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HEATHER HILL-VASQUEZ

The Possibilities of Performance: A Reformation Sponsorship for the Digby Conversion of Saint Paul

While the main text of the manuscript of the Conversion of Saint Paul dates to approximately 1500, the condition of the manuscript and a number of scribal tinkering with the main text suggest that the play enjoyed continued attention and use throughout the sixteenth century: not only is the cover sheet of the manuscript (f 37) rather worn and dirty, but two distinct creases or folds in the manuscript indicate that it was carried around, perhaps folded into pockets. For Donald Baker, these manuscript details demonstrate a highly versatile play with a long performance life, adaptable to different performance situations. These details can also point to the possibility of the play suiting alternative religious sensibilities – a possibility supported by the probable performance of the Conversion (along with the Digby Mary Magdalene) in Chelmsford in 1562. While the manu-
script of the Digby Conversion predates the Reformation and clearly must have been originally composed and produced to suit Catholic sensibilities, I would propose that it also could be performed to suit an alternative theology. As records have demonstrated, saint plays seem to have been highly popular, perhaps accounting for the most common and numerous of all of the vernacular religious plays in medieval England. In the wake of the Reformation's wholesale destruction of the genre, the sole survival of the Digby Conversion and its companion saint play, the Digby Mary Magdalene, suggests that these two plays may well have been deemed salvageable, if not eminently useful, to the new religion.

The thematic foundation of the Conversion of Saint Paul is, of course, the act of conversion—of Paul's recognition of his spiritual ignorance and his transformation from persecutor to Disciple. As a fawning and eager agent of the evil temple priests, Caiphas and Anna, Paul undergoes his change while journeying to Damascus to root out the followers of Christ. Gaining a new spiritual understanding, he converts from the old faith (of the Old Testament) to the new faith (of the New Testament). In his 1527–8 The Obedience of a Christian Man, William Tyndale points specifically to Paul's conversion: 'if any may have resisted ignorantly, as Paul did, let him look on the truth which Paul wrote after he came to knowledge.' Echoing Tyndale's admiration, John Bale identified his own cause and troubles with those of Paul. Viewed, then, with the right proclivities, Paul's conversion, along with the struggles between old and new faiths portrayed in the Conversion, could become, for some reformists, divinely sanctioned prefigurations of their own activities and theological beliefs. Likewise, the play contains an audience guide figure, Poeta, whose conflicting treatment of play, performance, and audience (especially seen in relation to the play's enigmatic audience processional), can be interpreted as demonstrating different theological attitudes regarding the proper use of the play and the proper role of its audience. Re-seen as a play whose true religious allegiance has been obscured by the incorrect theology and performance mishandling of the old and corrupt faith, the Conversion of Saint Paul can, in effect, endorse the Reformation and the new faith. Late in its performance history, through a reinterpretation of its meaning, message and production style that required little textual revision, the play's versatility and adaptability may have admitted performances that could support alternative theologies. In the hands of a shrewd reformist sponsor, the Conversion can become an effective proto-Reformist play, undergoing and demonstrating a process of change from the old to the new faith and capable of converting Catholic spectators to a different theology from within their own familiar tradition of the religious drama. Undergoing more than a thematic reinterpretation, such a reformist use of the play could also involve critiquing a performance style aligned with the earlier faith and its dramatic tradition and replacing it with a style more in keeping with Protestant notions of divine revelation and scriptural authority.

Specifically, the play's interpolated devil scene can serve to connect the play's message of religious conversion to contemporary reformist ideas and activities. Added twenty to thirty (or possibly even fifty) years after the main text of the play was composed and therefore corresponding roughly to the date of Tyndale's Obedience, the scene seems to have been carefully crafted and deliberately added. As Baker asserts, 'the Belial scene is not a mere thoughtless attachment to tart up the play; it takes its cue from the prayers
of the two priests, Caiphas and Anna, to their pagan gods. It ... make[s] a good addition to the new play, attributing further motives to the scheming of the priests ... and illustrating the sins against which the converted Paul is to preach." In addition, to a reformist eager to re-see and reveal the 'real' theological meaning of the Conversion, the added devil scene cements the association between the endeavors of Caiphas and Anna and those of Satan's ranks; just as the temple priests lament the loss of Paul to the new faith, so do Belial and Mercury. When Belial names them 'my prelats, Caiphas and Anna,'¹² he suggests a parallel between Catholic religious authorities and diabolical forces that characterized the thinking of a number of Reformation advocates and Protestant sympathizers who connected the overturning of Old Testament religion with the overturning of Catholicism. Sir Richard Morison, for example, in A discourse touching the reformation of the lawes of England, a text dating from around 1542 but possibly earlier, associates the Catholic clergy with Old Testament religious figures, paralleling pope and Pharaoh, Henry and Moses, and declares the necessity of a programmatic thematic attack upon 'the bysshopp of Rome, who provoked and forced us to commytt suche Idolatrie and impiete as thother pharo did never more to the Hebreys.'¹³ Likewise, in Lewis Wager's Protestant rendition of the only other extant Middle English saint play, the allegorical figure Infidelitie declares that

Infidelitie for divers respectes hath names divers,  
Of the which some of them to you I purpose to rehearse.  
With bishops, priests, scribes, seniors and pharisies. (383–5).¹⁴

And, in John Bale's King Johan, Treason, a representative of the Catholic clergy, directly associates his religious treachery with the very temple priests portrayed in the Conversion:

We selle our maker so sone as we have hym made,  
And as for preachynge we meddle not with that trade  
Least Annas, Caiphas, and the lawers shulde us blame.¹⁵

The interpolated devil scene, then, helps to suggest a thematic reinterpretation of the Conversion – one which conceives of it and the Saint Paul story as a symbolic prefiguration of the new faith's superiority to and triumph over the old.¹⁶

The connection between the diabolical machinations of the Old Testament religious authorities in the Conversion and the contemporary Catholic clergy becomes especially pronounced if the former were clad in the leftover vestments of the latter. Bale and other authors of Reformation polemic seem to have added a visual edge to their critique and ridicule of the Catholic clergy by using such vestments as costumes in their plays. As Peter Happé has noted, 'There is [in King Johan] extensive use of clerical and monastic garb, most of it with polemical intent. Possibly in the years of the Dissolution it was relatively easy to find unwanted ecclesiastical clothing, and Bale is adept at suggesting the tawdriness and staginess of Catholic rituals by employing it.'¹⁷ Despite Elizabeth's Act of Uniformity in the middle years of the sixteenth century, which required clergy to use and wear the 'outward and visible remnants of the old religion,'¹⁸ clergymen often
refused. Churches sold off their garments and playing companies came into a windfall of costume materials. In 1536, for example, Cromwell took possession of certain monastic goods that seem to have fallen into the hands of Bale and his players. If the Conversion was one of the plays staged in 1562 at Chelmsford, as John Coldewey's careful scrutiny of the dramatic records suggests, certainly the playing wardrobe, made from discarded clerical garments as described in the records, was used in its production. The symbolic usefulness of such garments as costumes for Caiphas and Anna and perhaps for the devils in the added scene may well have suggested itself to a reformation production, enhancing the damning associations between Catholic clergy and corrupt Old Testament figures. Perhaps Paul, too, in the 'pre-conversion' scenes of the play wore similar attire; the stage direction immediately preceding the converted Paul's sermon, 'Here aperyth Saul in hys dyscyplys weye ...', communicates a decided costume change which can, perhaps, visually indicate his literal and spiritual throwing off of Old Testament 'popish' garb for his true 'dyscyplys weye.'

One small interpolated scene, therefore, can encourage interpretive alterations to the play that extend beyond the scene's boundaries. While the play's contents are not textually altered, dressing certain players in vestments can suggest a connection between diabolical forces and Catholic clergy while endorsing religious reform. The religion of Caiphas and Anna, of the Old Testament—and, as the added scene makes clear, of the Devil—is that from which Paul tellingly converts. Moreover, the use of Catholic vestments in a play can also represent what the reformists conceived of as the overly-elaborate, spectacularly indulgent, and ultimately dangerous nature of Catholic belief and ritual. More than a stylistic concern for Protestantism's advocates, the elaborateness of the Catholic clergy's attire becomes exemplary of a larger process of spiritual beguilement. In his 1527 Parable of the Wicked Mammon, Tyndale asserts:

Though seest how Christ rebuketh the scribe and Pharisees in the gospel, (which were very Antichrists,) saying: 'Woe be to you, Pharisees! ... ye pray long prayers under a colour; ye shut up the kingdom of heaven, and suffer not them that would to enter in; ye have taken away the key of knowledge; ye have made men break God's commandments with your traditions; ye beguile the people with hypocrisy and such like; which things all our prelates do, but have yet gotten them new names, and other garments and weeds, and are other wise disguised. There is difference in the names between a pope, a cardinal, a bishop, and so forth, and to say a scribe, a Pharisee, a senior, and so forth; but the thing is all one.'

As Tyndale describes, the corrupt faith's clergy not only disguise themselves by their 'new names, garments and weeds' though they are really only contemporary incarnations of Old Testament religious figures, but they also actively mislead people from spiritual truth through 'long prayers with a colour'; they keep people from heaven by hiding away knowledge. Catholicism obscures religious truth and misleads people with its elaborate, unnecessary and dangerous trappings—its 'traditions' and ceremonies both visual and verbal. 'Help[ing] to dispel the notion that the Reformation from the beginning looked disfavor-
ably upon spectacula," Paul White comments upon the reformists' use of Catholic clerical attire, 'stunning visual puns' and other spectacular scenes not only to 'evoke laughter' but also to 'satirize' the tropological significance which Catholicism ascribes to visual images. Instead, in the minds of many early reformers 'the images need[ed] to be presented in order to be literally or ritualistically destroyed' so playwrights such as Bale often 'use[d] an image to make a point about the abuse of images.' Hence, in the play's interpolated scene, it is appropriate that Belyall, the diabolical agent of Satan and the overseer of Paul's original superiors, Caiphas and Anna, declare his own machinations and beguilements of 'Mans mynd':

Ho! Thus as a god most hye in magestye  
I rayne and I rule over creaturys humayne.  
Wyth soverayne sewte sowte to ys my deyte;  
Mans mynd ys applicant as I lyst to ordeyne.

A vestment-clad Belyall and his assertions, contained in the only major textual revision to the Conversion, can serve to link extravagant garments, spectacles, and images with the faith of the old Testament and Catholicism while suggesting that these diabolical religions enact a program of purposeful spiritual beguilement. Viewed in this way, then, the spectacular nature of the interpolated scene with its possibly vestment-clad devils can serve as negative example of what the converted Paul and the remainder of the play itself can be seen to reject: uncontrolled, irreverent horse-play that encourages a kind of audience role and spiritual stance unsuitable to the reformed faith. Like the corrupt Caiphas and Anna and their reincarnations in the present day Catholic clergy, Belyall and Mercury mislead the audience spiritually, making a game of religion. The interpolated devil scene therefore can be portrayed as beguiling trap that must be clarified and overturned in the Conversion by the reasonable logic of the converted Paul and the Holy Scriptures. From this perspective, the Conversion becomes an iconoclastic play, reforming its audience's style of faith and worship. While the addition of the devil scene may certainly have been a response to an actor or actors' particularly strong 'deviling' abilities, it may be nearly as possible to consider it a useful scene for the reformists, enabling them to convert a formerly Catholic play into one of 'those plaies,' which Sir Richard Morison declares in his Discourse to be necessary because they 'declare lyvely before the peoples eies the abhomynation and wickednes of the bisshop of Rome, monkes, freers, nonnes, and suche like.'

Like the elaborate dress and disguisings of the Catholic clergy and their prayers and ceremonies, the drama of the earlier faith was also considered misleading, for it engaged performers and audience members alike in a process that obscured religious truths. Much of the outlawed faith's dramatic tradition was destroyed or lost during the Reformation, and the genre that seems to have suffered most was the saint play. Yet, as ecclesiastical garments were occasionally used for polemical purposes, so too did Reformation advocates occasionally find it useful to revise a drama. Reworking visual spectacles and dramatic forms already familiar to the country's Catholics, the reformists attempted to convert people by convincing them that the true faith, once delivered from the evil and misleading
trappings of Catholicism, was near at hand, already present even and ready to be revealed in the very religious dramas associated with the new 'popist' faith. Grounded in notions of revelation and reform, such a program of reinterpretation can transform the *Conversion* into a proto-reformist play. Aided by the symbolic use of Catholic vestments, this alternative theological interpretation of the play reveals that the true meaning and message of Paul's conversion have been obscured by the practices of the older faith enacted by the play's earlier, misleading performance style. As the play undergoes thematic reinterpretation, then, so too does it undergo stylistic critique in which an alternative performance is publicized and dismissed in order to reveal the correct form for communicating and receiving religious truths. Indeed, the reinterpretation of the Paul story provides precedent and support for this process: as Paul converted to the new faith by realizing and purging the excesses and ills of his previous religion, so too must the adherents of the new faith reveal and remove the present ills and excesses of Catholicism found in the *Conversion* (and in other remnants of the earlier faith) in order to demonstrate the true faith's form and the correct practice of worship.

The devil scene added to the *Conversion* therefore suggests that the play can be performed to suit both a thematic reinterpretation as well as a stylistic reinterpretation of the Saint Paul story. Not only can Paul's religious awakening be interpreted as a proto-conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism, but the play that details this change seems also to undergo a stylistic conversion which suggests a different performance style and a different spiritual stance for its audience. A highly demonstrative, physical, and noisy display that would draw upon all of the human senses, the additional devil scene can demonstrate what for Protestant sensibilities was the earlier faith's use of the drama at its worst: a loose and uncontrolled event whose method and meaning remain open, enabling diabolic forces to determine the outcome. Similarly, Bale portrays Catholic rituals as mere engaging entertainments resulting in a disorderly confusion of the sacred and the mundane: 'To wynne the peple,' Dissymulacyon says, 'I appoynt yche man his place'

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Sum to syng Latyn, and sum to duchke at grace;
Sum to go mummyng, and sum to beare the cross;
Sum to stowpe downeward, as ther heades ware stopt with mosse;
Sum rede the epistle and gospell at hygh masse;
Sum syng at the lectorne with long eares lyke an asse.
The pawment of the Chyrche the aunchent faders tredes,
Sumtyme with a portas, sumtyme wih a payre of bedes;
And this exedyngly drawth peple to devoycyone,
Specyally what they do se so good relygeon.
Than have we imagys of Seynt Spryte and Seynt Sayver:
Moche is the sekynge of them to gett ther faver;
Yong whomen berfote and olde men seke them breechles.
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In Bale's account, such a confusion of worship, entertainment, spectacle, and devotion precluded true spiritual experience founded on direct, revelatory reception of truth. This reception he saw the Catholic clergy as forever corrupting: 'the clergy wroght by practye /
and left the scriptur for menns ymagynacyons." Consistently remarking on the misuse of human capacities and the danger of undefined involvement in ritual, both Bale and Tyndale seem to describe and critique the impetus behind the earlier religious drama's participatory style—a style which conflicted with the reformists' emphasis upon scriptural authority, fixity, and clarity in the dissemination of information to the people. Tyndale asserts that these rituals and ceremonies 'maketh the people... think that they have done abundantly enough for God... if they be present once in a day at such mumming.' For Tyndale, the ritual focused on spectacle and upon the mere attendance and participation of the people, preventing them from receiving true knowledge of God and his Word.

Not only, then, has the added scene connected the evil temple priests with diabolical forces, but the devils exemplify the very sins that are the topic of the converted Paul's sermon and that seem to characterize a style of performance that at least some reformists found useful to critique, overturn, and replace with a different form of practicing religious belief. Here, too, the influence of the added scene can be viewed as extending beyond its boundaries, influencing the message and effect of Paul's sermon. That sermon can therefore become a lesson with literal examples, an admonishment that purges the audience of the production style and sensibility in which they have just participated—a style and sensibility related to what Tyndale called 'persuasions of worldly wisdom,' 'blind ceremonies [and] superstitiousness of disguised hypocrisy.' Bale, furthermore, suggested that the 'papist' religion encouraged practices that hindered and obscured truth by encouraging too much of the human and mundane: 'In the place of Christe [they] have sett supersticyons;/ For preachynges, ceremonyes, for Gods wurde, mennys tradicyons' and, according to Tyndale, the converted Paul himself knew the dangers of 'worldly wisdom' and 'blind ceremonies':

"Crieth he [Paul] to God to augment their knowledge; that they should be no more children, wavering with every wind of doctrine; but would vouchsafe to make them full men in Christ, and in the understanding of the mysteries or secrets of Christ, so that it would not be possible for any man to deceive them with any enticing reasons of worldly wisdom, or to beguile them with blind ceremonies, or to lead them out of the way with superstitiousness."

Many of Tyndale's references to Paul, including this one, could easily be specific descriptions of Paul's actions and attitudes in the Conversion. In fact, Tyndale's description of Paul's battle against 'worldly wisdom' can provide a foundation for Paul's attack upon the dangers of the human senses in his sermon.

Paul's sermon, then, delivers a strong corrective regarding proper and improper styles of communication and reception—a lesson easily intertwined with a reformist reading of the play's emphasis upon textuality as a warning regarding the dangers of the drama itself as source and means of spiritual understanding. The audience, having watched Paul's rather dramatic conversion, becomes the inadvertent congregation for a sermon on appropriate spiritual behavior—behavior requiring careful control over the main means..."
by which humans receive information and by which they would participate in a religious drama:

Stabyll your syghtys, and look ye not stunt,
For of a sertaynte I know at a brunt,
'Oculus est nuncius peccati—'
That the Icy ys ever the messenger of foly. 42

Paul's aural message here, as well as the insertion of a sermon in the middle of a performance, can suppress the audience's visual participation, reinforcing the reformists' dislike of visual spectacle. Taking a cue from the interpolated devil scene which 'illustrat[es] the sins against which the converted Paul is to preach,' 43 both the sermon's presence and its theme can be seen as a warning to the audience to modify their behavior. Morison comments on a theological conflict for the reformists between visual and aural capabilities. 'Into the commen people,' he concedes, 'thynges sooner enter by the eies, then by the eares: remembryng more better that they see then that they heere.' 44 The loss of sight that accompanies Paul's conversion moreover can be interpreted as a reminder of the dangers of this human faculty. Tyndale, in fact, specifically quotes Paul on this conflict of ear versus eye: "Faith," saith he [Paul], Rom x., "cometh by hearing, and hearing cometh by the word of God." 45 The nine direct scriptural references in Paul's sermon and his emphasis upon the role of the Word and its textual authority in and over the spiritual life also suggest an alternative reception role for the play's audience. Paul requests, 'Good Lord, gyf us grace to understand and persever, / Thys wurd, as thou bydyst, to fulfyll ever' and also 'assent[s] and fully certify[s] / In text to tell 'the trw entencyon.' 46

Paul can be seen to guide the audience away from what the reformists saw as the confused and misleading rituals of the earlier Church. He has even undertaken the very practice in which, before his conversion, he condemningly accused the disciples of engaging: 'For they go about[y]te to preche and gyff exemplis' (27). 47 Now, however, he can be viewed as having taken up a practice that will be condoned and celebrated by the new English church.

Having condemned the dangers of human sight, Paul then may lead the audience away from reciprocal involvement in the performance with his description of the lasciviousness which accompanies human speech:

But spare your speche, and spek nott theron:
'Ex habundancia cordis os loquitur,'
Who movyth yt oft, chastyte lovyth non;
Of the hartys habundans, the tunge makyth locucyon.
What many[s] mynde ys laboryd, therof yt spekyth –
That ys of suernes, as Holy Scryptur tretyth. 48

Stabling the sight and sparing the speech, in short, relate directly to the role of the audience. Paul cautions against the misuse of both faculties — the very tools used by humans to communicate and respond. Paul can therefore apparently endorse a less active recep-
tion role that perhaps privileges silent listening. Having shed the extravagant garb and the evil disguisings and excesses of the old faith, the converted Paul can seemingly endorse and embody the new faith, appearing 'in his disciples were....' While a Catholic audience might have seen themselves as active participants in Paul's conversion, engaged in revealing its meaning for past and present Christians, in a reformist reinterpretation Paul's conversion and his garment change can echo Tyndale's association of Catholic clerical attire with the evil, excess, and beguilement of that faith: Paul's change of clothes and his sermon indicate a decided shift in religious faith and spiritual attitude. When Tyndale says that Paul 'commandeth to labour for knowledge, understanding, and feeling; and to beware of superstition, and persuasions of worldly wisdom, philosophy, and of hypocrisy and ceremonies, and of all manner disguising, and to walk in the plain and open truth,' he almost seems to be directly describing the message and form of Paul's sermon in the *Conversion*.

Paul, moreover, is not alone in addressing the audience regarding appropriate spiritual behavior. The play's Poeta figure also seems aware of a need to change or correct the play's performance and meaning and to guide the audience to its proper role in response to this. He delivers self-conscious, almost hesitant, audience addresses that indicate that the play and its performance can proceed only cautiously and under careful and authoritative supervision. In two of his addresses, he refers specifically to a process of 'correction' to which he, his players, and all those involved with the performance are being submitted, although who is in charge of this process remains unclear:

Honorable frendys, bescheching yow of lycens
To procece owur processe, we may under your correccyon
The conversyon of Seynt Paule, as the Byble gyf experyens.
Whoo lyst to rede the booke *Actum Appostolorum*,
Ther shall he have the very notycyon;
But, as we can, we shall us redres,
Brefly, wyth yowur favour, begynynge owur proces.

Thus we comyte yow all to the Trynyte,
Conkludyng this stacyon as we can or may,
Under the correccyon of them that letteryd be;
Howbeyt unable as I dare speke or say,
The compiler hereof should translat veray
So holy a story, but wyth favorable correccyon
Of my honorable masters, of ther benygne supplexion.

As these speeches indicate, there is clearly some confusion both about who controls this 'correction' and about what such an act entails. Poeta, in fact, seems to refer alternately to two different types of 'correction.' In his first speech, he grants the honor of 'correction' to the audience as a whole — all those 'honorale frendys' gathered for performance — yet by the middle of the play both the epithet and the authority to correct the play and its performance have shifted to 'them that letteryd be' — the 'honorale masters' without
whose aid the current 'compyler' of the Conversion would not have been able to 'translat veray / So holy a story.' So, while in his opening address the '[h]onorable frendys' – 'thys wyshyful audyens' – enabled the performance, seemingly energizing its momentum, later in the play Poeta and company seem barely able to move or speak without the 'correction' and authorization of his 'masters' ('Conkludyng this stacyonaswe can or may, / Under the correccyon of them that letteryd be' is a clear reference to some group separate from the main audience). These two speeches thus seem to display conflicting attitudes regarding the locus of the authority, interpretation, and meaning of the play, as well as the process and progress of its performance. Poeta and his play, in short, seem torn between two different approaches to and uses of the drama. On the one hand, Poeta may be simply engaging his audience in the intricacies of the play's story and enactment, referring to the difficulty of the 'compeyler' in bringing past events into the present day experiences of his audience and therefore calling upon them as necessary participants in the process. On the other hand, his emphasis on scriptural authority, his references to a distinct group of elite overseers outside and separate from the enactment of performance, and his own distanced stance from the audience suggest an alternative use of the play, one that might be more preferable to a reformed audience.

A similar conflict emerges between Poeta's confident authorization of the audience and the 'processe' itself and his ongoing concessions to the authority of specific Bible passages. As his opening address concludes, the Conversion becomes only a fair substitute for the 'very notycyon' found in the 'Actum Appostolorum,' and Poeta's tone becomes strikingly less confident: 'But, as we can, we shall us redres.' Later, he will refer directly and authoritatively to the performance – 'Thus Saul ys convertyd, as ye se expres' – only to assert again the preeminence of Holy Scripture:

After his conversyon never mutable, but styll insue
The lawys of God to teche ever more and more,
As Holy Scrypture tellyth whoso lyst to loke therfore.

Furthermore, while the Bible is held up as the only source of truth, that truth (as Poeta next indicates) can be understood and communicated only by a few learned elite who, it seems, follow in the converted Paul's path and have received his endorsement as the 'never mutable' teachers of 'the lawys of God.' Their 'correcycyon' process, with its adherence to scripture, text, and explication by a few choice 'masters,' suggests an alternative to the earlier audience, performance-based 'correccyon.' One correction method, in fact, can even been seen to be in the 'processe' of correcting the other, evoking its characteristics only to demonstrate its inferiority and to place it 'under the correccyon of them that letteryd be.' Like Paul himself, play, performance, and audience are also the objects of conversion, though they emerge from the process with strikingly less authority.

Poeta, then, can be viewed as a subtly conflicted character who echoes a spiritual use of the drama – a use that brought play and audience into close and active contact, and yet one who also seems to struggle against this performance style with a theological reformulation of communication and reception. While he may initially reflect robust enthusiasm for the 'processe' itself, he can be seen also to bow to a distinctly separate group of
authorities whose different 'correccyon' methods, far removed from such an interactive and participatory process, instead focus on explicating and revealing ineffable scriptural truth or that which may hinder the revelation of this truth. Poeta may thus indicate the conflict between two performance styles, hinting at alternative interpretations and uses of the same dramatic text. These uses include the possibility of one style maintaining the other in order to correct it within and through the play's performance.

One of the play's most problematic elements, its apparent audience processional, further demonstrates the possibility of these alternative uses. When seen as a remnant from the play's medieval performance past, the audience involvement required by the processional becomes a textual relic of the kind of participatory, engaging style that the reformists sought to critique and overturn. The processional of the *Conversion* can engage its audience as Paul's contemporaries by conflating past and present time and space. The extant text of the *Conversion* seems to have come as close as it can to offering alternatives to the audience-engaging processional without entirely eliminating it. While, certainly, the 'si placet' direction added to the right margin of the main text (f 39v), may reveal, once again, the play's ability to adapt to different 'playing conditions,' the direction also suggests that the sponsor of the play may simply do away with involving the audience directly in the action while, nevertheless, leaving the processional intact.

Poeta's paradoxical endorsement and critique of the processional seems also to suit these conflicting yet strangely conflated attitudes towards the procession and the audience's role in relation to it:

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Besechyng thys audyens to folow and succede
Wyth all your delygens this general processyon;
To understand this matter, wo lyst to rede
The Holy Bybyll for the better spede,
There shall he have the perfyth intellygens ...
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'This matter' to which Poeta refers remains enigmatic. While on the one hand Poeta seems to use the Bible to endorse 'this general procession' which stands grammatically in direct apposition to 'this matter' on the other he seems to be replacing the play's procession and performance with a reading of the Biblical account. Poeta can be seen alternately to be endorsing the 'perfyth intellygens' to be gained from participation in the processional, or critiquing it and replacing it with the 'perfyth intellygens' to be found only in scripture. Poeta's entreaties regarding the processional seem, at once, as in John Marshall's description of a 1986 performance of the *Conversion*, capable of making an audience 'literally followers of Saul,' encouraged by 'the Poet's instructions and Saul's journey in the most natural commingling of spiritual theme and physical action,' and yet alternatively adaptable to a presentation 'with perhaps less audience involvement at a single sight.' To contemporary critics, this extremely flexible portion of the play should suggest an internal complexity of performance layers: the original processional, part of an alternative style of performance, remains either as an intact memorial to that use, ready to be thus used again or, as the 'si placet' indicates, to be critiqued and purged away, either literally halted or merely referenced as an earlier misuse of the play.
Thus, rather than eliminating all references to what would have been considered a misguided role for the audience, a possible reformist use of the Conversion might have chosen to convey what distinguished the old from the new faith. Such a choice reveals a truly reformist conviction: it is not enough merely to replace old with new; the wrong of the earlier faith must also be revealed and used as a justification for religious change and revision. Tyndale seems involved in and dedicated to just such a process. In describing what he sees as the dangers of the earlier faith's religious rituals, he accuses the clergy of 'car[ing] for no understanding: it is enough if thou canst roll up a pair of matins, or an even-song, and mumble a few ceremonies' and asserts that clergy and rituals alike 'bring us from the true faith, that is in God's word, unto a superstitious and a false belief in our own imagination,' thereby causing the people to 'ascribe heaven unto their imaginations and mad inventions; and receive it not of the liberality of God....' The rituals and ceremonies of the old faith, marked by audience engagement and active physical as well as mental participation, encourage human capacities of thought and speech without guidance and therefore mislead people who lack the true way to 'the perfyth intellygens' found only through a different program of communication and reception – a program that it seems Poeta and his play are capable of enacting and endorsing.

From a reformist viewpoint, Poeta can be seen as working to change the style and meaning of his play, converting it from one in which audience, play, and players—all those involved—in fact method and meaning, to one in which meaning and method are determined by a single authoritative source, the Bible, and by those deemed expert enough to understand and communicate its message: those 'honorable masters' who oversee the 'compyler.' Poeta's acquiescence to the authority of scripture can certainly be interpreted as an endorsement of Protestant tastes, and his treatment of the play's performance and audience can be viewed as an overt process of 'correction': a public purging of the earlier faith's misdoings and worship practices considered superstitious ritual and lascivious spectacle.

In the Conversion of Saint Paul, then, both its hero and its 'Poet' can be seen as working to devise, explain, and assert a style of communication and reception clearly in conflict with an alternative use of the same play—a use related to the ceremonies and rituals of the faith that Bale, Tyndale, and other reformers were keen to condemn as misleading indulgences of 'worldly wisdom' and practices and misuses of human capacities. Described as dangerous and blinding influences based upon spectacle and worldly pleasure, Catholic worship practices conflict with the sacred truth and intractable authority of scripture. The reformists' emphasis upon the truth and perfection of God's Word seems, therefore, to have necessitated an ideological shift in worship practices, in the form by which the everyday Christian interacted with the divine.

The theological impulses that seem to have shaped reformist attitudes towards the earlier faith's religious drama and rituals seem to have extended to include Protestant reformulations of sainthood that mirror the process that a reformist adaptation of the Conversion of Saint Paul could display, enact, and impart to its audience. According to Tyndale in his 'The Obedience of a Christian Man,' published in 1527–8, those who worship the Catholic faith turn themselves from God's word, and put their trust and confidence in the saint and his merits; and make an advocate, or rather a god of the saint;
Tyndale's description of Catholic saint worship as a close bond between human worshipper and heavenly saint resembles the earlier faith's style of producing their religious dramas which similarly required the active involvement and identification of its participants with sacred events and holy people. Tyndale's complaints about saint worship communicate once again a critique of the earlier faith's encouragement of human imagination and participation in religious practice. Without proper guidance, ordinary men and women aspire to contact the divine, to meld the sacred and the mundane, to conflate the saintly with themselves. Just as the reformists' adaptations of the earlier faith's drama apparently attempted to critique and suppress a style and use of the drama that involved its audiences visually, physically, and directly in its performance and meaning, so too did they seem to create their own idea of sainthood in order to overcome the personal intercession characteristic of saint worship described by Tyndale. Indeed, the 'bond' that he describes enables the same kind of temporal and spatial continuum made possible in the early English drama by the active visual, verbal, and physical participation of the audience in the play's performance. Requiring both an active involvement on the part of the saint worshipper and the re-creation of past actions by present actions, this bond encourages a fluid continuum between saint and worshipper, past and present, sacred and mundane. Tyndale similarly describes this belief and practice when he criticizes those 'ceremonies, which some imagine their own selves ... saying ... Such holy persons did thus and thus, and they were holy men; therefore if I do so likewise, I shall please God.' The humble reception of scriptural truth espoused by the reformists differs from and conflicts with the spiritual stance expected of a Catholic audience member of a saint or other vernacular religious play. The Protestant definition of sainthood — of what constituted true holiness for the reformed faith — seems, in fact, to celebrate the perfectly reformed audience member, quietly receiving, accepting, and embodying the truth of God's Word.

The reformists recast their saints as perfect examples — exempla — made perfect by their spiritual reliance upon God's Word and their ability to manifest this reliance. Anne Askew, for example, a woman burned for her apparent adherence to scripture, becomes, in Bale's description, a saint because Askewe and her fellowship had none other relics about them ... but a bundle of the sacred Scriptures enclosed in their hearts.' The actual ingestion of scripture ... an actual 'bundle' in the heart — demonstrates the reformists' definition of a proper reception role for any true Christian. Similarly, in Wager's Protestant version of the life of Marie Magdalene, faith is God's gift that is 'sealed' in the individual's heart rather than actively sought:

This faith is founded on God's promise,
And most cleerly to the mynde of man revealed,
So that of God's will he hath an intuition,
Which by the holy ghost to his heart is sealed.
Likewise, Paul and Poeta can be interpreted as privileging the absolute authority of scripture while guiding their audience to a role more controlled and less participatory than that encouraged by the play's diabolical characters. Paul himself, once converted, can be seen to exemplify Bale's own hopes for a revised notion of sainthood - 'that saints [might] be used as a means of teaching, of clarifying the nature of the Word.' As Happé comments, 'he was ready to substitute some new Protestant saints whose power would rest upon the veracity with which they transmitted the Word.' Anne Askew and her adherents are the perfect audience – the whole and complete receptacles of sacred scripture which has determined and guided their spiritual lives. Not surprisingly, then, near the end of Bale's *King Johan*, Nobylete declares:

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Englande hath a quene, thankes to the Lorde above,
Whyche maye be a lyghte to other princes all
For the godly wayes whome she doth dayly move
To her liege people through Gods wurde specyall.
She is that Angell, as Saynt Johan doth hym call,
That with the Lordes seale doth marke out hys true servauntes.
Pryntyne in their hartes hys holy wourdes and covenauntes.
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Emphasizing textual authority and the direct reception of 'holy wourdes,' Bale thus makes Elizabeth into a Protestant saint whose perfection can be found in her own embodiment and communication of 'the Lordes seale.' In some reformists' reckoning, this embodiment and communication determine the true and proper spiritual state of the Christian.

The clearly Protestant texts of Wager, Bale, and others communicate the reformation theology that might have reinterpreted the *Conversion of Saint Paul* as a text for revealing and critiquing the evils of Catholicism and replacing them with the beliefs and practices of the reformed faith. Mirroring this process of revelation, criticism, and replacement, the Protestant reformulation of sainthood and a redefinition of the medium of spiritual life recast the relationship between word and image, mind and body, divine and human. In their elimination of intercession, in their privileging of scripture and direct access to it, the reformists attempted to eliminate what they perceived as misleading and superstitious rituals by demonstrating their faults from within the very texts and traditions that had initially disseminated them. Critiquing what they saw as worship practices founded on human imagination, spectacle, and mere entertainment, they emphasized the absolute authority of scripture, believing that scriptural access would fill the people with the truth of God's Word. Paradoxically, the reformists worked from within the very tradition that they sought to dispel, gathering peoples' attentions with the spectacles, imagery, and engaging forms and practices that they sought to condemn. More subtle than the blatant destruction of the earlier dramatic tradition often ascribed to the reformists, these reformulations were more insidious, putting the old faith's dramatic tradition to different uses and enabling different sponsors with different ideological invectives to manipulate subtly the possibilities of performance.
Notes


2 See Baker, 'When Is a Text a Play?' 20–5.

3 Coldewey, 'The Digby Plays.'


5 Discounting the Cornish *Life of Meriasek*.

6 I examine the *Mary Magdalene* in this light in Chapter Three of my dissertation.


9 Such a reinterpretation process – one that reveals the errors of the old faith from within the very texts it created – seems to be described in the post-Reformation Banns of the Chester cycle which describes the cycle as originally proto-Reformist, written by a fourteenth-century monk, Ranulp Higden who, responding to the fact that 'These storiez of the testamente at this tyme ... / in a common Englisho tonge never reade nor horde' was 'no thinge affrayde with feare of borninge, hangeinge, or cuttinge of heade / to sett out that all maye deserne and see, / and parte of good belefe, beleve ye mee.' Likewise, 'By craftsmen and meane men these pageauntes are playde, / and to commons and contry men accustomabylie before. / If better men and finer heads now come, what canne be sayde?' and 'Lordinges, in this storye consistethe our chefe faieth, / The ignorance wherein hathe us manye yeares soe blinded / as though now all see the pathe playne.' The post-Reformation Banns suggest that it is only in the Reformation's time of religious enlightenment that the Protestant foundation of the plays of the cycle can be seen and

I examine the Chester cycle and its Banns in the first chapter of my dissertation.

10 Baker, Murphy, and Hall, Jr (eds), *The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian mss. Digby 133 and E Museo 160*, EETS, os 238 (London, 1982), xvi–xvii. See also Baker, 'When Is a Text a Play,' 21: 'To this manuscript about thirty or forty years later, a gathering of four leaves (only three leaves bear writing; the fourth is cut to a stub) was added, in which a second hand has marked out St. Paul's sermon after his conversion (f 44v) and has inserted an interesting scene in which Belial receives news from Mercury about the conversion of St. Paul, their special agent. After this scene (f 45–7, ll. 412–515), the new scribe, or, more probably the author of the scene, has carefully again written St. Paul's sermon on the Seven Deadly Sins; then the play continues as before.' See also Baker and Murphy (eds), *The Digby Plays. Facsimiles of the Plays in Bodleian mss. Digby 133 and e Museo 160*.

11 'When Is a Text a Play?' 23.

12 'The Conversion of Saint Paul' in Baker, Murphy, and Hall, Jr (eds), *The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian mss. Digby 133 and E Museo 160*, 15. I have modernized some spellings throughout the text.

13 References here are to Sidney Anglo, 'An Early Tudor Programme for Plays and other Demonstrations Against the Pope,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 20 (1957), 176–9. Anglo, 177, speculating on the date of Morison's text, comments that 'all the suggestions for anti-papal propaganda, apart from the annual celebration, appear to have been put into practice long before 1542, so that the original date of composition might well have been some four, or more, years earlier, that is before such ideas had been applied throughout the country and when they would still have had the force of an original theory.'

14 Frederic Ives Carpenter (ed), *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene by Lewis Wager* (Chicago, 1904), 20. I have changed 'diuers' to 'divers.'


16 For an invaluable discussion of reformation adaptations and versions of the saint play genre, see Happé, 'The Protestant Adaptation of the Saint Play.'


20 See Coldewey, 'The Digby Plays.'

21 See Coldewey, 'The Last Rise.' 255, nt. 33.

22 Top of f 47v. See Baker, Murphy, and Hall, Jr (eds), *The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian mss. Digby 133 and E Museo 160*, 18.


25 White, 1.
26 White, 15.
27 White, 2.
28 Baker, Murphy, and Hall, Jr (eds), *The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian mss. Digby 133 and E Museo 160*, 16.
29 While the devil scene may have been added specifically to suit reformist polemic, it may be possible that, like the rest of the play, it too could have been an originally Catholic addition reinterpreted to suit different theological sensibilities. John Cox, in 'The Devil and Society in the English Mystery Plays,' *Comparative Drama*, 28 (1994–5), 407–38, esp. 427ff., has argued that in the mystery plays, courtier's garments were often worn by devils to suggest a connection between diabolical actions and contemporary social ills. Depending upon his attire, then, Belyall's intentions to beguile man's 'applicant' mind could be performed with a Catholic audience in mind, his costume linking contemporary wealth and extravagance to diabolical activities. Dress Belyall and his cohorts in discarded vestments, however, and the attire links Catholicism itself with diabolical forces and the spiritual beguilement of souls. Paradoxically, the reformists may have taken a cue from the very religious drama that they wished to alter in order to suit their own theological assertions. Rather than destroying these examples of the earlier faith's misleading beliefs, elaborate ceremonies, and excessive worship practices, the plays could be revised and/or reinterpreted to suit and endorse Protestant tenets, or even, as in the case of the *Conversion*, reinterpreted as examples of and precedents for overcoming these trappings, demonstrating the very reformation of religious practice and legitimizing it at the same time through a different interpretation of the play's message. See nt. 9 above.
30 Interestingly, before his conversion, Paul too seems to have been involved in similar diabolical actions as he swears 'by the God Bellyall' in his opening lines. See Baker, Murphy, and Hall, Jr (eds), *The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian mss. Digby 133 and E Museo 160*, 2. Furthermore, the passage in the manuscript that contains this line (lines 27–35) is in a different style from the rest of the text. Despite this difference, Baker, Murphy, and Hall in *The Late Medieval Religious Plays*, 2, nt. 1, suggest that these lines are 'probably [in the] same hand as [the] bulk of [the] text.' See also Baker and Murphy (eds), *The Digby Plays. Facsimiles of the Plays in Bodley mss. Digby 133 and e Museo 160*.
31 See Baker, 'When Is a Text a Play?' 23 and see nt. 29 above.
32 Sidney Anglo, 'An Early Tudor Programme,' 179.
34 See nt. 4 above.
35 See nt. 9 above.
37 Ibid., 38. Cf., also, William Tyndale in 1528 (a date that corresponds roughly to the interpolation of the Devil scene in the *Conversion*) in his 'The Obedience of a Christian Man,' in Henry Walter (ed), *Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions to Different Portions of Holy Scriptures*, 147: 'Christ saith, that there shall come false prophets in his name, and
say that they themselves are Christ; that is, they shall so preach Christ that men must believe in them, in their holiness, and things of their imagination, without God's word: yea, and that Against-Christ, or Antichrist, that shall come, is nothing but such false prophets, that shall juggle with the Scripture, and beguile the people with false interpretations, as all the false prophets, scribes, and pharisees did in the old testament.'


Tyndale, 220.

'The Obedience of a Christian Man,' 220.

Baker, Murphy, and Hall, Jr (eds), The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS. Digby 133 and E Museo 160, 20.

Baker, 'When Is a Text a Play?' 23.

Anglo, 'An Early Tudor Programme,' 179.

'The Obedience of a Christian Man,' 223 and cf. 268: "Faith" (saith Paul ...) 'cometh by hearing, that is to say, by hearing the preacher that is sent from God …''

Baker, Murphy, and Hall, Jr (eds), The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS. Digby 133 and E Museo 160, 19, my emphasis. It is also interesting to note that the Protestant prophesings were originally derived, as Patrick Collinson in The Elizabethan Puritan Movement (Berkeley, California, 1967), 169, comments, 'from a text of St. Paul: 'Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge … For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and be comforted.'

Interestingly, the lines that contain this condemnation of 'preaching' and 'giving examples' – what were privileged activities of Protestantism – are in a different style from the rest of the text. See nt. 30 above.

Similarly, in Bale's 'King Johan,' 77, Treason, a Catholic figure belittles and distances himself from the activity of preaching: 'And as for preachynge we meddle not with that trade / Least Annas, Cayphas, and the lawers shulde us blame.'

Baker, Murphy, and Hall, Jr (eds), The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS. Digby 133 and E Museo 160, 20.

Top of f 47v. See Baker, Murphy, and Hall, Jr (eds), The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS. Digby 133 and E Museo 160, 18.


Baker, Murphy, and Hall, Jr (eds), The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS. Digby 133 and E Museo 160, 1.

Baker, Murphy, and Hall, Jr, 13.

My emphasis.

Baker, Murphy, and Hall, Jr (eds), The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS. Digby 133 and E Museo 160, 12.

Baker, Murphy, and Hall, Jr, 12–13.

Baker, Murphy, and Hall, Jr, 13.

See Baker, 'When Is a Text a Play?' 25.

Baker, Murphy, and Hall, Jr (eds), The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS. Digby 133 and E Museo 160, 6.

For complete reviews of this production, see Peter Meredith, 'The Conversion of Saint...
The York and Coventry Mystery Cycles: A Comparative Model of Civic Response to Growth and Recession

The York Cycle in its surviving form from the third quarter of the fifteenth century contains all or part of forty-eight pageants. Half a century earlier, when the Ordo Paginarum was recorded in the A/Y Memorandum Book, the list of subjects undertaken by the guilds was longer. From Coventry only two pageants survive, both redactions from the second quarter of the sixteenth century. There is, additionally, evidence that we have lost the Smiths' pageant of the Passion, the Pinners and Needlers' pageant of the Death and Burial of Christ, the Cappers' pageant of the Harrowing of Hell and/or Resurrection, the Mercers' pageant of the Death and Assumption of the Virgin, and the Drapers' Doomsday. The Tanners (from 1497), the Whittawers and the Girdlers also had pageants, but the subjects of these are lost.

All the above has the status of common knowledge, thanks to the amassing of numerous shards of evidence which has been largely undertaken by the Records of Early English Drama project. It is also part of an information crisis. While it was relatively easy for E.K. Chambers to construct sequential evolutionary narrative from the limited amount of data available to him, scholars working in the wake of REED are increasingly aware of how we write our narratives into the spaces in order to create a meaningful history. As