to act proactively. Underlying both their positions is an inherent assumption of

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<sup>56</sup> William Dyke, *A Treasure of Knowledge* (London: R. Field for Robert Mylbourne, 1620), p.42. This is part of his 'Exposition of the Commandments' and lists columns of acts that are 'commanded' and those 'forbidden' by the different Commandments.

<sup>57</sup> For a discussion of the historiography of resistance theory of this period see for example, Adrian Streete, *Protestantism and Drama in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.206; Karl Gunther, *Reformation Unbound: Protestant Visions of Reform in England, 1525 – 1590* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 38, 131, 132; Rosamund Oates, *Moderate Radical: Tobie Matthew and the English Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p.12. Resistance theory specific to the 1630s and 1640s is discussed by Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, p.21

<sup>58</sup> *Homilies*, pp. 587–641. This is also discussed in chapter three of this work.

<sup>59</sup> Sir William Berkeley, *The Lost Lady*, D.F. Rowan (ed.), (London: Malone Society, 1987). All subsequent references to *Lost Lady* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically. I have modernised the spelling.



God's involvement with a recognition that people can never know how or when God will intervene. There was much debate post-Reformation as to the nature of God's providence and the role within it for human activity.<sup>60</sup> Although no human endeavour could succeed without God's aid, God usually acted through natural means so a failure to act for one's own good might undermine God's purposes. It was important to acknowledge God's role through prayer and thanksgiving when successful or self-reflection and repentance on failure.<sup>61</sup>

Acanthe articulates an orthodox position. When Hermione calls on the gods to help her Acanthe responds:

They will not hear us, madam, unless we  
Contribute to their aid our best endeavours. (2.3.752 – 3)

In other words, "God helps those who help themselves". There is a conflict of messages here, however. The use of 'will not' suggests God chooses to only assist those who attempt self-help. Prayer could legitimately be used for healing but only if accompanied by natural remedies to avoid any implication of tempting God.<sup>62</sup> However, the need to '*contribute* to their aid' implies God *cannot* do anything without human participation giving an inappropriate value to human action. Acanthe suggests ways Hermione might avoid unwanted suitors, which Hermione rejects. Acanthe concludes that those who will not take some chance to help themselves 'must sit still, and wait their preservation from a miracle' (2.3.781 - 2). That she is being dismissive here is clear by the contrast to her earlier statement that it is necessary to act on one's own behalf

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<sup>60</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 90–132.

<sup>61</sup> Alexandra Walsham discusses this in *Providence*, pp.15, 18.

<sup>62</sup> Though faith-healing did continue to be deemed beneficial by many. See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 133–178.

to get aid from God and by the reference to 'miracle'. As it was generally agreed by theologians that 'the age of miracles was dead' this suggests there is no chance for Hermione if she persists in passivity in the face of tyranny.<sup>63</sup> It denies any hope that her religion alone will secure her a happy ending. At this point in the play Hermione's faith, with her superstitious belief in prophesy, is uncertain, adding to the play's potentially tragic trajectory. Acanthe continues to articulate the need for some action even if it is only through prayer. When Hermione asks what the gods foretell for her, Acanthe responds:

They seldom let us know what is to come,  
That we may still implore their aid to help us. (3.1.1369 - 70)

This is contentious because although the first line articulates the orthodox idea of the unknowability of providence, 'that' in the second implies this is a means to control human behaviour, which is less appropriate. Acanthe's juxtaposition of the orthodox expression with the more doubtful one raises anxieties about her status as either a tragic or a tragicomic heroine. Thus, it is unclear whether the passive or the active response to tyranny will gain the providential support required. This tension between the 'suffer and do nothing' and the 'rebel respectfully' approach within the late tragicomedies reflected the contemporary dilemma and was reinforced by evident uncertainties regarding protagonists' moral status. Again, this was as pertinent in the real as the dramatic world.

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<sup>63</sup> For discussions of the different ways this was understood by contemporaries see for example: Robert Hunter West, *The Invisible World: A Study of Pneumatology in Elizabethan Drama* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), pp.19–20, pp. 113–4; Hudson Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 44, 138, 140–1; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* pp. 108, 122; Darren Oldridge, *Supernatural*, pp. 1–2, 50–6, 61, 62–4; Philip C. Almond, 'Introduction' in Philip C. Almond (compiler), *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England: Contemporary Texts and Their Cultural Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 8–10; Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*, pp. 12, 226, 229.

Tragicomedies of the late 1630s then reflected contemporary concerns and highlighted the difficult choices to be made in dealing with them.

In earlier plays, as discussed in previous chapters, virtuous characters called for providential aid in their plight whilst the vice characters referred to the Devil, Fortune, or nature. By the late 1630s tragicomedies however, there was often no clear distinction between heroes and villains. Anyone might therefore attribute desired outcomes to God or seek providential aid. As Verna Foster recognises:

tragicomedy's central inherent requirement [was] to offer a more comprehensive and complex understanding of human experience than either tragedy or comedy and to evoke in its audience a more complicated response.<sup>64</sup>

This complexity is evidenced in many later tragicomedies by the moral ambiguity of their characters and the consequent uncertainty of their outcomes. References to God offer audiences an indicator of characters' moral status, but where these are religiously unsound in the later plays it is unsettling rather than confirmatory. Casting doubt on the moral status of the apparent hero by emphasising poor Christian faith in contrast to others, for example, challenges the justice of a happy providential ending for that character. Such uncertainty mirrors the anxiety many contemporaries were experiencing over national politics. Although they might have felt Charles I's policies were wrong, the

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<sup>64</sup> Verna A. Foster, *The Name and Nature of Tragicomedy* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), p.1.

Scottish rebellion against him could seem positively impious, complicating contemporaries' response.<sup>65</sup>

Such uncertain moral status is particularly true of Lysicles in *The Lost Lady*. In the opening scene he is described by his doctor and a courtier as deeply melancholic over the murder of his beloved, Milesia, by her uncle. He is driven to plot revenge by murdering those he considers to be involved. This, though, means breaking the Sixth Commandment; 'thou shalt not kill' as well as God's statement that 'vengeance is mine'.<sup>66</sup> In 1.2 he plans to kill Milesia's uncle so that through his consequent execution he can join her in death, thus effectively committing suicide too. This doubly damns him. He declares Milesia sufficiently virtuous as to be, undoubtably, in heaven, so his assumption that dying because he has killed her uncle would re-unite them further signals an error of Christian faith. Lysicles' extreme melancholy and plans for revenge undermine his moral status and signal a potentially tragic ending for him.

Lysicles' poor faith is also shown through his language. In his conversation with Agenor he rejects the value of heaven's blessings:

for as I am, it'h instant,  
if heaven should pour her blessings on me their  
quality will alter. (1.1. 38 - 40)

His reference to Heaven's 'blessings' signals his nominal Christianity, but that his state of mind could alter their 'quality' implies human power is greater than

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<sup>65</sup> For contemporary attitudes to rebellion see the discussion above and in chapter two.

<sup>66</sup> *THE HOLY BIBLE, Conteyning the Old Testament, And The New. (King James Bible)*, (London: 1611), St Paul's Epistle to Romans 12:19. The full verse reads 'Dearly beloved, avenge not your selves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.' On-line edition used throughout.

God's. This identifies Lysicles as melancholic to a dangerous degree. A good Protestant should accept one's situation as part of the divine plan and suffer it patiently. His later references to God raise similar uncertainty about his moral status. Towards the end of the play, he warns Hermione against Acanthe, arguing that she should not be trusted because:

Those that do trace forbidden paths of knowledge  
The gods reserve unto themselves, do never do't  
But with intent to ruin the believers  
And venturers on their art. (5.1.2181 - 2184)

This is an orthodox attitude to magicians, but it is undermined by his use of 'gods', with its hint of paganism.<sup>67</sup> This is significant because it contrasts with the consistent references of other characters to 'heaven'. Although the nominal setting is pagan Sparta and Thessaly, the language of Acanthe and Hermione suggest it is a Christian world. His poor faith is underlined by their repeated orthodox articulations of a beneficent providential God. Even when he does eventually attribute events to God it is problematic. Speaking to Acanthe of her illness, he claims that he was 'enrag'd to madness' to become 'the blessed instrument' of God (5.2.2207 – 8). This is undermined by his rationally articulated determination to kill her; then commit suicide in the previous scene. One of the paradoxes of Protestant faith was its presumption of God's absolute superiority in controlling everything that happened, whilst insisting on his complete beneficence. It would be more common therefore to assume that it

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<sup>67</sup> See for example Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* pp. 252-300; Robert Hunter West, *The Invisible World* pp. 35-53; Barbara Howard Traister, *Heavenly Necromancers: The Magician in English Renaissance Drama* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984), pp. 1-31; King James I and VI, *Demonology* in Lawrence Normand and Gareth Roberts (eds.), *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland: James VI's Demonology and the North Berwick Witches*, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000).

was the Devil who enticed Lysicles to risk his soul by murdering Acanthe, an act unlikely to be considered 'blessed'. Furthermore, he continues to seek death, asking his friend Eugenio to kill him. His moral status remains uncertain, leaving in doubt the likelihood of a happy ending for him.

Finally, Lysicles's attitude towards Milesia is impious. When he visits her monument, her ghost appears. He interprets her appearance as a form of heaven-sent comfort to him:

Ha what miracle  
Are the gods pleas'd to work to ease affliction?<sup>68</sup>  
[...]  
Heaven does confess in this,  
That she can only add unto thy beauty  
By making it immortal. (4.1.1769 – 1770; 1773 - 1775)

Here his reference to 'the gods', is Christianised by its association with 'miracle' and 'heaven'.<sup>69</sup> Although other faiths also have miracles and refer to heaven, as argued above, the language of other characters suggest the play world is Christian. Two points in this speech signal uncertainty about Lysicles' faith, however. The first is his attribution of Milesia's ghost as a 'miracle' designed to 'ease [his] affliction'. Orthodox Protestantism said that generally God no longer worked through miracles, indicating human or demonic involvement. Conversely, it was generally accepted that God *could* perform such miracles if he chose, so God's involvement is not excluded. Secondly, the possibility of ghostly apparition was contentious. Pre-Reformation ghosts could be

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<sup>68</sup> I have substituted the footnote's folio rendering in place of the main text's 'each affection' as it makes better sense.

<sup>69</sup> I contend that most contemporary audiences would hear references to 'miracles' and 'heaven' as Christian unless the character speaking the words was explicitly non-Christian, which is not the case with Lysicles.

interpreted as the restless souls of the dead and some probably still believed that. However, Protestant theology said that the human soul went immediately to either heaven or hell on death and could not, and did not, return.<sup>70</sup> Dramatic ghosts' status was thus always uncertain but, unlike Hamlet, Lysicles does not question this. Audience members could interpret the scene in a myriad of ways, rendering Lysicles', and even Milesia's, moral status unstable whilst also unsettling themselves.<sup>71</sup>

The revelation of Acanthe's true identity finally brings out an orthodox Christian response from Lysicles:

Impenetrable powers!  
Deliver us in thunder your intents,  
And exposition of this metamorphosis. (5.22247 - 9)

He apostrophises God, indicating an internal relationship with him and recognises the 'impenetrable' nature of providence that requires 'exposition' for humans to understand. Finally, 'your intents' acknowledges God as the author of his experiences. This articulation of orthodox faith for the first time suggests the play may ultimately end happily for Lysicles, briefly easing for audiences the uncertainty which has been established thus far. However, this is almost immediately undermined when he gives Milesia divine status:

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<sup>70</sup> For a discussion on post-Reformation ghosts see Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 701-734; R.C. Finucane, *Appearances of the Dead: a Cultural History of Ghosts* (London: Junction Books, 1982), pp. 90-114; Robert Hunter West, *The Invisible World* pp. 35-53, 162-200; Darren Oldridge, *Supernatural*, 107-128; Catharine Belsey, 'Shakespeare's Sad Tale for Winter: Hamlet and the Tradition of Fireside Ghost Stories' in *Shakespeare Quarterly* vol. 61, no. 1, Spring 2010, pp. 1-27).

<sup>71</sup> As Mc Gavin and Walker note spectators 'can choose the nature and diversity of their responses within the limits set by the developing action and the time they have to think over a scene once it has passed from visual immediacy into the memory.' John J. McGavin and Greg Walker *Imagining Spectatorship: From the Mysteries to the Shakespearean Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.121.

Is this a punishment for adoring her  
Equal with you, you made so equal to ye. (5.2.2270 - 1)  
It was sinful to love anyone 'equal with' God and suggesting that Miliesia was 'so equal to' God is a breach of the First Commandment 'thou shalt have no other gods before me'.<sup>72</sup> To attribute god-like qualities to one's beloved was a conventional trope but to consider her as God's equal was blasphemous. That he recognises his problems as a possible 'punishment' acknowledges this error however, making it seem merely human, so potentially softening some audience members' moral judgement. The poor faith worsens though when he continues addressing God:

Pardon the fault you forc'd me to commit:  
So visible a divinity  
Could not be look'd on with less adoration. (5.2.2272 - 4)

Suggesting that God 'forced' him to love her too much by making her so beautiful abrogates his responsibility for the blasphemy. This is compounded by his next line as looking on images of divinity was proscribed by Protestants. Equally it feeds into contemporary anxieties as the Laudian beautification of churches was causing many to fear that the official Church was moving back towards icon worship, in breach of the Second Commandment.<sup>73</sup> Additionally using 'adoration' potentially references perceived Catholic practice, another sensitive concern for many at the time. Even at this late stage then, the hero's moral status is ambiguous. These repeated references to God throughout the

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<sup>72</sup> *King James Bible*, 1611, Exodus 20:3. Referring to images the fifth verse warns 'Thou shalt not bow down thy self to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God'. Although this is not an explicitly Christian play, being set in Thessaly and Sparta, I contend that audiences were likely to judge characters against their own beliefs. A character making a statement that explicitly breaches a Commandment as Lycicles does here is therefore likely to suffer a fall in moral status for at least some audiences.

<sup>73</sup> 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing [*sic*] that is in heaven above' Exodus 20:4 from *King James Bible* 1611.



play evidence his presence in the play world but the hero's poor faith makes it uncertain that Lysicles will benefit from God's providential solution. In highlighting Lysicles' fluctuating faith, the playwright complicates his moral status in a manner commensurate with events in the real world.

Similar insecurity about moral status surrounds other characters in the play. Despite her apparent piety, Acanthe's moral standing is also questionable. She poses as a prophetess and uses astrology. Astrology and providence were closely related concepts. Many theologians opposed judicial astrology, arguing it undermined God's providence. Calvin warned against it and James I condemned it.<sup>74</sup> So for some of the audience at least Acanthe was blasphemous. Conversely, Richard Napier, an astrologer, doctor, and member of the clergy working during the 1630s, used a combination of natural medicines, astrological charts and prayer in treating his patients.<sup>75</sup> Christian astrologers argued that they widened their client's range of possible actions rather than imposing particular behaviours on them.<sup>76</sup> Acanthe tells Hermione that the 'stars incline' but 'not force us in our actions' (2.3.690). This summarises astrology's defence against a charge of determinism and reflects the argument acknowledged as valid by Calvin.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, the line between reading the stars as a sign of divine intention and attributing a causal

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<sup>74</sup> King James I, *Demonology*, p.367.

<sup>75</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 362, 450–1, 375–6; 392, 450; Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) looks in detail at Napier's work on curing those suffering from mental health problems and his use of a combined approach.

<sup>76</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* p.429.

<sup>77</sup> Phebe Jenson, 'Astrology and Religion in the Long Reformation: "Dr Faustus in Swaddling Clouts"' in *Reformation*, 24:2, (2019), pp. 92–106. Jenson discusses the compatibility between astrology and Calvinist theology which she suggests contributed to the continuing activity of astrology post-Reformation despite Calvinist disapproval, p.93.

effect to them was fine.<sup>78</sup> Acanthe's distinction between stars providing the 'inclination' not the 'force' ensures she remains orthodox in her reference but some within any audience would have seen it as a moral failing.

Hermione's moral status is never in doubt, but her faith does waver. Throughout, the play's signals for a positive outcome for Hermione are undermined by contrary indicators. Waiting for the arrival of a prophetess to tell her fortune Hermione acknowledges heaven's role in her life as 'heaven afflict[s]' her with 'blessings which make others happy' but which 'must be [her] ruin' (2.3.654 - 655). Her certainty that it '*must* be [her] ruin'<sup>79</sup> shows a lack of faith in God's wisdom. Similarly, consulting a prophetess is superstitious, whilst her determination to kill herself if she cannot marry Eugenio is blasphemous. Her suffering could equally be an indicator of providential favour, however. Throughout the Marian period, suffering by Protestant martyrs was interpreted as a sign of grace. With the success of Protestantism in England the idea remained, with many books written on the 'art of suffering' and the 'benefits of affliction' from the 1570s onwards.<sup>80</sup> These asserted that any sort of trial should be interpreted as a loving God's way of instructing the faithful. Afflictions were 'a symptom and consequence of their election [...and so formed] a crucial element in the emerging doctrine of assurance' to be welcomed.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Alexandra Walsham discusses this in *Providence* p.175.

<sup>79</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>80</sup> Alexandra Walsham, 'The Happiness of Suffering' in Michael J. Braddick, and Joanna Innes, (eds.), *Suffering and Happiness in England, 1550 – 1850: Narratives, and Representations: A Collection to Honour Paul Slack* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 45-64, p.52; Alexandra Walsham discusses what she calls 'experimental providence' in *Providence*, pp. 15–20.

<sup>81</sup> Alexandra Walsham, 'The Happiness of Suffering' pp. 45 - 64, p.54.

Paradoxically, setbacks continued to be regarded as divine punishment for the reprobate as well. Thus, the uncertainty of outcome for all these characters remains. Much like the contemporary real world, it is unclear who has the moral high ground so who will be likely to benefit from God's providential support.

Shirley's *The Doubtful Heir* involves uncertainties of a different kind but reflects the contemporary situation still more closely. Throughout the play it is unclear which side is in the right and which is wrong, much like in the contemporary real world. There is no obvious villain nor clear hero or heroine. The legitimacy of Queen Olivia's rule is called into question and either she or her challenger, Ferdinand, could be the eponymous heir.<sup>82</sup> Both sides repeatedly call on providence to support their cause, demonstrating good faith, and the balance of support switches between them, as God seems to favour first one then the other. The audience can never be sure how it is going to end, potentially raising their anxiety levels throughout.

Lack of clarity about the 'right' side in the play are raised in the opening scene. Leandro, Ernesto and Rodriguez discuss Ferdinand's claims that Olivia has usurped his throne. Rodriguez declares him an imposter to which Leandro piously responds: 'Heaven aid the innocent!' (1.1; p.287), with the implication that he means Olivia. This is reinforced when he declares:

there needs no art, nor strength of war,  
To advance her cause, justice will fight for her  
l'the clouds; and victory, sent from heaven, without  
Her soldiers' sweat, will gloriously descend

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<sup>82</sup> Though it should be noted that the original title was *Rosiana* so that additional uncertainty may not have been available to its first audiences.

To crown his head with laurel. (1.1; p.287 - 8)

The repetition of 'her' posits Olivia as the innocent party. Heavenly justice, he asserts, will ensure the victory for the right side without 'her soldiers' sweat', perhaps expressing audiences' hopes regarding the Scottish problems.

Leandro's orthodox piety posits him as morally sound, which implicitly validates Olivia and Leonario's positions and makes them seem worthy beneficiaries of God's ultimate providential justice.

However, when Leandro is next seen, he is reading news of Leonario's success and complains:

Hath heaven no stroke in war,  
Or is old Providence asleep? (2.1; p.295)

This is not an apostrophe, so he is not directly attacking God, but 'old Providence' is disrespectful whilst the suggestion that providence might sleep is impious. Although he previously asserted that Heaven's 'justice' would give the victory to Leonario, it now seems he hoped for the opposite outcome. As he is alone his outburst presumably genuinely reflects his feelings. The certainties established in the previous act are undermined. Is Leandro a villain after all?

His moral status falls further with his conclusion that:

There is no trust to policy or time;  
The things of state are whirl'd by destiny  
To meet their period; art cannot repair them. (2.1; p.295)

His use of 'policy', and 'art' even though it is to declaim faith in them, associates him with Machiavellianism whilst the reference to 'destiny' potentially denies providence. Conversely, 'whirl'd by destiny' implies political chaos, which would have resonated with some audiences, encouraging them to question whether it

could be so straightforward. In conventional morality tales, the 'villains' initially prosper. Although this character's dishonesty posits him as a villain, Olivia and Leonario's early success raises doubts about their moral status for the first time. The lack of clarity about characters' relative moral status potentially unsettles audiences' expectations.

Leonario, however, seems clearly virtuous. He shows tact in describing his aid to the impoverished Captain as a debt repayment. His benevolence is indicated by the Captain's: 'I'll take the money and allow the miracle' (1.1; p.290). The reference to 'miracle' associates Leonario's action with God. Leonario also demonstrates modest piety. He asks Olivia whether they can be married when he returns:

if that power, which crowns  
With victory, guides me with fair success  
In this your war, and triumph smile upon us. (1.1; p.290)

He continues that this is what 'My soul, next heaven, affects'. The first two lines acknowledge dependence on God for victory, with 'if' signalling the conditional nature of this. Unlike Lycicles's deification of Milesia in *The Lost Lady* discussed above, he also, piously, if unromantically, adds that he loves her above everything, *after* God, thus enhancing his moral status. So, in the first two acts the audience are encouraged to perceive Leonario as a hero, fighting for what will prove the right side and to view Leandro, and by implication, Ferdinand, with suspicion.

This positioning continues with Ferdinand's first appearance. Rather than attribute his situation to heaven as Leonario did, he urges Rosania to

'leave [him] to [his] own stars' and 'expect [...] a happy fate' at court (2.3; p.300). Although 'fate' was part of 'popular discourse', Alison Shell suggests that the 'rhetorical posture' of speaking of 'the gods, fate and fortune' as 'still valid' in a Christian world can 'betray real slippage between pagan and Christian habits of thought'.<sup>83</sup> Although 'these terms were widely used in Reformation England to denote God's subsidiary workings', the parallel between Calvinist predestination and unavoidable fate from classical tragedy enabled anti-Calvinist polemicists increasingly to accuse Calvinists of 'quasi-pagan fatalism'.<sup>84</sup> References to the fates therefore could be more, or less, damning for different audience members. Its damning potential is increased by the plot as he is rebelling against an apparently legitimate and fair ruler. He is redeemed somewhat when, hearing his supporters are to be pardoned, he tells Rosania more piously that 'Heaven does command thee live' (2.3; p.302). Ferdinand's previous reference to his stars might then simply be an unwillingness to nominate God as the author of the evil he is suffering. His moral status is further complicated when, during his trial, Ferdinand declares that 'though his stars have frown'd,/ And the great eye of Providence seem[']d to slumber' (2.3; p.304), he really is the Queen's cousin.<sup>85</sup> Although he again ascribes influence to the 'stars', he also acknowledges providence, and 'seem[']d' recognises that providence acts in its own time rather than being a

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<sup>83</sup> Alison Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion*, p.183.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.185.

<sup>85</sup> Contemporaries debated the relationship between God's providence and the stars in controlling human lives. Attitudes varied from seeing the two as mutually exclusive to hierarchically compatible. For more on this see Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 425-460.

blasphemous belief that it sleeps. Ferdinand's moral status is unclear. Leandro used the image of sleeping providence in 2.1, when lamenting Ferdinand's defeat, linking the two speeches. In 2.3 however Leandro accuses Ferdinand of treason. The repeated imagery draws attention to Leandro's second change of side and his inconsistency further unsettles any sense of everyone's moral status. The question of God's active role in human affairs was an important one for Protestants. Contemporary clerics were concerned that many people doubted God's on-going involvement in daily life. This, they argued made God 'a lifeless idol' and this attitude to God was deemed a form of atheism.<sup>86</sup>

Ferdinand's claim to the moral high ground is increased as he continues to acknowledge providence's role in his life. Denying the charge of treason, he claims he 'escaped, by divine providence' from the murderous intents of 'a cruel uncle' (2.4; p.305). As the 'cruel uncle' was Olivia's father, she is implicated in the attack on his life, which destabilises her moral status. The moral uncertainty regarding both Olivia and Leandro continues as Olivia delays Ferdinand's execution, and Leandro also saves him by reporting a counsellor's intention to execute him anyway. This potentially redeems Leandro in the eyes of the audience. The scene ends in confusion for both on- and off-stage audiences when Olivia announces that she will reprieve Ferdinand and he leads her off-stage. Olivia and Fernando's marriage increases their moral instability. It puts Olivia clearly in the wrong and raises doubts about her legitimacy. In 1.1, in front of witnesses, she was betrothed to Leonario. She has clearly breached

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<sup>86</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*, p.29.

this binding legal contract. Leonario then determines on revenge, thus unsettling his moral status for the first time, and positing a potentially tragic ending. The moral status of all the main protagonists has ebbed and flowed and early in the third act it remains unclear who holds the moral high ground and would ultimately justify providential aid. As with the real-world situation, it is difficult to know whose cause was right.

Seemingly good characters in other plays also articulate potentially mistaken faith creating uncertainty about their moral status. In *The Gentleman of Venice* Florelli demonstrates his piety in accepting, albeit unwillingly, the fate heaven has planned. He could 'expostulate with heaven' or 'say/ Something in my defence' except 'it is not fit' to do so (5.2.2268 – 9; 2267). His request for heavenly aid from his 'tutelar angel' to 'be at counsel with/ My thoughts' and 'direct my trembling steps' to 'a path of safety' (5.2.2271 – 3) however was contentious as Protestant theologians disagreed on the existence of guardian angels.<sup>87</sup> Florelli's piety then is evident, but his request for a confessor to help him prepare for death and avoid 'murdering [his]/ Eternity' (5.2.2250 – 1) might

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<sup>87</sup> For discussions about Protestant attitudes to the concept of guardian angels see: Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham, 'Migrations of Angels in the Early Modern World' in Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (eds.), *Angels in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 1–40; Peter Marshall, 'Angels Around the Death Bed: Variations on a Theme in the English Art of Dying' in Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (eds.), *Angels in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 83–103; Alexandra Walsham, 'Angels and Idols in England's Long Reformation' in Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (eds.), *Angels in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 134–176; Robin Briggs, 'Dubious Messengers: Bodin's Daemon, the Spirit World and the Sadducees' in Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (eds.), *Angels in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 168–190; Laura Sangha, *Angels and Belief in England, 1480 – 1800* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012).



be too Catholic for some audience members.<sup>88</sup> Following the Reformation, regular personal confession, absolution, and penance were abolished. The *Book of Common Prayer*, and its 1645 successor the *Directory for the Public Worship*, contained a general confession of sins accompanied by priestly absolution. Both also make special provision for individual confession and absolution for the sick.<sup>89</sup> However neither is necessary for achieving salvation. For some contemporary audiences Florelli's request simply indicates mistaken faith but for others it associated him with the Devil. Many contemporaries were anxious at a perceived increase in Catholic toleration as more extreme anti-papal polemic was being censored. Equally, Laudian devotional books were based on a mixture of pre- and post-Reformation material whilst the beautification of church and liturgy also carried Catholic overtones for some.<sup>90</sup> Thus, for some audience members Florelli's faith would have been dangerously Catholic, suggesting low moral status deserving of a fall whatever the play's genre, whilst for others it would have been suitably pious, so that his death would be tragic.

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<sup>88</sup> This reference to confession is interesting in an English gentleman. Shirley was himself a Catholic, which might explain it, but it may also reflect the increasing number of courtiers converting to Catholicism at this time, under the influence of the pious Queen. Florelli is quite explicit that he needs to confess his sins to enable him the chance of salvation – a decidedly Catholic understanding.

<sup>89</sup> For the text of this see [http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1559/MP\\_1559.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1559/MP_1559.htm). The text for the visitation of the sick is available at [http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1559/Visitation\\_Sick\\_1559.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1559/Visitation_Sick_1559.htm).

<sup>90</sup> Alexandra Walsham, 'The Parochial Roots of Laudianism Revisited: Catholics, Anti-Calvinists, and 'Parish Anglicans' in Early Stuart England' in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* Vol. 49, no. 4 Oct. 1998, pp. 620–651. There had long been an overlap in Catholic and Protestant devotional works. Robert Parsons' *A Christian Directory* (1582) was very popular, and a puritan 'translation' was published two years later, with multiple subsequent editions. However, the concern here was that too much of the erroneous Catholicism remained.

The characters in these plays are thus all signalled as equally right and wrong, potentially raising audience anxiety and uncertainty about the outcome. These uncertainties resonated with the contemporary context, in which it was difficult to determine who was the more virtuous and ought, ultimately, to prevail. Audiences' anxieties could be created by uncertainties regarding characters' moral status destabilising audience expectations of appropriate outcomes, enhanced by plots paralleling real world issues, thus utilising concerns audiences might be bringing with them into the theatre. The plays create tensions that appear unresolvable without significant bloodshed. Ultimately, all that remained was the hope of providential intervention. My final sections argue that this was the preferred solution, in a variety of forms, for dealing with these uncertainties in the late 1630s tragicomedies. Further, that such a providential design was fundamental to the genre at the time. By resolving scenarios that can be applied to contemporary concerns the plays provide reassurance that a similar outcome may be possible in real life. The next section demonstrates the change in presentation of providence to suit this agenda.

## **Doctrine Versus Faith: *The Atheist's Tragedy* and Late 1630s**

### **Tragicomedies**

The play that most explicitly engages with providence is Cyril Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy* from 1610. D'Amville, the eponymous atheist, rejects God's

offer of heaven in favour of his own version of eternity. From the outset he challenges orthodox doctrine stating:

There's my eternity. My life in them  
And their succession shall for ever live.<sup>91</sup>

He thus suggests his progeny constitute his version of eternal life. Poetic references like this usually emphasised the eternal *fame*, both literary and literal, their progeny would give the poet, keeping his *name* alive through the generations. D'Amville's 'my *life*' implies something like the Christian concept of the soul's everlasting life. Its attainment through his sons' physical resemblance to himself associates it with the body and implies humans can actively obtain it. Protestant doctrine however insisted that salvation comes only from God's grace. The caesura in line 124 emphasises 'there's', highlighting by its omission the alternative that he is rejecting. Contemporary audiences, exposed weekly to Christian doctrines of predestination and providence, are likely to have recognised the dialogical argument this sets up and which is explored throughout the rest of the play.

D'Amville believes in nature and natural reasoning independent of a God whose existence he doubts. He shows himself at risk of damnation from the outset as he frequently refers to 'reason' as a justification for his actions. This contrasts to the philosophy of Charlemont and Castabella who, as orthodox Christians, believe that 'to live by nature was to live in accordance with the

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<sup>91</sup> Cyril Tourneur, *The Atheist's Tragedy* Brian Morris and Roma Gill (eds.), (London: Ernest Benn Ltd, 1976), 1.1.124 - 5. All subsequent references to *Atheist's Tragedy* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

divine plan of God who had created nature'.<sup>92</sup> As an atheist, D'Amville's ultimate fate is clear from the outset: he will die 'an unnatural death inflicted as punishment by God'.<sup>93</sup> The popularity of providential literature, such as the aforementioned *Theatre of God's Judgement*, evidenced by multiple publications and repeat editions, along with sermons and the presence in churches of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, ensured the message was unlikely to be missed by Tourneur's audiences.

Castabella articulates an association between nature's movements and God's providential response to sinfulness. Threatened with rape by D'Amville, Castabella expects that God will hurl 'thunderbolts', cause 'an earthquake' or 'the angry face of Heaven/ Be [...] enflamed [*sic*] with lightning' (4.3.162; 164 – 5), in retributive punishment on D'Amville, as happens in many of Beard's stories. D'Amville again mocks this idea, sarcastically suggesting that she call up the Devil and the dead since they are in a graveyard. Charlemont's subsequent appearance disguised as a ghost to affect her rescue, seemingly fulfils D'Amville's suggestion. Ghosts were often associated with the Devil. Her use of an apostrophe directed at God however associates God directly with Charlemont's arrival. D'Amville is frightened away and when Charlemont reveals himself his role as God's providential agent becomes clear. Although

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<sup>92</sup> Irving Ribner (ed.), 'Introduction' to Cyril Tourneur, *The Atheist's Tragedy* (London: Methuen & Co, 1964), pp. xix–lxvi, p.xxxviii. For a discussion of contemporary ideas on the relationship between nature and providence see for example Alan Sinfield, *Literature in Protestant England*, pp. 129–134, though I would suggest that the consequent secularisation he discusses came later.

<sup>93</sup> Robert Ornstein, "The Atheist's Tragedy and Renaissance Naturalism" in *Studies in Philology* Vol. 51, no. 2 (Apr. 1954), pp. 194–207, p.201. For a discussion of atheism and unbelief during this period see Alec Ryrie, *Unbelievers: An Emotional History of Doubt* (London: William Collins, 2019).

thunder and lightning were considered portents from God, divine intervention was more typically deemed to be enacted by unremarkable methods such as this.

God is shown repeatedly responding to D'Amville's blasphemy. Earlier, D'Amville's claim that they have successfully carried out the murder of Montferrers unobserved is challenged by thunder and lightning. D'Amville deems this 'a mere effect of nature', which shows that Nature 'favoured our performance' (2.4.141; 155 – 6), blasphemously transposing Nature for God. Both, Leslie Thomson explains, require audiences to recognise the stage convention that thunder and lightning 'was a sign of intervention in human affairs by the demonic or divine'.<sup>94</sup> Although not all storms in drama or in life necessarily signalled the supernatural, Walsham notes that both sermons and popular print also highlighted the providential warning evident in thunder and lightning. Preachers asserted that rather than the Biblical fire and brimstone, God used 'secondary causes' as 'visible sermons'.<sup>95</sup> 'Freak storms, torrential rain, and raging gale-force winds were [...] ominous prognostications' of God's 'heavier temporal punishments'.<sup>96</sup> The power of God's providence is thus made clear, preparing audiences for D'Amville's ultimate fate.

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<sup>94</sup> Leslie Thomson, 'The Meaning of Thunder and Lightning: Stage Direction and Audience Expectations' in *Early Theatre* 2 (1999), pp. 11–24, p.14.

<sup>95</sup> Alexandra Walsham *Providence*, pp. 116–118, 122.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* As discussed above, Castabella explicitly references God's use of weather effects to punish malefactors at 4.3.163 – 8, though she is wondering why God stays his hand as D'Amville threatens to rape her. See also Irving Ribner, 'Introduction', p.xliii. Ribner notes that thunder, and also references to the stars, were 'commonly used in literature as a sign of the divine presence in the universe'. He shows in detail D'Amville's frequent rejection of the role of the stars in the affairs of men as part of his denial of an active deity.

A central issue of the play is to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of human action against God's superior providential power. It does this by articulating alternative theories and demonstrating their falsity. In the opening scene, D'Amville repeatedly questions accepted Christian doctrine about life after death. In doing this he introduces a legitimate but potentially dangerous concept. He argues that as the number of his children increases 'so should my providence' as from his 'substance [...] they live and flourish' (1.1.56 – 7). People were supposed to make provision for themselves and others since leaving everything to God's providential care was seen as tempting God.<sup>97</sup> The use of 'providence' in this sense was established around this time and was not in itself damning. It was acceptably 'provident' to work to provide for one's family and increase one's wealth for their benefit. However, his claim that 'in my reason dwells the providence' to 'add to life' (1.1.126 – 7) has a potentially alarming emphasis on 'reason'. Human reason was deemed fallible, especially for understanding the divine will. D'Amville's frequent use of 'providence' in the sense of being prudent inherently also draws attention to the alternative Christian association of God's providence. In 5.1 he ultimately juxtaposes the two concepts, wondering that 'the simple, honest worshipper/ Of a fantastic providence' should choose to 'groan under [...] neglected misery' (5.1.43 – 4; 44 - 45). The virtuous Castabella and Charlemont are two such, having repeatedly but seemingly unsuccessfully called on God for aid. Both are

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<sup>97</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*, p.18; Alan Sinfield, *Literature in Protestant England*, pp. 34–47 discusses heroic virtue in the context of puritan theology of providence in works by Sidney, Milton and Spenser. On pp. 91–2, 98-102 he also notes that some Renaissance thinkers did allow humans the capacity to be virtuous by their own efforts, while others insisted on God's role.

unjustly imprisoned, she for adultery and he for murder. Conversely D'Amville himself, through the 'real wisdom' of his devious plotting, is sitting in front of a pile of gold, which he anticipates will 'eternize [his] posterity' (5.1.46 – 7). However, his boast is immediately followed by the complete collapse of his plans. One son's dead body is brought in whilst the other is heard dying off-stage.

As Ornstein notes God 'is from the outset D'Amville's opponent' rather than Charlemont.<sup>98</sup> The final resolution of the fall of the axe on D'Amville should be read as: 'a miracle, deliberately chosen for its apparent impossibility, by which Tourneur emphasizes the intervention of God to destroy the wicked and protect the innocent.'<sup>99</sup> Although in Protestant theology the age of miracles was deemed to be past, this was principally part of an attack on Catholic ritual and saints.<sup>100</sup> Protestants of all stripes accepted that although God usually chose to work through natural means, he could produce miracles if he wished.<sup>101</sup>

Charlemont and Castabella also have a role in the didactic explication of the doctrine of providence which the play presents. Just as D'Amville's words

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<sup>98</sup> Robert Ornstein, 'The *Atheist's Tragedy* and Renaissance Naturalism' in *Studies in Philology* vol. 51, no. 2 (Apr 1954), pp. 194–207, p.202.

<sup>99</sup> Irving Ribner 'Introduction', p.xxxviii. The desire to achieve a spectacular stage effect was of course also pertinent, as with the use of thunder and lightning but I would argue that the spectacle would be enhanced by their association with the divine.

<sup>100</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*, pp. 226, 229.

<sup>101</sup> For discussions on the contemporary meaning of the idea that 'miracles are dead' and the connection with the doctrine of providence see for example: Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 90-132; Rober Hunter West, *The Invisible World*, pp. 19–20; Discussing sacred or demonic manifestations Van Dijkhuizen notes that much English culture remained unreformed in Jan Frans Van Dijkhuizen, *Devil Theatre: Demonic Possession and Exorcism in English Renaissance Drama, 1558 – 1642* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), p.5; Almond discusses different interpretations of the end of miracles in the context of demonic possession in Philip C. Almond, *Demonic Possession*, pp. 8-12.

and actions deny providence, those of Charlemont and Castabella verify it. As well as acting as God's agent in the graveyard scene, Charlemont makes positive religiously based choices throughout that put him on the side of God. Montferrers' ghost tells Charlemont to leave revenge to God, causing him to complain:

You torture me between the passion of  
My blood and the religion of my soul. (3.2.35 – 6)

Here, Charlemont's desire to seek revenge is at war with his understanding of his religion. Ethan Shagan has shown that 'moderation' in the sense of control or restraint was considered an essential element of English Protestantism.<sup>102</sup> The Protestant focus on original sin meant that faults were interpreted as an excess rather than a lack of something.<sup>103</sup> For Charlemont the 'passion of [his] blood' demands action in seeking revenge, and the ghost's prohibition is 'torture' to him. There is evidence of excess in his reference to 'torture' and 'passion' but his religion demands self-moderation which takes precedence. God's aid, as in everything, was essential to achieve self-control, evidenced by Charlemont's final acknowledgement that heaven 'made [him] still forbear' (5.2.276).<sup>104</sup>

Castabella reflects persistent faith, tested in a manner that emphasises her humanity. She makes frequent reference to God as the guide to her

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<sup>102</sup> Ethan Shagan, *The Rule of Moderation: Violence, Religion and the Politics of Restraint in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 33, 68.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Full quotation is 'Only to Heaven I attribute the work,/ Whose gracious motives made me still forbear/To be mine own revenger. Now I see/That *patience is the honest man's revenge*. (5.2.275 -278) which summarises the religious argument of the play that one should trust in God's providence patiently.



actions, but also questions the reason for her suffering as she apostrophises God, giving him a presence on the stage. Having heard of Charlemont's supposed death and been forced to marry Rousard, for example, she acknowledges that it is God's 'pleasure' that has caused her situation and determines to 'submit' dutifully to his providence (2.3.13; 14). Her duty throughout the play is explicitly to God. When D'Amville proposes he supply the sexual satisfaction that his son cannot, she rejects the associated incest, exclaiming: 'Now Heav'n defend me!' (4.3.118). D'Amville's argument that 'Nature allows a general liberty' (4.3.128) to animals, causes her to ask of God if his 'unlimited and infinite/ Omnipotence' is 'less free' (4.3.133 – 4) because he does not sin. Castabella's expansive adjectives 'unlimited and infinite omnipotence' jar with 'less', emphasising the irony of her exclamation as she picks up on D'Amville's idea of 'liberty' with her 'free'.

D'Amville's arguments throughout the play use reasoning based on his understanding of Nature as a ruling power. Castabella recognises this. Threatening to rape her he mocks her: 'Nay then invoke/ Your great supposed protector.' (4.3.159 – 60). Her echo 'supposed protector?' (4.3.161) stresses her incredulity and alarm at his disbelief in and denigration of an active divine protector, and her own correspondingly strong belief. Later she assures Charlemont that 'The hand of Heaven directed thy defence' (4.3.190) when he relates his killing of Borachio. There is a potential dual meaning with 'directed'. Heard anthropomorphically 'hand' could suggest literally steering Charlemont's sword as a form of special providence. Equally, 'directed' can mean a planned

intent, highlighting God's providence more generally. Both indicate her belief in God's active involvement in human affairs.

D'Amville only takes account of the power of nature as he perceives it. The play demonstrates however that nature's power is subject to a greater, divine power. Although the play is nominally about atheism, it uses providence to illustrate its falseness.<sup>105</sup> As Ribner concludes, the play:

consist[s] of two parallel movements, the one [...] a systematic refutation of D'Amville's creed [...] the other to a demonstration of Charlemont's way as the only one which can assure man's happiness on earth as well as in heaven.<sup>106</sup>

The play's main action serves to denounce atheism and support a belief in the providential Christian God through an explicitly theological debate between dialogic extremes. Castabella and the subplot plait the paths of D'Amville and Charlemont together.<sup>107</sup> They thus amplify the moral lesson of the play on the need to have faith in providence as defined by Protestant theology. None of the characters who deny providence survive the end of the play. The lesson is emphasised by the repeated comparison between D'Amville's atheism and Charlemont and Castabella's orthodox Christianity. Christian doctrine is

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<sup>105</sup> Irving Ribner usefully summarises the contrasting attitudes of D'Amville and Charlemont. D'Amville's atheism is based on: 'fallible human reason, which sees physical nature as the ultimate power in the universe, governed by its own fixed and mechanical laws of cause and effect, uncontrolled by any supernatural influences' whilst Charlemont's religion is 'based upon faith in a supreme being superior to physical nature of which He is always master, governing mankind with justice as well as mercy'. Irving Ribner, 'Introduction', pp. xxxvi–xxxvii.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxxviii. Ribner's suggestion that Charlemont 'has meaning *only* as an antithesis to the intellectual position of D'Amville' is too reductive, whilst the idea of 'parallel movements', with its suggestion of two paths that never meet, does not do justice to the full complexity of Tourneur's anti-atheist argument. Such a reductive summary ignores both Castabella's role and that of the subplot.

<sup>107</sup> Richard Levin persuasively demonstrates the ways in which the sub-plot interacts with the main plot, presenting more temperate representations of the key philosophies and their implications. Richard Levin, 'The Subplot of *The Atheist's Tragedy*' in *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* (San Marino, California: Vol. 29, Issue 1 Nov 1965), pp. 17–31, p.23.

articulated by them all repeatedly, in D'Amville's case only to deny it. Their actions, or more often in Charlemont and Castabella's case, their inaction, are driven by their understanding of their own philosophies, whilst their ultimate outcomes illustrate which is 'right'. Orthodox religious views on providence are a major explicit theme of *The Atheist's Tragedy*. It sets out to illustrate and verify the workings of providence in a doctrinal manner. Tourneur sets contemporary interpretations of the writings of Machiavelli against Calvinist providential doctrine and inevitably the latter wins. The miracle which ends the play is clearly religious and supernatural in nature.

In *The Atheist's Tragedy*, providence is inexorable, and God is constantly present throughout. Unlike the characters in the later plays discussed earlier in the chapter, D'Amville's fall is clear from the outset as he explicitly rejects orthodox Christian doctrine, relying instead on his own 'reason'. Providence was not subject to human understanding and often did not operate 'rationally', rather the converse. D'Amville's antagonist is God, and in the seventeenth century there could be only one winner in that battle. Audiences could be as confident as Charlemont and Castabella, that ultimately providence would step in and punish D'Amville and reward them for their fidelity, even if only after earthly death. *The Atheist's Tragedy* represents an ideological playing out of providence as part of an exposition of providential theology. In the plays of the 1630s however, there is little or no explication of doctrine. Instead, providence is shown as something to put faith and trust in, and through this faith God

ultimately makes things right. This potentially offers reassurance to audiences that were faced with similarly testing circumstances.

Like the history plays of the 1590s discussed in chapter two and the virtuous characters in *The Atheist's Tragedy*, characters in the plays of the late 1630s make expressions of faith early on. They also reference God and his providence throughout the plays. Various words are used, often in an early scene, to establish a character's piety: heaven, stars, powers, gods, and miracles, as well as providence itself. For example, in the opening scene of *The Royal Master*, Andrugio promises to keep Riviero's presence secret, asking that:

When it leaves  
To be religious for thy safety, may it,  
By an angry flame from heaven, be turn'd to ashes! (1.1; p.105)

Like Castabella, Andrugio calls for an act of nature to be sent by God to punish wrongdoing, albeit his own rather than an assailant's. Providential outcomes in tales such as Beard's *Theatre* were often triggered by protagonists' declaring 'may God strike me dead if I did this', so the convention of an ever-listening, responsive God was well established.<sup>108</sup> In Sir John Suckling's *Aglaura*,

Thersames soliloquises:

How wisely do those Powers  
That give us happiness, order it? (1.6.7 – 8)

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<sup>108</sup> See Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*, pp. 65-115; Paul S. Seaver, *Wallington's World*, pp. 45-66; Peter Lake and Michael Questier *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, pp. 425-479. This is evident in a number of plays including for example the Queen in Peele's *Edward I* discussed in chapter two.

This obliquely acknowledges God's providence in 'Powers that give us happiness'.<sup>109</sup> Auria references the resurrection in John Ford's 1638 play *The Lady's Trial*. He likens his impending separation from Spinella to that of the body and soul before the Last Judgement, 'severed for a time [...] to join again [...] in a confirmed unity for ever'.<sup>110</sup> When we first meet Cratander, the hero of William Cartwright's 1936 play *The Royal Slave* he is reading a 'discourse o' th' Nature of the Soul'.<sup>111</sup> He reflects that true victory, can only be achieved by the deserving who fight 'out of conscience' (1.2.127) and who 'acknowledge all his strength deriv'd from 'Heav'n' which demands 'pious [...] gratitude' in return (1.2.132; 134; 133). Responding to his welcome back from war, Doria, in *The Ladies' Privilege*, likens his inability to repay their kindness to 'parched earth' which 'drinks up' the 'elemental dew' but 'cannot/ Give heaven a retribution' (1.1; p.96).<sup>112</sup> These early divine references, conventional piety though they may be, bring God into their stage worlds early on.

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<sup>109</sup> Although 'powers' is plural and God's providence singular, contemporary references to 'stars,' 'heavens', 'powers' and even 'gods' were commonly used by playwrights to refer to God and his providence in a combination of the elision of Christian and classical usage and as a convenient way to circumvent the 1606 act, as discussed elsewhere in this thesis. See for example Alexandra Walsham *Providence*.

<sup>110</sup> John Ford, *The Lady's Trial* Lisa Hopkins (ed.) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 1.1.50 - 52. All subsequent references to *Lady's Trial* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

<sup>111</sup> William Cartwright, *The Royal Slave* in G. Blakemore Evans (ed.), *The Plays and Poems of William Cartwright* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), pp. 163–253, 1.2.111. All subsequent references to *Royal Slave* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically. This play is slightly earlier than the others discussed here and positions a Christian captive in an honourable but pagan kingdom. It concludes with an executioner unaccountably paralysed, a portentous solar eclipse, and fortuitous rain extinguishing the sacrificial fire. The pagan characters all acknowledge the providential nature of these events.

<sup>112</sup> Henry Glapthorne, *The Ladies' Privilege* in R.H. Shepherd (ed.), *The Plays and Poems of Henry Glapthorne*, Vol. ii, (London: John Pearson, 1874) pp. 81–160, 1.1; p.96. All subsequent references to *Ladies' Privilege* are keyed to this edition and will be given parenthetically.

In several plays, characters demonstrate their faith by apostrophising God in times of trouble. This reflects the internalisation of God discussed in chapter one. In *The Doubtful Heir* for example, Rosania bemoans Ferdinand's broken promises using the same image of sleeping providence used earlier by the seemingly faithless Leandro:

Is perjury no sin? or can heaven be  
So busy, or asleep, such crimes of men  
Pass with impunity? (3.1; p.316)

Her reference to sleeping providence potentially makes her faith seem weak although her use of rhetorical questioning avoids open doubt. Asking, 'is perjury no sin?' anticipates the answer, 'of course it is'. Similarly, 'can heaven be [...] asleep', demands the response 'no'. In Ferdinand and Rosania's opening scene together she asserts that 'Our vows have made us one' (2.3; p.301) indicating that they are formally betrothed so in marrying Olivia Ferdinand effectively commits bigamy. Keeping faith with God was essential, as was keeping oaths made to other people and it had an immediate contemporary relevance. The first Bishops' War was concluded with an agreement that both sides would disband their armies, whilst the King would attend a meeting of the Scottish parliament and General Assembly of the Kirk. If peace and reconciliation were to be achieved, both sides needed to keep their promises. By the time of its first London performance audiences would have seen the consequences of broken promises, as neither the Covenanters nor Charles proved faithful, making this reference fortuitously timely. That characters' faith in providence is ultimately rewarded in the play therefore can help to provide reassurance to audiences.

As characters continue to refer to God throughout the plays, his presence remains, although, as with the real world, this is not always reassuring. An audience could be clear throughout *The Atheist's Tragedy* that by the end of the play God would have prevailed over D'Amville. Many plays of the late 1630s, as discussed above, are more uneasy, reflecting the prevailing sense of anxiety. Problems seem insoluble, there is often no absolute villain, or the most villainous characters remain off-stage, and everyone thinks 'right' is on their side. It is not clear until the *dénouement* whether the play is going to end tragically or not. Ultimately, only God's providential intervention can resolve the issues. This all chimes with the anxieties of outcome that audiences might be conscious of in the national social, political, and religious contexts.

Providence in plays of the late 1630s is used more discretely and less spectacularly than in *The Atheist's Tragedy*. The veracity of the doctrine is assumed and only questioned fleetingly, if at all, to highlight a villain or suggest a virtuous character's humanity. The endings rely on what modern audiences would consider coincidences – plausible if unlikely - rather than explicit supernatural interventions. Nevertheless, the persistently assumed presence of a divine power articulated within the plays, fundamental to the tragicomedies of the time, gives their endings a miraculous significance which could provide reassurance during increasingly turbulent times.

## Enacting a Providential Ending

As in *The Atheist's Tragedy*, the ultimate fate of the characters in the tragicomedies of the late 1630s lies explicitly in the hands of providence. However, there the similarity ends. These are not plays concerned with establishing a doctrinal truth and rather than the judgemental God evident in *The Atheist's Tragedy*, theirs is beneficent and reassuring. Also, except for William Cartwright's 1636 play *The Royal Slave*, the endings enacted are not explicitly miraculous.

There are several ways in which these later plays perform a providential solution. In *The Doubtful Heir* all looks lost for Ferdinand until the end of the final scene, when Alfonso reveals himself to be Rosania's father and confirms Ferdinand's identity as the true heir. The play's performance title of *Rosania, or Love's Victory* does flag a happy ending and associates that directly with Rosania. However, this *dénouement* comes as a complete surprise as the multiple reversals during the final act repeatedly undermine hope of a comic ending. Clues do exist for the religiously alert in Rosania's expressions of faith though. Sustained faith in the face of difficulties was an important characteristic in Protestantism, which God would ultimately reward. Setbacks could be perceived as a test of that faith. Rosania demonstrates her faith in the final act when she attributes Ferdinand's freedom and the revelation of his identity to the 'strong arm' of 'Heaven' (5.2; p.345), evidencing her faith in a providential solution. This appears premature when Leonario successfully takes over the city. Rosania's faith remains strong though as she reassures Olivia:



It cannot be heaven will so soon destroy  
The blessing it bestowed. (5.4; p.356)

She follows this up with a rhetorical question, which further shows her absolute faith in God's justice:

If thus you punish  
Whom you advance, who will believe your gifts  
Are more than flattery, to betray our peace? (5.4; p.356)

The idea that God would 'flatter' to 'betray' those he had favoured, with the implicit suggestion of deceitfulness, could have reassured contemporary Christian audiences that ultimately it 'cannot be'. Her faith continues to be challenged as Leonario denies Ferdinand's claim to the throne and orders his execution. However, within fifty lines, she is rewarded by Alfonso's revelations. That Alfonso is Rosania's father is also apt. Fathers had particular significance as heads of the family commonwealth and thus God's earthly representative.<sup>113</sup> His role in rewarding her faith further underlines the providential nature of the solution. Despite the anxiety, tension and potential chaos associated with conflict between essentially good people in the play, God has ensured that nothing bad results. The play rewards all the main characters' trust in providence and offers hope to off-stage audiences that through faith their own troubles might end as satisfactorily.

The subplot of *The Gentleman of Venice* is similarly resolved by character revelation when Bellaura reveals she swapped her son and the Duke's at birth. Martin Wiggins notes many plays in the final years of the theatre are resolved through a baby-swap or reappearance of an heir,

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<sup>113</sup> See Jonathan Willis, *The Reformation of the Decalogue*, pp. 72-131.

previously presumed dead. He describes such *dénouements* as a 'kind of fantasy' which politically 'recommends quietism', that is passive acceptance of the status quo.<sup>114</sup> Clearly neither option was likely in the real world but the parallel is not dependent on the form of the resolution. As I show below, characters' faith in providence enabled the 'fantasy' ending and that this provided the real application for contemporary audiences.

In *The Lost Lady* the first indication that Acanthe is not who she seems comes at the beginning of 5.1. When she asks Hermione to keep her history from Lysicles, Hermione is confused and prays:

Mysterious powers! Instruct us in the way  
You would be serv'd, for we are ignorant. (5.2.2163 - 4)

'Mysterious' and 'ignorant' remind audiences of the impenetrability of God's intention for humans and 'instruct us' that they must seek God's guidance. Together this signals a providential resolution. Its placement here associates God with the revelation that is to come. When Acanthe's identity is finally revealed all the characters assert the revelation's providential nature. Irene calls on Lysicles to 'look on this miracle' (5.2.2236) whilst Hermione and Lysicles both acknowledge providence's role. Hermione says that 'Heaven hath some further ends in this than we can pierce' (5.2.2241)<sup>115</sup>, while Lysicles, recognising her as Milesia, apostrophises the 'impenetrable powers' as discussed above. Even Acanthe, who had previously insisted that to obtain God's help it was necessary to act oneself, finally acknowledges, 'I am by

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<sup>114</sup> Martin Wiggins, *Drama and The Transfer of Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.105.

<sup>115</sup> Folio's inserted 'given' shown in the text as [given] omitted.

miracle preserv'd' (5.2.2258). Again, the tragicomic outcome is secured by providentially ascribed events.

In *The Lost Lady* providence acts independently of protagonists' plans. Acanthe's and Lysicles's active attempts to deal with tyranny nearly end in disaster. Milesia's fortuitous decision to send her maid down first and Irene's quick thinking to save 'Acanthe' can both be read as divinely inspired. Acanthe's identity was revealed because of Lysicles' poison, contrary to his intentions, and not through Acanthe's own action. Hermione's desires are satisfied by the timely promotion of Eugenio. The message of the play is that people must wait with patient faith and tyranny will be defeated by God's providence. Conversely, active resistance is shown to be preferable in *The Ladies' Privilege*. Both lovers choose obedience rather than rebellion, nearly costing Doria his life and both men their happiness. Conversely, Sabelli responded to Chrisea's tyranny actively. Disregarding his master's instruction to seek a new master, his cross-dressing and subsequent timely revelation enact the providential solution the tragicomic genre in this period requires. Doria interprets Sabelli's appearance as 'Some apparition to confirm my faith' (5.1; p.157). This recognises that his experiences have also been a test of faith, enhancing the sense that it has all been part of the providential plan.

In *The Royal Master* heaven's involvement in the solution is only evident through the person of the King, rather than being explicitly articulated as a providential solution. This exception is significant, however. Charles I believed that he was God's representative on earth. From his perspective at least, any

solution involving an anointed King inherently implied providential inspiration.<sup>116</sup>

In the play this association is reinforced by the King's frequent references to heaven. Considering what action to take in response to the proof of Montalto's perfidity, the King reminds Philoberto 'whose representative we are' (5.2; p.178), self-identifying as God's agent. He insists that though 'we may be just' it is 'mercy' which demonstrates his link with God, 'too much' of which 'can be but thought a sin on the right hand' (5.2; p.178). This reinforces Riviero's fear that the King is bewitched and he concludes that:

If, after this, Montalto shall prevail,  
Let innocence be stranger to the world,  
And heaven be afraid to punish vice. (5.2; p.178)

Like Rosania's rhetorical questions discussed above, the final line contains an absurdity – an omnipotent, perfectly virtuous, deity cannot be 'afraid to punish vice' and will not allow 'innocence' to be lost. Unlike Rosania, Riviero does not mean this ironically. His faith is less strong than hers and he feels disempowered by the forces that he perceives to be against him. That the solution lies in the hands of a king whose judgement has been poor and who has been influenced by a wicked counsellor, creates tension for the on-stage audience and may strike a topical chord for that off-stage as well. Ultimately though it becomes apparent that the King was 'resolv'd' to favour justice. He tells Theodosia he 'dare not pardon; 'twere a sin' which would do 'violence to heaven and justice' (5.2; p.183). The reference to heaven again explicitly

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<sup>116</sup> As Jonathan Willis discusses, this line of authority was widely recognised. He notes that the first of the royal collects, read at the beginning of the communion service, reminds the congregation that the monarch is 'the embodiment of divine authority', see Jonathan Willis, *The Reformation of the Decalogue*, p.87.

associates the King's justice with God's. A fully tragicomic ending, without death, is achieved through another ruler, the Duke. His timely revelation enables the King to show both mercy and justice by allowing Montalto to be banished instead of executed. The contemporary problem of the evil counsellor is removed in a providential manner which simultaneously allows the King to retain his self-image of mercy and justice. Reconciliation is achieved without loss of face through the providential action of the ruling powers. This bears resemblance to the resolution of earlier plays such as *Measure For Measure*. What distinguishes it is the characters' insistence that they are enacting God's justice. It is not my point that providential endings were necessarily unique to these plays but that the persistent attribution to providence was novel and served a particular contemporary need.

Expressions of faith are an important element in securing a providential outcome in these plays and as an indication of the ending's providential nature. In *The Lost Lady* Acanthe's final explanations highlight her belief that God's hand was involved throughout her story. Describing the feud that motivated her uncle, she explains that she had used faith to try and change his mind:

Heaven, said I, has approv'd it, and the gods  
Have chose this way to reunite our houses. (5.4.2573 - 4)

The active verbs 'approv'd' and 'chose' evidence faith in God's providence. The use of the past tense further implies it is part of a longer-term providential plan in keeping with Calvinist doctrine. Her decision to send the treacherous maid downstairs ahead of her and her uncle's decision to ensure darkness, are thus also rendered providential. The maid is appropriately providentially punished

for her treachery akin to those described by Beard and others. Milesia's otherwise wicked uncle also 'Confess'd heaven's hand was in't' (5.4.2657). Milesia concludes that 'the gods have made this trial in my sufferings' (5.4.2633), firmly linking all the play's events as part of the providential plan. The revelation of her story at the end of the play associates her early faith with the positive outcome and so offers hope to contemporary audiences that heaven is a means to achieve reconciliation between factions provided they have sufficient faith.

Everyone at the conclusion to *The Gentleman of Venice* assumes the happy resolution and reconciliations are providential. Florelli highlights Conari's 'distrust of heaven/ To bless him with an heir' (5.2.2299 – 2300), which should have caused Claudiana's 'chaster soul' (5.2.2298) to 'have been stain'd' (5.2.2299). A contrast is made between the 'white' (5.2.2300) purity of Claudiana's honesty, and Cornari's 'black' (5.2.2303) intentions, which associates the first with God and the second with hell. Conari's 'black ambition, and our lust' indicates human inability to avoid sin 'had not Providence/ Chain'd up [their] blood' (5.2.2303; 2301 – 2). God's active role in all aspects of human life is asserted, from the provision of children within marriage to controlling the sexual urge outside of it. Florelli and Claudiana spend the night 'in prayers for his conversion' (5.2.2304) emphasising the importance of faith. Providence has offset one danger, the loss of Claudiana's chastity, and Florelli believes 'some miracle' is needed 'To rescue me (a man disarm'd) from violence' (5.2.2311 - 2312). Faced with imminent death, he is piously concerned for his soul. He

confesses to the 'friar' that he has tricked Conari, hoping the friar has 'authority from heaven/ To take his fury off' (5.2.2327 – 8) and save Florelli's life. The friar is Conari in disguise. Conari's unexpected repentance is triggered by Florelli's piety, and conclusion that Claudiana's 'holy tears' (5.2.2330) were:

powerful enough to beg from heaven  
That blessing which he fondly thinks to hasten,  
With loss of his eternity. (5.2.2342 – 44)

Malipiero's ultimate repentance and reconciliation with Conari, is similarly signalled, making him into the suitable heir Conari desired. The repeated references to heaven here, and later, emphasise God's role in the outcome.

Claudiana similarly acknowledges providence's role. Like Florelli, she had had thoughts of suicide:

But providence determined better for me,  
And made me worth a stranger's piety. (5.2.2371 - 2)

Unlike Cornari, Claudiana is certain of the 'miracle' of Malipiero's letter of repentance and deems it 'a blessing to reward our penitence' as 'Heaven has a spacious charity' (5.2.2447; 2449 - 2450). Despite his own disbelief, Cornari asks the Duke to forgive Malipiero, causing Malipiero to declare Cornari 'a miracle/ Of goodness' (5.4.2707 - 8), thus also articulating God's role.<sup>117</sup> No reason is given for Malipiero's sudden repentance. Although he is threatened with hanging, there is no suggestion that remorse will relieve him and his

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<sup>117</sup> In his discussion of tragicomedies Bentley considers their application of forgiveness rather than justice is a defining feature in the Shakespearean plays he discusses. In the examples he discusses he overemphasises this, but it is valid for the later tragicomedies I discuss here. What is significant in his argument however, though he does not apply it to the drama, is his recognition of the difficulty of forgiveness for humans which in its true form is a characteristic of Christ. Characters in the plays I am discussing can achieve forgiveness, largely without punishment, precisely because their endings are explicitly divinely inspired. Eric Bentley, *Life of the Drama* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1965), pp. 330–333.

surprise that his uncle intercedes for him is clear. The repeated use of 'miracle' highlights the providential cause. This is commensurate with contemporary theology, which held that true repentance was impossible without God's grace.<sup>118</sup> The play has demonstrated to its audiences that a tyrannical ruler acting against God's laws can justifiably be resisted and that his tyranny will be providentially dealt with through faith. This may have resonated with contemporary audiences worried about the tyrannous policies of their own ruler and the best way to deal with them.

Inevitably all sides in the conflicts of the late 1630s believed themselves to be right and assumed that providence would ultimately be on their side. However, most would equally recognise that God might punish them for their sins by delaying their desired outcome. Providence was an on-going experience. For an individual it only ended with death, and for a commonwealth it went on indefinitely. The tragicomedies of the late 1630s discussed here reflect these tensions through their characters' fluctuating moral status and changing fortunes. Ultimately, they use divine providence to resolve their conflict. Plays thus offered audiences a holistic experience of providence, complete with its 'final' outcome – a God's eye view perhaps – in a manner not possible in the real world. This allowed viewers to draw comfort and reassurance if they chose to apply the lessons to their own experiences. The

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<sup>118</sup> For discussions about why sinners repent both in drama and real life see for example: David Hirst, *Tragicomedy*, p.21; Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat* pp. 130–2, 135–6, 138, 149, 155–8, 178–9; Adrian Streete, *Protestantism and Drama* pp. 101–2, 156–7; Alec Ryrie *Being Protestant* p.37; Peter Lake, 'Deeds Against Nature', pp. 274–282.



final section shows how the adaptation of the tragicomic form to incorporate providence made the genre particularly appropriate at this time.

### Tragicomedy – A Newly Providential Genre

The tragicomic genre combines the narratives of uncertainty and reassurance discussed above. In the late 1630s it was also adapted to provide explicitly providential endings. The impact of divine activity is particularly evident in Suckling's play *Aglaura*. Despite its evident popularity both at court and commercially, *Aglaura*, as its modern editor L. A. Beaurline says, 'is [not] a good play by our standard' in either form.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, the nature of the change Suckling chose to create the tragicomic ending is instructive. Key is the sense of an external providential force acting on the protagonists. As David Hirst notes the 'last act concerns itself with the "credible miracle" which is basic to the comic dénouement'.<sup>120</sup>

In the tragic ending, no-one can see any solution that is not destructive and built on a desire for revenge. Achieving justice, as the individual characters see it, is entirely in human hands, and any claim on providential intervention is immediately undermined by subsequent human actions. Zorannes plans for the King to be killed by Ariaspes and Jolas, then kills Jolas himself. These are clearly pre-planned acts, as is his decision to duel with Ariaspes over Orbella,

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<sup>119</sup> L. A. Beaurline, (ed.), 'Foreword', p.vii.

<sup>120</sup> David L. Hirst, *Tragicomedy*, pp. 20, 21. The importance of repentance for Christians and in particular villains facing death is discussed in various contexts by: Peter Lake, 'Deeds against Nature', pp. 274–281; Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, pp. 37–8; Peter Lake with Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat*; Adrian Streete, *Protestantism and Drama*, pp. 101–2.

which results in Ariaspes death. Aglaura's attack on Thersames is caused by Zorannes' failure to tell her his plan and her misinterpretation of his words of warning about the king. Subsequently when she realises her mistake she dies of a broken heart. Orbella kills Zorannes because he has killed her lover Ariaspes. She claims that he was 'kept alive by some/ Incensed Power, to punish Persia thus' (5.3.154 – 5) and believes she survived because 'Heav'n was just' (5.3.156). Her assumption of providential protection is immediately undermined by the intervention of Pasithas, who kills her in revenge for her murder of Zorannes. The tragic version thus suggests that without God's benign intervention in human affairs murderous chaos ensues.

The tragicomic ending has a different driving power. Despite Zorannes telling Aglaura they need to kill or be killed in 4.4, he simply has the King and Jolas arrested in the final act. The text offers no explanation for this, the alteration indicated by a simple change of stage direction from 'they kill the King' to the 'Guard seizeth on 'em'.<sup>121</sup> He then duels with Ariaspes over Orbella but gaining the upper hand inexplicably declines to kill him: 'I have bethought myself, there will be use/ Of thee,' (5.1.68 – 69) before sending him off under guard as well. The 'use' he suddenly conceives of never becomes apparent. The absence of explanation and lack of coherence with his earlier plans is uncomfortably contrived for a modern audience but inevitable given the circumstances of the version's composition. For contemporary audiences, however, the contrivance and artificiality would have been part of its appeal.

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<sup>121</sup> Stage direction between 5.1.24 and 5.1.25, p.83; stage direction at 5.1.25, p.98.

Foster suggests that while suspense was important for audiences of Renaissance tragicomedy, they would have been certain of a positive outcome, which led to artifice.<sup>122</sup> Contemporary audiences, seeing a play for the first time, may not have known its genre, so need not have had the certainty of outcome she refers to unless there were clues along the way. However, as has been asserted above, any clues in the plays of this period are often contradictory and so unsettling. Repeated references to God can hint that providence will ultimately intervene, but in *Aglaura* these are absent. It is the mysteriousness of Zorannes' change of heart here that signals the miraculous workings of God's providence.

The providential interpretation is reinforced by a series of fortuitous events and key characters' subsequent pious assertions about them. When Aglaura unwittingly stabs Thesames it is not fatal, and fortunately causes him to cry out. She thus realises her mistake, so does not stab him again. Zorannes arrives in time to send for a doctor and prevent Aglaura from committing suicide in remorse. His pious reference to 'the gods' defence and 'powers, whom great sins/ Do displease' (5.1.142; 145 – 6, t-c) signal God's involvement in the action. Similarly, the doctor's 'Would Heaven his mind would admit as easy cure' (5.1.244, t-c) also reminds the audience of providence's active role. Zorannes is hopeful 'it may be Heaven will give/ Our miseries some ease' (5.1.227 – 8, t-c) although 'may' indicates its contingency. Thesames' 'Thanks

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<sup>122</sup> Verna A. Foster, *The Name and Nature of Tragicomedy*, pp. 17-20. Artifice was not necessarily the negative characteristic for contemporaries that it might be for a modern audience of course.

to Heaven, and good Andrages' (5.3.25, t-c) on awakening also acknowledges God's part in his cure. Ultimately the King expresses repentance for his crimes. Passing judgement on his confederates in wickedness he limits Jolas's banishment because he interprets him as 'Heaven's instrument to save my life,' (5.3.174 – 5, t-c), acknowledging the importance of heaven in bringing about his reformation. His final line 'What miracles of preservation have we had?' (5.3.197, t-c) brings the play to its happy conclusion and makes clear providence's role.

The involvement of God through the repeated references to Heaven and its miracles provide a comforting solution to an all too relevant problem. Tyranny has been thwarted and chaos, which looked certain, has been averted. Additionally, the status quo has been maintained by the reinstatement of the newly reformed legitimate monarch. The wicked counsellors and a lecherous woman have been banished, freeing the King from their influence, and allowing him to become a good king again. Despite the King's use of 'miracles', this has not been achieved through an unnatural heavenly intervention. Individual decisions were silently adjusted without the individuals themselves shown to be making the changes consciously, as if it were planned that way. Human actions were given potency by God. This was how God's providence worked.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and The Decline of Magic*, pp. 90–2, 108.

Suckling was very loyal to the king and not particularly religious.<sup>124</sup> The role given to providence here is understated. It has a more 'taken for granted' quality than in some of the other plays discussed above. Nevertheless, it demonstrates the way in which a tragicomic ending can be salvaged from a tragic play through the involvement of providence. Susanne Langer described tragicomic plot-structures as 'traged[ies] averted' whilst Eric Bentley, arguably more aptly in the context of these later plays, used the word 'transcended'.<sup>125</sup> Characters plan extreme acts but change their minds for no clear reason, or for unconvincing reasons. The common factor is the frequent reference to Heaven and providence.

Ristine dismissively notes that the tragicomic form 'throve in response to an ever-increasing demand for the thrills, melodramatic extravagance and happy endings that it only could supply'.<sup>126</sup> As well as being an anachronistic summary, this makes no attempt to consider why the form was so appealing in the late 1630s. More usefully Gordon McMullan and Jonathan Hope suggest that:

romantic tragicomedy [...] is driven by certain forces of reconciliation and regeneration. [...] This] regeneration frequently comes in the form of a displacement of the political status quo, the regeneration of a nation away from tyranny.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> All bibliographical information comes from Tom Clayton, "Suckling, Sir John (bap. 1609, d.1641?), poet." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>125</sup> Verna A. Foster, *The Name and Nature of Tragicomedy*, p.18. Susanne Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from 'Philosophy in a New Key'* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1953), p.363 footnote 19. Langer's emphasis; Eric Bentley, *Life of the Drama*, p.319.

<sup>126</sup> Frank Humphrey Ristine, *English Tragicomedy*, p.147.

<sup>127</sup> Gordon McMullan and Jonathan Hope, (eds.), 'Introduction', p.10.

As I have argued above, such ‘reconciliation and regeneration’ and ‘displacement [...] away from tyranny’ was perceived by many to be desperately needed in the years preceding the Civil Wars.<sup>128</sup> The tragicomedies of the later 1630s repeatedly ‘reconcile’ enemies and ‘regenerate’ domestic or state commonwealths ‘away from tyranny’.

The tragicomedies of the late 1630s do not engage in significant political dialogue, and certainly not religious politics, although political issues are presented with varying levels of critique.<sup>129</sup> Foster is correct when she says that ‘the implication of providential design, or occasionally its absence, in artistic self-consciousness gives to much of Renaissance tragicomedy its special resonance.’<sup>130</sup> However, while her suggestion that this ‘weakens’ in Beaumont and Fletcher’s tragicomedies so that ‘tragicomic inevitability gives way to happy chance and the genre’s cosmic implications are replaced by more mundane concerns’ may be accurate for plays of the 1610s and 1620s, this chapter has demonstrated the expression of a ‘providential design’ is fundamental to the tragicomedies of the late 1630s.<sup>131</sup> The familial and socio-political crises that

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<sup>128</sup> Michael Neill, discussing *The Renegado*, sees a ‘new and deepened significance to the sensational turns and counter-turns of tragicomic design’ in which the application of Guarini’s ‘comic order’ might ‘express a providentialist vision running counter to the Calvinist pessimism of late Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy’ in its sympathetic representation of Catholicism. He concludes that: ‘In this context it becomes possible to see tragicomedy’s increasingly dominant place in the theatrical representation of the late 1620s and 1630s [...] as an epiphenomenon of larger tendencies in the religious politics of the time.’ Michael Neill, ‘Turn and Counterturn: Merchanting, Apostasy, and Tragicomic Form in Massinger’s *The Renegado*’ in Subha Mukherji and Raphael Lyne (eds.), *Early Modern Tragicomedy* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), pp1 54–174, p.156. This is useful in identifying the relevance of the genre at the end of the 1630s but does not fully articulate the nature of the change in the genre that occurred because of his explicit association with Catholic sympathies which is less relevant to the later plays.

<sup>129</sup> See for example, Martin Butler *Theatre and Crisis* on this.

<sup>130</sup> Verna A Foster, *The Name and Nature of Tragicomedy*, p.50.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50–1.

form the plots of these later tragicomedies were not, at that historical moment, 'mundane'. Anxiety caused by contemporary religious and political strains demanded the reassurance of a providential outcome, a God who was in control, albeit in a way that was unclear to people, rather than the blind vagaries of chance. Although the endings often seem contrived as individuals inexplicably change their intentions, motives or plans to enable the happy outcome, they are not part of a 'fantasy' as Wiggins alleged.<sup>132</sup> The plays' settings are usually recognisably contemporary and only ostensibly foreign, rather than the fantasy world of earlier pastoral tragicomedies. They use the tragicomic form to reflect acute anxiety at a seemingly insoluble conflict. Their newly explicit providential endings signal hope that everything can ultimately come right with God's help, provided everyone maintains their faith. Further, they achieve this by repeatedly undermining signs of a comic ending or highlighting the tragic potential during the plays before solving the crises in an explicitly providential manner.

## Conclusion

Providence was a key component of the tragicomedies of the late 1630s but unlike earlier plays the doctrine is assumed, not challenged, or debated.

References to God as a providential power are casual, and often used to indicate a character's changing moral status through the orthodoxy or otherwise of their Christian faith. The form of tragicomedy in this period is novel.

Expectations of a positive outcome are repeatedly undermined even into the

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<sup>132</sup> Martin Wiggins, *Drama and The Transfer of Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.105.

final act, shaking audience certainties sufficiently to ensure suspension of disbelief where necessary. This can create anxiety, albeit temporary and artificial. The plays consistently make clear that a peaceful resolution depends on providential intervention. Contemporary audiences can thus experience at least a frisson of fear, rewarded by the sigh of relief at the beneficent outcome.

The plays' instabilities tap into the anxieties of the contemporary socio-political and religious context caused by the imposition of the *Book of Common Prayer* on Scotland and the period of personal rule at home. The plays mirror this unease in several ways. Disguising the genre by undermining the hero's moral status, indicated by his relatively poor faith, emphasises a play's tragic potential. Similarly, if audiences cannot identify the virtuous from the villainous the genre becomes harder to read. Again, verbalised piety is a key indicator, but this fluctuates between characters from opposing sides, disrupting audience assumptions. In all the plays discussed, seemingly virtuous characters articulate errors of faith. Orthodoxy in faith was a contested concept for many contemporaries anyway and not a trivial issue. Any audience was likely to include members from across the religious spectrum, each relating to different nuances of expressed faith and responding differently to any lapses.<sup>133</sup> This potentially created tension in the off-stage atmosphere, adding to that being created on-stage.

These tensions were given added significance by the plays' use of contexts that parallel contemporary real-world concerns and anxieties. Tyranny

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<sup>133</sup> See for example Martin Butler *Theatre and Crisis* on the various social and religious make-up of contemporary audiences.



in a leader and poor counsel were particularly pertinent, along with the associated debate about how to respond. The predominance of tragicomedies during this period therefore seems inevitable. They reflected the uncertain and seemingly unresolvable problems dramatists, and their audiences, were experiencing, and then provided comfortable endings. By enacting God's providential role in human life, they served as a source of hope and reassurance, as well as entertainment.

Multiple studies have highlighted the contemporary focus placed on the role of providence in temporal matters by preachers in sermons, writers of ballads and pamphlets, and in less ephemeral literature.<sup>134</sup> The popularity of works such as Beard's *Theatre of God's Judgement* and *The Mirror for Magistrates* has already been discussed above, whilst the official *Homilies* and catechisms to which most of the population were exposed, regularly propounded the same message. That literate people from across the religious spectrum had an active consciousness of the role of providence in the late 1630s has also briefly been indicated in the introduction. Whilst they may not have fully understood the finer nuances of providential theology, it is likely that many in contemporary audiences would be alive to providential signals, arguably making the providential nature of tragicomic *dénouements* seem less contrived to them than they do to modern audiences. The popularity of

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<sup>134</sup> See for example Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*; Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat*; Frederick Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*. Tessa Watts discusses the interaction between print and piety in her seminal work *Cheap Print*; while Judith Maltby's, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) demonstrates the genuine support for Protestant liturgy amongst the large number of lay people she describes as 'prayer book Protestants'.

tragicomedies in the 1630s is hardly surprising then since they show the possibility of political and social reconciliation, without bloodshed, through the peaceful removal of tyranny and the restoration of fair rule. This was something which very many at the time would have been praying for.

By frequently dashing characters' hopes of a positive outcome during the play, dramatists reflect contemporaries' everyday experiences of providence. The ultimate reconciliation thus reinforces the need for constant faith, especially during difficult times, demonstrated by the protagonists. The plays provided audiences with an overview of providence's working, offering reassurance to the faithful that the same might be true in their own lives. Ultimately these plays all resolve their issues through divine intervention which all on-stage characters agree to be providential. The tragicomic genre was adapted to take advantage of contemporaries' providential world view. Repeated references to heavenly responses signal God's constant presence – both in the real world and on the stage.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis argues that we must reassess our assumptions about the secularised nature of the literary canon in early modern England. To a modern audience, for example, *King Lear* is evidently a god-less play because God fails to respond to the cries of the suffering Lear and others. However, contemporaries did not expect immediate divine intervention. This did not mean, for them, that God was absent. Far from the previously supposed absence of God from the post-Reformation stage, this thesis has demonstrated his active involvement in contemporary play worlds. By considering the role of God in early modern, not modern, terms, I have shown that although God had largely ceased to appear anthropomorphically on stage by 1580, he continued to have a presence in contemporary play worlds throughout the period to 1642. The variety of approaches taken by playwrights to include God reflected and, perhaps, anticipated Protestant doctrine as articulated by clerical divines. Playwrights used cultural associations with other supernatural beings to imply God's presence, and in doing so engaged with contemporary social, religious, and political concerns. Audiences might thus gain a clearer understanding of complex Protestant doctrine and observe how it could be applied to their own lives.

Playwrights used narrative techniques and character substitutes by other supernatural elements to represent God on their stages. These corresponded to lay and clerical interpretations of God's nature and role. Ultimately, through a change in genre convention, the actions of a God, fully internalised within the

believer, were realised entirely through character articulation. God stands alone in these plays as the sole supernatural being controlling the lives of protagonists in the play worlds, albeit sometimes represented by other beings both human and supernatural.

At the beginning of the period God appeared anthropomorphically both as a literal character and through linguistic references to his 'body' parts. God and humans shared an externally signified hierarchical relationship akin to that of individual humans of differing social status, sometimes mediated through a third character. This reflected earlier dramatizations of divine interactions. Gradually these physical manifestations of God were replaced by allegorical abstractions representing his properties and works, showing the way drama could contribute to audiences developing an understanding of Protestant doctrine. These dramatic representations of God's works and properties pre-date the explicit articulation of the same properties by leading English theological voices such as Alexander Nowell and William Perkins.<sup>1</sup> Earlier studies have considered how drama reflects and engages with changing theology. My work suggests that plays may also have anticipated these changes, by experimenting with theological interpretations practically, before they had been articulated formally in theological treatises. If dramatists such as Wager and Fulwell were using these characteristics to represent God before

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Nowell, *A catechism written in Latin by Alexander Nowell; together with the same catechism translated into English by Thomas Norton; appended is a sermon preached by Dean Nowell before Queen Elizabeth at the opening of Parliament which met January 11, 1563*. G.E. Corrie (ed.) (Cambridge: Printed at the University press for the Parker Society, 1853); William Perkins, *The Foundation of Christian Religion* (1590).

contemporary theologians had proposed them, studying early drama offers an important contribution to Reformation studies.

This thesis tracks a growing dramatic trend to internalise and individualise the relationships between the allegorical and the human play characters. Dramatists thus reflected the Reformation's changed perception of God's relationship with humans to a personal, internal experience of faith in the divine.<sup>2</sup> The plays examined in the opening chapter serve an explicitly Protestant didactic agenda, delivered by demonstrably Protestant authors, potentially helping audiences to better understand complex doctrines. The plays provide practical illustrations of how justification comes through faith, evidenced by character piety, not works. Initially they provided an external representation of a character's internal religious experience and gradually this representation became fully internalised, expressed through character articulation. The plays provided an opportunity for audiences to consider how difficult Protestant doctrine might operate in the real world. God's support and the Devil's temptations to sin are demonstrated through the allegorical characters with whom protagonists engage, showing both the role of faith in overcoming sin, resulting in salvation, and the damning consequences of poor faith. It also demonstrates for audiences how God and the Devil are an inherent part of human lives, even when they are not obviously present. I have argued that early plays' representation of God thus presented audiences with a

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<sup>2</sup> This is discussed by Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

possible pattern for understanding and thinking about God as part of their daily lives.

Once God had been internalised within their characters, playwrights experimented with different ways of representing God, in keeping with the varying context of their plays. Some plays enact explicitly God-less worlds, but many more found alternative ways to include him. A few used the opportunities for spectacle provided by the new permanent theatres to present 'miraculous' interventions explicitly attributed to God by the plays' protagonists, but most used more subtle means in keeping with contemporary Protestant doctrine. One novel approach was the use of a frame narrative in which gods rule the lives of the protagonists in the inner play world. These deities, although variously pagan or classical, are Christianised by contemporary association, their own claims, and by the articulations of the inner play characters. Their control is predominantly remote reflecting contemporary providential theology. The distancing of the gods' control over the plays' action, through a frame narrative, potentially gave audiences a bird's eye view of the way God might have an active role in their own lives. Protestant doctrine is thus reinforced and perhaps clarified. By analysing frame narratives in this way this thesis extends our understanding of the contemporary purposes of this narrative technique.

Simultaneously, plays with exotic settings and non-Christian characters also became popular. The non-British setting facilitated the expression of heterodox ideas and allowed playwrights to explore God's relationships with fortune, heaven, and the stars, substituting these for God in various ways.

Fortune was a particularly common substitute, acting variously as an agent or an antagonist of God. The Christian and non-Christian villains and heroes attribute their experiences in both orthodox and heterodox terms. In keeping with contemporary reality, non-Christians often succeed to the detriment of Christian characters. Pious Protestant statements by non-Christian heroes brought the Christian God into the play world, often reinforced by the sometimes-Christian villains' parallel reliance on Fortune. The plays thus reflect the ambiguity contemporaries may have felt for non-Christians with whom they had dealings. Whilst some of these ideas have been identified by others, this thesis pulls them together and highlights how they aided contemporary religious understanding and the dramatic representation of God.<sup>3</sup> It demonstrates how the dramatic appropriation and adaptation of classical and pagan gods, could be accommodated within Calvinist thinking, through the application of Renaissance ideas. Representations of the Christian God which were otherwise forbidden were thus facilitated.

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<sup>3</sup> Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558 – 1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) discusses attitudes of the English to Muslims and association with anti-Catholic rhetoric; Jonathan Burton, *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579 – 1624* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Rosemont Publishing and Printing Group, 2005) discusses the development and representation of a more nuanced attitude to Turkish Muslims; Lisa Hopkins 'Marlowe's Asia and the Feminization of Conquest' in Debra Johanyak and Walter S.H. Lim (eds.), *The English Renaissance, Orientalism, and the Idea of Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 115–130 and Bindu Malieckal 'As Good as Gold: India, Akbar the Great, and Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* Plays' in Debra Johanyak and Walter S.H. Lim (eds.), *The English Renaissance, Orientalism, and the Idea of Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 131–159 discuss English representation of Muslims in the context of Marlowe's plays and the attitude it suggests towards Islam and women; Anne, B. Mangum, *Reflection of Africa in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama and Poetry* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), pp. 14–18 posits a distinction between the evil Muly Mohamet as a Blackamoor and other characters such as Abdulmelec, whom she posits as 'white moors'.

By contrast, British history plays established their Christian credentials early on, even in plays in which the action is pre-Christian. These plays rely entirely on character comments to represent God. Like the Eastern plays, moral status is indicated by a character's preference for God or Fortune but in these plays, Fortune is always God's antithesis. Virtuous characters in the history plays are not immune to the dangers of denying God through calls on Fortune but always ultimately return to good faith, illustrating the Protestant doctrine of inherent human sinfulness and the need for God's help to avoid sin and have true faith. All the plays discussed from this period explicitly involve God in their play worlds. They continue the process of internalising the staging of God, as they reflect and reinforce various Protestant theologies for their audiences to observe.

The one supernatural character that consistently appears on stage throughout the period 1559 – 1642 is the Devil. But like God, the way he is represented and the role he plays undergoes changes. In the early Elizabethan plays he contributes to the didactic Protestant message. Patterns of relationships between the Devil and God are established as primarily antagonistic, whilst both demonic and divine characters articulate the Protestant messages being delivered in sermons and through the liturgy. In these early plays the Devil battles with God for the protagonists' souls and by the 1580s the appearance of the Devil on the stage could simultaneously enact the presence of God in the play world.



The physical absence of God enhanced the potential threat from a Christianised staged Devil. In keeping with Protestant doctrine, the plays' characters can only be protected from the Devil by appropriate Christian faith. Virtuous characters articulate such faith and are presumed to be amongst the elect. Equally, the blasphemy, and subsequent repentance, of witches and magicians who dabbled with the Devil bring the threat of damnation close. Repentance speeches, incorporating explicit references to Christ's passion, with the physical presence of a Christianised Devil or devils, thus help to remind audiences of the simultaneous, internalised presence of God, controlling the Devil's power and protecting the virtuous characters.

As with plays involving Fortune, virtuous characters in plays with the Devil do not consistently show good faith, resulting in potentially dire consequences for them. This reflects the need for God's help that Calvinists insisted upon and demonstrates God's work in action. The involvement of the Devil with the implied presence of God helped plays provide a context for, and working examples of, the theology delivered to audiences in church and at sermons. It gave audiences the opportunity to observe God in action through the activities and failures of the Devil and apply this to their own lives should they choose.

These dramatizations of an internalised God, realised by the appearance of the Devil or reference to Fortune, continued throughout the period of study to varying degrees with limited alteration. At the end of the 1630s however, as social, political, and religious tensions increased, a new approach to

representing God on stage developed. For some contemporaries the King's position was ordained by God and thus sacrosanct and yet they also felt his rule was erroneous, even tyrannous. This created a sense of instability and tension reflected in late-1630s tragicomedies. These plays' plots reflect contemporary problems and protagonists experience similar uncertainties about the means of resolution. Lead characters' moral status is rendered uncertain through their fluctuating faith, effectively disguising the plays' genre. Characters are put in insoluble positions with no clear villain or hero. Expectations of a positive outcome are repeatedly undermined until the final scene. Ultimately solutions are contrived through a series of coincidences or unlikely outcomes which are explicitly acknowledged as providential by all. The articulations of faith throughout the plays taken together with their providential endings ensure God's presence hangs over the play but in a manner that is more casual than the explicitly doctrinal articulations of earlier drama. This casualness gives the religious element a reassuring, taken-for-granted, quality and implies that, despite serious liturgical differences, everyone could coalesce around the presence of a providential God.

Ultimately conflict in these plays is resolved using the same coincidence or contrivance typical of earlier tragicomedies. Audiences might always have read this as providential, but new to the genre is the insistence by all the plays' characters that it is a providential solution. As well as demonstrating a Protestant understanding of God's providence in action, the plays of the late 1630s potentially helped people deal with the difficulties of the contemporary

context. The plays demonstrate that ultimately providence will deliver a peaceful solution to seemingly intransigent problems provided those involved have enough faith.

I do not suggest that everyone consciously recognised God's presence within the plays they saw, unlike the anthropomorphic God of earlier drama. Some probably did but for others it perhaps simply reflected 'how the world worked'. Except for *The Atheist's Tragedy*, none of the plays I discuss in the final three chapters have explicit religious didacticism at their heart. They ostensibly focus on other contemporary issues such as social and political satire, and international and domestic relationships. Highlighting God's implicit role in these plays offers a clearer understanding of how contemporaries might have rationalised these other issues. Hence, we can gain an enhanced insight into the workings of the socio-political environment from a contemporary point of view. Identifying the 'hidden' God within drama helps us to better understand the ubiquity of God in contemporary life.

The plays I have explored in the opening chapter were explicitly didactic, written by Protestant preachers. This is likely not the case for most of the later plays, although often we have no specific information regarding the playwrights' faith and sometimes, we do not know who the playwrights were. Nevertheless, their plays offer audiences the opportunity to further their understanding of their own faith by observation and application, whether the dramatists intended this or not. Thus, the plays provide a less rigorous and less restrictive model of theological praxis than other media with which audiences might have engaged

such as sermons, pamphlets, and ballads. Of course, the meanings to be derived from a play are closely linked to the performance choices made. Our understanding of the role of God in these plays would be enhanced by further analysis of the plays' performance possibilities.

The dramatic representation of God then, was continuous over the period but varied substantially in form, reflecting changing contemporary interests and needs. Sometimes these different forms were driven by dramatic fashion, such as the interest in the exotic or in magic caused by the success of plays like *Tamburlaine* and *Dr Faustus*. At others, external factors, such as the social, political, and religious tensions of the late 1630s, influenced dramatists' representation of God. But while these factors affected the contexts in which God was portrayed, he was always shown as engaged and participative, variously illustrating both Calvinist theology and lay understandings of the divine. Overall, despite the different forms of presentation, what stands out is the continuity of the fact of the representation of God in one way or another, across changing dramatic forms from moralities and cycle plays to the plays of the pre-revolutionary period. It suggests that more may be gained in future by considering the corpus holistically across genres and time periods to identify continuities alongside differences.

This thesis contributes to our understanding of the long English Reformation and to contemporary audience studies. It demonstrates how plays both reflected and participated in the drawn-out process of Protestantisation of the masses. It offers a practical way into a religious habit of thought which

many modern scholars find hard to conceive. Faith for many in the second half of the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries was not an abstract philosophy but a practical part of, and guide to, life. God's role in human affairs was seen to be real and, sometimes, immediate. Supernatural elements interacted as parts of a whole divine creation. Recognising God's presence in contemporary plays allows us to see how reformed faith might be applied and lived by lay folk, beyond the more fervent or active faithful, whose religious lives are so usefully represented in their spiritual autobiographies. Similarly, it suggests how audiences might bring their faith to engage with the play and enhance its meaning, or equally, suggests ways in which the play might encourage such engagement. By considering the changing representation of God the thesis increases our understanding of both the contemporary application of the Second Commandment and the development of Protestantism more generally, thus contributing to Reformation studies. The changes to the tragicomic genre I identify makes a direct contribution to genre theory, and more broadly helps us to understand the popularity of these plays, which identifies the urgent need for further study of these currently neglected plays.

Rather than applying a modern construct of the divine, I have identified God within the plays in early modern terms and contexts. In this way we can better understand the post-Reformation development of beliefs about God and how the post-Reformation God was deemed to operate in people's lives. He was the central part of a complex arrangement of other supernatural beings and

activities. While these beings all had their own discrete 'lives', they were fully dependent upon God and operated as part of a unified system. It is important that both historians and literary scholars are cognisant of the holistic nature of supernatural activity to maximise the contribution these plays can make to our understanding of the period in which they were first performed.

Finally, this thesis contributes to our understanding of the development of Protestant beliefs, distinct from formal theology, during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It extends the work of scholars such as Alexandra Walsham, on experimental providentialism.<sup>4</sup> The practical beliefs of the most pious contemporaries have been the focus of much attention by virtue of the detailed spiritual diaries they have left behind and other sources.<sup>5</sup> Here I have considered how drama may have helped less spiritually driven lay folk apply this theology to their everyday lives. This silent majority's faith has been given a small voice and the hidden God of the stage is newly revealed.

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<sup>4</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> See for example, Paul S. Seaver, *Wallington's World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-century London* (London: Methuen, 1985); Effie Botonaki, 'Seventeenth Century English Women's Spiritual Diaries: Self-examination, Covenanting, and Account Keeping' in *Sixteenth-century Journal* Vol. 30, no. 1 (Spring 1999), p.3 – 21; Retka M. Warnicke, 'Lady Mildmay's Journal: A Study in Autobiography and Meditation in Reformation England' in *Sixteenth-century Journal* Vol. 20, no. 1 (Spring 1989), p.55 – 68; Kate Narveson, *Bible Readers and Lay Writers in Early Modern England: Gender and Self-definition in an Emergent Writing Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant*.

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