Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama

General Editor's Preface

Helen Ostovich, McMaster University

Performance assumes a string of creative, analytical, and collaborative acts that, in defiance of theatrical ephemerality, live on through records, manuscripts, and printed books. The monographs and essay collections in this series offer original research which addresses theatre histories and performance histories in the context of the sixteenth and seventeenth century life. Of especial interest are studies in which women's activities are a central feature of discussion as financial or technical supporters (patrons, musicians, dancers, seamstresses, wigmakers, or 'gatherers'), if not authors or performers per se. Welcome too are critiques of early modern drama that not only take into account the production values of the plays, but also speculate on how intellectual advances or popular culture affect the theatre.

The series logo, selected by my colleague Mary V. Silcox, derives from Thomas Combe's duodecimo volume, *The Theater of Fine Devices* (London, 1592), Emblem VI, sig. B. The emblem of four masks has a verse which makes claims for the increasing complexity of early modern experience, a complexity that makes interpretation difficult. Hence the corresponding perhaps uneasy rise in sophistication:

> Masks will be more hereafter in request,
> And grow more deare than they did heretofore.

No longer simply signs of performance "in play and jest", the mask has become the "double face" worn "in earnest" even by "the best" of people, in order to manipulate or profit from the world around them. The books stamped with this design attempt to understand the complications of performance produced on stage and interpreted by the audience, whose experiences outside the theatre may reflect the emblem's argument:

> Most men do use some colour'd shift
> For to conceal their craftie drift.

Centuries after their first presentations, the possible performance choices and meanings they engender still stir the imaginations of actors, audiences, and readers of early plays. The products of scholarly creativity in this series, I hope, will also stir imaginations to new ways of thinking about performance.

Religion and Drama in Early Modern England

The Performance of Religion on the Renaissance Stage

Edited by

JANE HWANG DEGENHARDT
University of Massachusetts-Amherst, USA

and

ELIZABETH WILLIAMSON
The Evergreen State College, USA

ASHGATE

Introduction

Jane Hwang Degenhardt and Elizabeth Williamson

A tyrant sets fire to a holy book on stage and dares the god of his enemies to defend it from the flames. This gesture of iconoclasm, which comes near the end of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, part II (1587), provides a metaphor for the excesses of its antihero's tyranny and simultaneously raises a set of crucial questions about the sacredness of holy books and the impact of their destruction. The play does so, however, not by staging the desecration of the bible—instead, its antihero burns a copy of the Qur'an to taunt his Muslim enemies. As the fire rages, Tamburlaine challenges the Muslim prophet: "Now, Mahomet, if thou have any power, / Come down thyself and work a miracle" (5.1.185–6).[1] Mahomet, of course, does not appear, and the fire continues to burn. In that English audiences were both awed by the Ottoman empire and scornful of the infidel "Turk," their reaction to the play's use of an Islamic holy book to demonstrate Tamburlaine's villainy could not have been a straightforward one. While the unholy act implied a sympathetic identification with Islam, it also posited Mahomet's powerlessness to rescue the book. In addition, the scene evoked the burning of competing Catholic and Protestant volumes practiced by fervent iconoclasts on either side of the confessional divide throughout the early years of the English Reformation. In doing so, it tapped into controversial questions about the relationship between God and the word of God, and about what it meant to stage the word of God, while at the same time displacing these questions onto the Muslim religion. What did it mean for *Tamburlaine* to take the most controversial iconoclastic gesture available to its audience's imagination and re-inscribe it in a foreign context?

The potential meanings of this act became even more complex when transported to the public theater. Was there a difference between burning a holy book and performing its burning? Would early modern audiences answer this question in the same way if the book were a bible? If so, would it be all right to burn a "fake" bible? As *Tamburlaine* shows us, the performance of iconoclasm necessarily undercuts the possibility of a true "miracle," while at the same time revealing how certain beliefs might transcend performance. Burning a real Christian bible was out of the question, not only due to its impracticality but also because it was blasphemous. Hypothetically, bible burning would have demanded that the scene play out differently, but how did Tamburlaine's burning of the Qur'an taunt audiences into recognizing that the Christian god would have been equally powerless to

[1] Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great, Part II*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

intercede on the early modern stage? For one, the staging of a Christian miracle in early modern England was just as unacceptable as the staging of an Islamic one. Beyond this, any divine intervention—whether Christian or Muslim—could only have been supplied in the form of an actor or stage effect, thus calling attention to the artificiality of the intervention. At the same time, the staging of the bonfire exposed the contingency of theatrical effects upon the material conditions of the theater and the unpredictable variables of performance, including the atmospheric effects of wind or dampness. Rather than underscore the potential potency of divine forces, Tamburlaine's burning of the Qur'an calls attention to what cannot be shown on the early modern stage as the result of both cultural belief structures and the material limitations of performance.

Given the complex and unpredictable effects of performance, the meanings of Tamburlaine's book burning point in many directions, in part because of the material conditions that governed the production of theatrical scripts. *Tamburlaine* is a work of fiction, but a fiction altogether unlike the travel narratives or epic poems that might describe similar kinds of religious conflict. To read about the destruction of sacred texts is one thing; to smell and hear and see the flames is quite another, particularly in the public amphitheaters where the possibility of setting fire to the thatched roof was a very real one. Here, then, is both a convergence and a divergence between presentation and representation. The fire appears to have been real (Tamburlaine explicitly draws the audience's attention to the onstage spectacle), as is the object being incinerated, but the "book" in the fire was not likely to be a copy of the Islamic scriptures or even an actual folio, given the expense of such items and the frequency of staging the play. Early modern audiences would have been aware of the gap between the stage property and the object it stood for, allowing them to bring a more critical perspective to this overtly polemical gesture.

This collection seeks to complicate our understanding of how references to contemporary religion function within the theater by attending to the representational gaps created by theatrical materiality and performance. In addition, we are interested in readings that take the historical moment of performance into account without attempting to posit a direct analogy between the religious discourses presented on stage and those that appeared in other aspects of early modern culture. The stage, we argue, both draws upon and profoundly reconfigures existing religious signifiers. In the case of *Tamburlaine*, it is worth noting that adherents of the traditional faith destroyed English translations of the bible during their reclamation of Durham Cathedral in 1569, and that in 1617 a large number of devotional texts found at the home of a Catholic printer were cast into a public bonfire at St. Paul's.[2] We are also bound to acknowledge, however,

[2] Alexandra Walsham, "Unclasping the Book? Post-Reformation English Catholicism and the Vernacular Bible," *Journal of British Studies*, 42.2 (April 2003): 141–66, 141; Lisa McClain, *Lest We Be Damned: Practical Innovation and Lived Experience Among Catholics in Protestant England, 1559–1642* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 53.

that Marlowe purposefully avoided staging the burning of the Christian bible. We can learn only so much by comparing his incendiary gesture with that of contemporary Protestants and Catholics—we also need to account for the play's translation of this familiar, and deeply controversial, gesture into a foreign context. Early modern performances of *Tamburlaine* participated in a mutually constitutive process of re-thinking what it meant to be both "English" and "religious," playing off and reshaping other cultural productions, such as sermons, religious polemics, travel narratives, romances, and ballads. The theatrical depiction of biblioclasm is necessarily and self-consciously distinct from the treatment of the same subject in any of these other media. Our task in this collection is to map out how and why those differences emerge, for it is the allusive and elusive quality of the theatrical medium that concerns us, particularly when a closer examination of the material qualities and conventions of the drama leads us to a clearer understanding of the interplay between theatrical and religious discourses.

We reassess the relationship between religion and drama here by taking seriously the ways that theatrical performance shifted the meaning of the religious representations it appropriated from other cultural spheres. Our contributors accomplish this important methodological shift by taking into account the effect of the material conditions of early modern performance, by exploring the intricate resonances between dramatic performance and religious ceremonies, and by re-assessing the multiple valences of religious allusions in early modern plays. Additionally, *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England* takes a broad view of religious culture in the period, resisting the tendency to parcel out individual affiliations and identities into separate theatrical paradigms. Our collection is informed by advances in early modern performance studies and cultural materialism, particularly scholarship that urges readers of the drama to account for generic expectations and the particular conditions of the repertory system.

We are also indebted to the most influential recent work in both religious history and theater history: scholars in both these fields have consistently argued that we need to understand the local, individualized nature of the cultural practices we study. In the case of religious culture, this means not just the details of English Christianity, but also the particularity of its encounters with non-Christian "others." This interdisciplinary approach allows us to develop a more robust picture of the theater's social role, and thereby to re-theorize what it means for the drama to engage with religious culture. At the heart of this work is a set of questions that focus on the representational mechanisms specific to the theater. What was the nature of the conversation between theater and religious culture, and how was it affected by audience expectation and other material conditions of performance? How do we know when to read a representation as religious, and how should we approach explicit allusions to religious experience, particularly those that do not map easily onto the fictional setting?

Additionally, our contributors address questions about what it might mean for religious ways of understanding the world to influence theatrical forms. For example, how did modes of visuality in devotional culture shape dramatic

performances of sight as well as the visual logics with which audiences approached plays? How did religious faith and doubt help condition a theatrical audience's willing suspension of disbelief? It is our contention that this type of sensory and theoretical interplay is just as important, though sometimes more difficult to trace, than the translation of religious content to the stage.

Insisting upon the particularity of the theatrical experience and its social role, *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England* seeks to reframe our understanding of both canonical and noncanonical works that include references to religious experience. The theater's engagement with religious questions, we argue, was not limited to explicit verbal or visual allusions and can only be fully apprehended by taking into account all the visceral elements of public theater performance. Our focus on the theatrical medium implies a significant rethinking of early modern performance studies and a broadening of our current definitions of "religious content" in the drama. Whereas previous studies have tended to focus on tracking direct references to contemporary events and practices in the dialogue, the essays in this volume investigate the ways in which the theater's own practices of meaning-making were conditioned by an extraordinary diversity of religious practice and by the wide variety of signifiers operating in the theater itself.[3] The collection opens with a group of essays that ground our discussion of the theater's relationship to religious experience in the materiality of performance itself, while the second and third groups expand our examination of the medium to include questions about audience and the play of religious ideologies operating outside the theater. It is important to note that by "materiality" we mean not just the physical properties of the bodies and objects that appeared on stage, but also the ways in which aspects of the theatrical presentation were shaped by various social relations, including audience expectations and the political and economic factors that affected the material conditions of performance. At the same time, we stress the fact that early modern performances did not emerge in any simple sense from the cultural phenomena that existed outside the playhouse. On the contrary, the audience's visual, aural, and olfactory experience was shaped by constantly shifting theatrical conventions, created in response to and in dialogue with other social forces. This ongoing interchange between the developing theatrical medium and the culture that surrounded it meant that even the most charged religious signifiers did not always function in straightforward ways. The presence of a crucifix on stage may not always signal nostalgia for Catholicism, and allusions to the Pauline epistles

[3] See, for example, Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger, eds., *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Richard Dutton, Alison Findlay, and Richard Wilson, eds., *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Philip Collington and Kenneth Graham, eds., *Shakespeare and Religious Change* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.); Ewan Fernie, ed., *Spiritual Shakespeares* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005); Regina Buccola and Lisa Hopkins, eds., *Marian Moments in Early Modern British Drama* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).

do not always indicate that the play in question is in sympathy with Protestant depictions of early Christianity. The stage frequently combined disparate religious references or layered them on top of one another, reflecting the inherently fluid quality of contemporary religious practice.

Because of the ephemerality of the medium and the incomplete nature of scripts as records of stage performances, it is difficult to pin down all the elements associated with any given production. The virtue of the repertory system, however, is that we can discern patterns in the types of stage effects that were used and how they might have resonated in particular playing spaces. Thanks to the work of theater historians—who have assiduously mined the manuscript and archaeological record—these patterns are becoming increasingly visible to modern readers. What we are seeking is a historicity of convention, an approach that views theatrical strategies within a cultural context that includes not just the events transpiring outside the theater but the play of meanings within the theatrical environment itself. These temporal aspects of performance contribute significant clues about how the actors engaged specific aspects of playgoers' religious experience, and about the total sensory environment in which playgoers worked to interpret the spoken dialogue. It is not just the presence of the actors' bodies, but their movement in relation to one another and to the inanimate objects on stage that lend nuance and tension to the words they speak. For instance, the theater acknowledged, and relied upon, its audience's awareness of the lack of identification between the actor's body and the character's. Levels of meaning in the script were also affected by the interplay between actor and audience and between different members of the audience. Finally, the early modern theater was built on a number of conventions that operated among play scripts as well as within individual ones. These conventions were sometimes organized around the demands of genre, or the properties available to the individual acting company, but they were also inherited, to a certain degree, from the parish dramas of the later middle ages.[4]

By focusing on the theatrical practices that organized the play of meanings in early modern English drama, this collection draws on several existing models of

[4] The sack into which the members of the Black Court are thrown at the end of Middleton's *A Game at Chess*, for instance, was a stage technology first developed for the plays depicting Jesus's harrowing of hell, and several early modern tomb scenes mimic pre-Reformation resurrection plays. On Middleton's use of the hell mouth imagery, see Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis, 1632–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 232, and for one example of the resurrection parallels in early modern drama, see Alice Dailey, "Easter Scenes from an Unholy Tomb: Christian Parody in *The Widow's Tears*," in Regina Buccola and Lisa Hopkins, eds., *Marian Moments* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007), 127–39. Lawrence Clopper has argued persuasively that these theatrical productions, though frequently associated with traditional religious practice, were just as much about civic pride as they were about didacticism; his research reveals the ways in which sacred and secular concerns have been linked throughout the long history of theater in England. *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001), 274.

performance scholarship. From critics such as William B. Worthen and Barbara Hodgdon we have inherited a strong sense of the historicity of performance.[5] These and other performance theorists have focused on the entire lifespan of Shakespearean theater, demonstrating that the "play" only comes to light as a particular combination of script and performance conditions. Relying in part on the experiential knowledge gained from recent theatrical productions, they have provided a model for interpretation that calls attention to what is missing from the printed editions we tend to rely on in the classroom and in our research. We also rely on theater historians such as Alan Dessen, who have uncovered new categories of evidence that can be used in reconstructing the atmosphere of reception in early modern playhouses by analyzing what Dessen calls the syntactical "building blocks" of the theatrical vocabulary.[6] By mining the archive and cataloguing their findings to give us an overall sense of the patterns structuring repertory performances, these researchers have given us a crucial set of tools that anchor us in the conventions of the stage itself. And despite their assiduous attention to detail, they also remind us not to read the scripts too literally. Dessen, for instance, warns that even the most detailed iconographical analyses of stage images should not convince us that we have discovered a one-to-one relationship between the visual signifiers deployed on stage and those that appeared in religious rituals, broadside prints, or royal pageants.[7]

So far, however, scholars of performance theory have yet to fully address the potentially rich ways that historical knowledge about performance and theatrical productions might illuminate dramatic representations of religion, and *vice-versa*.[8] Seeking to fill this gap, our collection builds upon the most recent performance-based scholarship while paying special attention to the ways in which such approaches can shed new light on the plays' particular investment in questions of religious practice. The conditions of the theater often complicated

[5] See, for example, Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen, eds., *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005); William B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge, 1997).

[6] Dessen, *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3.

[7] Ibid., 14.

[8] Notable exceptions include Anthony Dawson's meditation on the eucharistic overtones of early modern acting, and Michael O'Connell's analysis of the visual technologies of the late medieval drama. Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin, *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare's England: A Collaborative Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11–37; Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). But by and large literary scholars have yet to take note of advances in theater history when reading religious references in the drama, or to go beyond the broadest descriptions of stage rituals as echoes of "actual" ones, whereas this collection seeks to uncover structural analogies between religious and theatrical experiences.

or undermined the literal meaning of the dialogue; as Jean Howard has pointed out, many Shakespearean scripts critique social mobility yet were performed by the era's quintessential social climbers.[9] By applying the insights of critics such as Howard—who have analyzed the operation of systems of class, gender, and racial identity within the public theaters—to the question of religious content on the stage, and by acknowledging the degree to which religious practice was linked to these "secular" cultural conditions, we can produce an analysis of the scripts that takes both performance history and religious history into account. To paraphrase Worthen, we are looking to individual case studies, what he calls "the stuff of history," to create new lines of inquiry that interrogate not just the scripts themselves but also the methods of analysis that have been applied to the elusive traces of early modern performance.[10] Our approach constitutes an intervention in the application of performance theory as well as in the identification and analysis of dramatized religious content. By shifting our attention to the particular semiotics of theatrical meaning, this collection reveals the ways in which questions of religion and questions of performance are inextricably linked in the scripts themselves.

* * *

Although a focus on the theater as a dynamic and rapidly developing medium is the primary tool we use here to unlock new approaches to the study of religious elements in early modern drama, our ultimate goal is twofold. We seek fuller understandings of both dramatic representations and the complexities of early modern religious culture itself. Accordingly, our contributors look beyond and in some cases reject the significance of direct allusions to religious experience in order to consider the more nuanced ways that the stage evoked those experiences through a multitude of effects. As Debora Shuger and Anthony Dawson have argued, from quite separate critical perspectives, religion was a "habit of thought" in the early modern period, a familiar way of experiencing and interpreting the world informed by a long tradition of Christian practice.[11] Those habits were disrupted by the Protestant Reformation, but well-established mental patterns, inflected by medieval theology and ritual, continued to inform the way English men and women saw the world. The phrase "habits of thought" is one Shuger uses in place of the term "ideology" to signify the way in which "a culture's interpretive categories and their relations" play out in the lives of ordinary people.[12] For his part, Dawson

[9] *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1994), 58.

[10] Peter Holland and William B. Worthen, eds., *Theorizing Practice: Redefining Theatre History* (Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 2.

[11] Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 9; and Dawson, "Performance and Participation," in Dawson and Yachnin, *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare's England*, 26.

[12] Shuger, *Habits of Thought*, 9.

focuses on the ways in which Christian "habits of thought" continued to play a role in the otherwise secular public theater. He goes farther than Shuger, however, in his analysis of play scripts as traces of a unique set of material practices, arguing "for a kind of exchange whereby specifically theatrical effects are inflected by cultural preoccupations."[13] We take the work of these two scholars—together with that of the performance theorists and theater historians referenced above—as a crucial foundation for our collection, which seeks to contribute new evidence, and new texts, to the ongoing body of work on religious resonances in the drama.

One fruitful way to trace religious habits of thought in surviving play scripts is to focus on the physicality of early modern religion itself. Protestantism prided itself on eliminating the more corruptible elements of Catholic practice such as relics, statues of saints, bleeding crucifixes, rosary beads, and elaborately illustrated books of hours—and in fact it was the actors' reliance on material objects that led their Protestant critics to accuse them of idolatry. The players, like the polytheists who were the main target of the Mosaic commandment against idol worship, were thought to seduce men and women into sinful behavior by appealing to their senses and leading them to mistake false shadows for reality. But even the strictest enforcers of post-Reformation statutes could not eliminate the bodily aspects of devotion from households and churches. For the most part parishioners still worshiped in the same public spaces, using liturgical language largely derived from the Catholic Mass. The eucharist continued to function as the center of Christian fellowship, though there were fierce arguments about how this ritual was to be kept separate from the secular activities that often took place in parish halls. In other words, believers still required physical phenomena to conceive of an immaterial god, and material objects were still the easiest way for the actors to signal a character's involvement in a religious experience. The fact that those properties—as in the case of the prayer book Gloucester holds in his appearance before the citizens of London in *Richard III*—could be used as instruments of deception signals the theater's awareness of the limitations of the physical material used in its own fictions as well as the pervasiveness of such materials in the lives of English playgoers.

The theater—whose meanings were conveyed through a jumble of bodies, objects, and identity labels—was ideally positioned to reveal the insecure quality of religious categories and ways of knowing. Those categories were destabilized in part because of the Reformation and the political turmoil it caused. But they were also epistemologically shaky precisely because they were rooted in the project of rendering transcendent ideas through imperfect material forms. The drama, too, operated somewhere in between the abstract and the grossly physical; it relied first and foremost on the presence of actors' bodies and their physical relationship to the audience. In this sense, the very structure of theatrical performance resembled the "worldly" experience of religious worship. Moreover, as Jeffrey Knapp has suggested, the theater provided a space in which players and playgoers

[13] Dawson, "Performance and Participation," 26.

could construct alternatives to the religious intolerance that characterized post-Reformation debates on the status of proper Christian practice. But the theater was also a commercial institution; working as paid professionals, actors performed a constant balancing act—invoking powerful aspects of contemporary religious experience while, for the most part, avoiding specific ideological positions. Thus the very conditions that made it difficult to predict how audience members would receive the play allowed the drama to operate through patterns of meaning that did not signify a simple relationship between fictional content and religious practice.

Arthur Marotti and Ken Jackson's recent assessment of the "turn to religion" in early modern English studies responds to the increasing centrality of religion as a topic of inquiry, but also identifies a splintering of scholarly approaches. In particular, they identify a split between two parallel methodologies: a (New) Historical one that emphasizes specific contexts, cultures, and controversies, and a more philosophical one that addresses religion as a discourse and experiential mode that cannot be reduced to the field of ideology. Marotti and Jackson maintain that although New Historicist scholarship foregrounds the otherness of early modern culture, it does not go far enough in engaging the "philosophical roots of alterity" in the theories of Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Soren Kierkegaard, and Alain Badiou.[14] Moreover, they contend that while New Historicism organizes itself around the concept of alterity, it tends to ignore the alterity of early modern religion, instead translating religion into politics or culture. Dawson's most recent work on the "secular theater" is especially attuned to this concern, arguing forcefully for the autonomous nature of the theater in relation to existing religious discourses and other cultural productions. Positing an alternative to Greenblatt's contention that the theater contributes to an "emptying out" of religious content from early modern culture (a claim Greenblatt himself has since re-examined and modified), Dawson follows John Sommerville in suggesting that the theater was part of a long and complex process which "helped to separate religious language from its ideological center."[15] For Dawson, and for us, a "secular theater" was not one that entirely avoided all engagement with religious faith and its material representations. Rather, such an institution allowed for the reconfiguring of existing discourses from all aspects of contemporary culture and encouraged its audiences to participate in the continual renegotiation of what it meant to be a "Christian."

In paying attention to how the stage shaped and reshaped religious content, the essays in our collection tend to be grounded in historicist values, but we are not suggesting that the stage necessarily removed all religion from its religious representations. The stage's engagement with religion was broad and multifaceted, expressed through dramatic tropes and semiotic codes, and evoked not merely

[14] "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies," *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 46/1 (Winter 2004): 167–90, 168, 176.

[15] Dawson, "The Secular Theatre," in Patricia Badir and Paul Yachnin, eds., *Shakespeare and the Cultures of Performance* (Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 83–100, 86.

through direct representations but also more subtly through its visual, aural, and olfactory effects. Our contributors consider a range of ways in which religion and drama were interrelated, examining, for example, how the early modern stage informed cultural understandings of religious difference, responded to religious controversies, and simulated religious experiences not only through dialogue, costuming and props, but also through music, incense, and the staging of action and perception. In turn, our contributors also demonstrate how religious ceremonies, habits of perception, and theories of faith informed theatrical representations and the interpretive practices of early modern audiences. Collectively, they expose a mutually constitutive relationship between various theatrical and extra-theatrical discourses, arguing both for the autonomy of the theatrical medium and for a multi-directional exchange between theater and culture.

Indeed, the essays in this collection move beyond any single methodology by showcasing a range of approaches and displaying an overarching methodological awareness. Moreover, they challenge the binary laid out by Marotti and Jackson by attempting to theorize the dynamic relationship between religion and drama, and by focusing on the difference that theatrical representation makes. Toward this end, our contributors avoid drawing simple conclusions about religious allusions in favor of exposing their complex and often ambiguous nature, and grappling with the multiple sensory dimensions of theatrical representation. Their interest in the specific social function of the theatrical medium helps them address the ideological complexity of the scripts as traces of living cultural productions. And although individual case studies pay careful attention to the locality of performance, they address the ways in which local productions apprehended an expanding world that included not only different kinds of Christians but also Muslims, Jews, pagans, and other religious affiliations.

We offer a set of readings that consider not just the "otherness" of early modern religion, but also the particularity of various religious "others" who populated the early modern stage. Historicist scholars have tended to become caught in the oscillation between "Protestant" and "Catholic" points of view, even when their work seeks to complicate such rough distinctions. We strive to track the interplay and development of religious ideologies rather than limiting ourselves to binary oppositions. One aim in putting these essays in conversation is to draw out the connections between plays that represent contemporary English religion and those that bring Islam, Judaism, and paganism onto the stage—for in the theater, non-Christian traditions are not always easily separated from analyses of England's own religious culture. This is a historicist move, but one with significant theoretical implications. By going beyond standard analyses of Christian allusions in scripts, we hope to reveal some of the broader issues at stake in the theater's investigation of the ontological status of religious faith.

As exemplified in plays such as *Tamburlaine*, the English stage exploited its culture's fascination with religious others and with the dangers of cross-cultural contact by directly thematizing these encounters. But the stage registered these religious influences in indirect ways as well. Shakespeare and other playwrights

presented stories of interreligious conflict and persecution set in ancient pagan settings; these plays often contain anachronistic references and other suggestions that such depictions functioned as foils for more contemporary concerns. At the same time, these contemporary resonances were complex in nature and resist readings that too easily draw a one-to-one correspondence between ancient and contemporary signifiers. Often, the combined effect of verbal, visual, and aural allusions in these plays produced temporal, geographical, and theological inconsistencies. In other cases, contemporary resonances intruded upon seemingly consistent ancient settings. By the same token, the staging of encounters between Christian and non-Christian characters were often inflected by the theological and material effects of the confessional controversy within Christianity itself.

Act 1, scene 1 of *Titus Andronicus* offers a compelling example of layered temporal effects and inconsistencies within the drama's representation of religious experience. The stage directions indicate the procession of a Roman warrior and his sons, followed by a barbarian woman, her two children, and Aaron the Moor. This procession frames and sets the tone for the sacrifice of the queen's eldest son, and thus for the cycle of revenge that drives the play, but it also sets up the parameters of the play's exploration of racial and religious identities. Given England's trading interests in Mediterranean locations such as the Barbary Coast, and attendant anxieties about intercultural context with Muslim Moors as well as the potential influx of such people into London itself, the presence of the black-faced Aaron created a spectacle of difference that must have registered in a contemporary religious context as well. The historical record tells us that *Titus Andronicus* was performed by Sussex's Men in January and February of 1594, as well as by a combination of actors from the Admiral's and Chamberlain's Men later that spring. Whatever the composition of the company, the direction "others, as many as can be" (1.1.69 sd.) suggests that the stage should be as full of Goths and Romans as possible, depending on which actors need to be in the tiring house changing costumes for the next scene. This crowd of onstage spectators reinforces Tamora's complaint that her son is being "slaughtered in the streets" (1.1.112) like an animal and might substantiate a reading of the scene in terms of either Catholic or Protestant martyrdom. But it is not just the sheer number of characters on stage that matters here—it is also their similarity, or lack thereof, to one another. If, for instance, Aaron the Moor is brought on stage, as the stage directions specify, this character would dramatically mark the Goths as "others," affecting our ability to see Tamora's pleas as analogous to Christian prayers; it would also point up the differences between the fair-haired barbarians and their dark companion.

However abbreviated, a reading of the play that attends to the conditions of performance suggests that it would be a mistake to attempt to interpret this scene as reinforcing either a simple pagan/Christian opposition or a Protestant/Catholic one. Aaron's blackness is, of course, a marker of his own outsider status in the play, one that is fundamentally different from Tamora and her children's. In this opening scene, however, his visual presence resonates beyond his character, calling attention to the process of racialization and the impact of non-Christian foreigners

on contemporary European culture. The fact that some of Titus's prisoners are black and some are white disrupts the notion of a unified, non-Christian identity, revealing the complexities of "otherness" on the English stage and in English religious experience. The actor playing Tamora may or may not be kneeling in a manner reminiscent of English piety as she begs Titus for mercy, but on the stage we cannot separate this visual image from the equally striking stage presence of the Moor.

As our readings of *Titus Andronicus* and *Tamburlaine* suggest, we hope to refocus attention on theatrically specific ways of creating meaning, taking into consideration the complex interplay between audience, script, and actor, and thereby producing a more complicated understanding of the nature of dramatic allusion. Our contributors treat the plays as manifestations of complex representational problems, rather than simply as witnesses to particular historical events and confessional positions. Consequently, the central questions in this book all focus to one degree or another on the theater's evolving relationship to its own constituent elements. How did theatrical performance evoke aspects of religious experience? How did it draw audience members' attention to similarities between dramatic and ceremonial tropes while differentiating itself as a secular mode of cultural production? How might the complexity of early modern religious ideology be mirrored in the dynamic conditions of the theater itself?

* * *

The essays in this collection are divided into three sections, moving from close examinations of specific material conditions to broader considerations of the relationship between those theatrical conditions and questions of faith and religious identity. The case studies in the first section of the book consider the players' use of stage properties and costumes, but also the music that accompanied or framed the action, the movement of actors' bodies in relation to sets and stage architecture, the use of make-up, olfactory effects, and non-musical sound cues. These discussions, in turn, lay the groundwork for broader explorations of factors such as the space and locality of performance and the interplay between generic structures and audience expectations in the second and third sections. By paying attention to these theatrical phenomena, we are able to put flesh on the skeletal structure of theatrical dialogue and expand our definition of what constitutes religious "content" on the stage. Essays in the third section complicate the interpretation of religious allusions on the stage, questioning our ability to deduce coherent religious ideologies from them. This section brings together the previous discussions of materiality and the social role of the theater, zeroing in on our argument that although it relies on its audience's familiarity with certain religious tropes, the theater re-envisions religious practice in a way that is fundamentally different from other cultural forms. The progression in the collection from case studies in staging to broader discussions of the theater's complex engagement with religious ideology signals our commitment to careful readings of the scripts as

well as our contention that those readings have significant implications for our analysis of early modern religious culture.

Each essay in the book's first section demonstrates why considerations of performance and materiality are so important for rethinking the drama's treatment of religious subjects. The title of Holly Crawford Pickett's chapter, "The Idolatrous Nose," foregrounds its debt to Michael O'Connell's seminal work on visual idolatry and antitheatricalism, while considering the distinct function of smell in the early modern theater as a sensory effect that induced religious memories in automatic and involuntary ways. Focusing on the contrasting uses of incense in Ben Jonson's *Sejanus* and Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, Pickett calls attention to how the theater drew audiences into an experiential response to anti-Catholic polemic surrounding ritual incense use. Jacqueline Wylde's chapter on *The Shoemaker's Holiday* draws our attention to the significance of aural effects in the early modern theater, and more particularly to the importance of musical songs and the implications of their placement within the structure of the play. Arguing for the placement of the Second Three-Man's song at the play's conclusion, Wylde demonstrates how the song functions as part of a complex holiday celebration, simultaneously evoking Shrove Tuesday, the latent Catholicism of Saint Hugh's Day, and the imposed Protestant nationalism of Accession Day.

Foregrounding materiality and performance in a different way, Peter Berek's chapter focuses on the theatrical contrivance of large noses to represent stage Jews. He demonstrates how Barabas's oversized Jewish nose took on a life of its own, influencing depictions of non-Jewish usurers outside of the theater and evolving into theatrical schtick in plays such as William Haughton's *Englishmen for My Money* and *The Wisdom of Doctor Dodypoll*. By contrast, Dennis Britton looks at how the conventions for staging Muslim circumcisions in Thomas Kyd's *Solyman and Perseda* and Robert Daborne's *A Christian Turned Turk* created disturbing rather than comic effects by destabilizing religious differences. For Britton, the similarities between religious tricks and theatrical ones do not evacuate Islam of its danger, but rather enhance the threat of conversion by calling attention to the impossibility of distinguishing real from performed religious identities.

The second section of the book moves to a set of readings that examine the theater's appropriations of religious codes of meaning in relation to its development as a particular form of secular cultural production. How were audience's responses to the theater conditioned by religious experiences and ways of knowing? What was the relationship between the stage and non-dramatic religious discourses? In what sense did theatrical entertainment and religious ceremonies perform similar social functions? Influential historicist work on the subject of religion and drama by authors such as Huston Diehl and Jeffrey Knapp has forcefully asserted the similarities between religious and theatrical polemics in order to contest claims that the two had been fully separated by the reformers' campaign to stamp out

traditional theatrical forms.[16] The essays in this section build on these approaches, but also consider the complex ways the stage questioned and structured parallels between religious and theatrical experience. Their authors argue that the theater's relationship to religious experience was determined to a large degree by the specific elements involved in any given production, and also that the scripts reveal a high level of self-consciousness about this relationship. Each author posits a slightly different analogy between religious and theatrical practice, and reading their essays alongside one another reminds us that the directness with which the theater addressed religious subjects was dependent not just on the medium, but on the particular historical moment in which the play in question was composed and performed.

Using the spying episode in *Love's Labor's Lost* to demonstrate how early modern audiences were trained through everyday popular worship to read the stage in a certain way, Erika T. Lin provides a transition between the material case studies in the opening section and the essays in the second section that deal more broadly with the relationship between religious and theatrical experience. Lin takes a new approach to understanding early modern modes of visuality and spectatorship, suggesting that the drama's treatment of the sacramental gaze was not merely a reflection of existing visual references, but a kind of semiotic code in and of itself. Susannah Brietz Monta's chapter on *The Winter's Tale* also considers how religious experiences informed theatrical semiotics. Monta offers new insights into the treatment of belief and skepticism in the play by addressing the interplay between the characters' experience of faith and the audience's experience of the theatrical fiction.

The contributions by Paul Whitfield White and Joseph L. Black suggest other models for theorizing the relationship between religion and drama. White's essay on *Summer's Last Will and Testament* addresses the performance of Thomas Nashe's play at the home of his patron Archbishop Whitgift, locating Nashe's pageant in the tradition of ecclesiastical patronage and the archbishop's own engagement with contemporary debates over festivity and traditional customs. In this context, White argues, the play takes on a particular social function, one that contradicts our modern assumptions about the separation between Protestant orthodoxy and traditional religious practice. Reconsidering the relationship between popular drama and religious polemic, Black demonstrates how the stage appropriated a key set of theatrical techniques—including irreverent colloquialism, self-reflexively ironic play, doubleness, and fluidity of persona—exemplified by Martin Marprelate in the period's most notorious religious controversy. He argues for a methodological shift away from readings of influence that focus on topical

[16] Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theater in Renaissance England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002); Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

allusion and toward readings that address performative modes shared between religious polemic and the stage.

If the first two sections of the book work to expand our capacity to see religious content in the drama, the authors in the third and final section return to more literal references to religion within the dialogue, but in ways that foreground the uneasy correlations between religious allusions and coherent ideologies. These essays reveal the complexity of seemingly straightforward allusions while accounting for what appear to be inconsistencies within the scripts themselves. As Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda remind us, modern critics have inherited some of the literal-mindedness of the Protestant antitheatricalists, especially in our obsession with parsing out the exact meanings associated with individual lines.[17] Thus, when considering the religious "content" of early modern play scripts, we tend to look for overt references to biblical language or theological controversy. This approach has produced many significant discoveries, but it often falls short in the case of playwrights such as Shakespeare who studiously avoid identifying their characters with a single confessional position. Extending and reframing existing critical accounts, authors in the third section of the book argue that the theater actively worked to destabilize polemical debates and ideological affiliations. Rather than providing answers to difficult questions about religious concepts or affiliations, theatrical scripts often responded to far more subtle cultural tensions and anxieties—even when invoking charged religious topics. Accordingly, the essays in our final section complicate previous interpretations of religious allusions in the scripts, questioning our ability to deduce coherent religious ideologies from them.

Musa Gurnis-Farrell's "Martyr Acts: Playing with Foxe's Martyrs on the Public Stage" examines the theater's treatment of an existing, highly influential cultural production—John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*—and suggests that around the turn of the seventeenth century, the theater was able to highlight the role political contingency played in the early years of the Protestant Reformation. She argues that while Protestant martyr plays might be expected to reproduce Foxe's historiographical framework, *Sir Thomas Wyatt* and *1 Sir John Oldcastle* disrupt or replace Foxe's triumphalist historiography with a sense of historical contingency. Turning to seemingly discordant religious allusions in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Michael O'Connell contends that the play's competing religious motifs demonstrate a sophisticated awareness of the long history of Christianity, proposing that the play's understanding of the pagan roots of Christianity might help to reframe contemporary religious debates. Exploring the links in the play between the decadent, pagan Cleopatra and the figure of Christ, O'Connell argues that *Antony and Cleopatra*'s diverse religious allusions offer a model for religious syncretism.

[17] Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda, eds., *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

This section concludes with an even more expansive essay on the layering of religious temporalities in early modern drama by Julia Reinhard Lupton, who invents an imaginary character named "Paul Shakespeare" as a way of pointing out the allusive corners of William Shakespeare's plays, especially in regard to the resurgence of interest in Paul among philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben and Alain Badiou. Lupton points forward to a new kind of historicism, one that takes into account early modern playgoers' awareness of their place in world history, and pushes us to a reconsideration not just of Paul's influence on Shakespeare and his contemporaries, but of the ways in which Shakespeare illuminates the shades of meaning in Pauline texts. In this sense her work is the clearest expression of our contention that drama provides a distinctive way of understanding early modern culture, as well as an exploration of what scholars can bring to that search for understanding.

In the coda, Anthony Dawson argues that Claudius's prayer for forgiveness highlights a contiguous set of religious and theatrical experiences, allowing for a more nuanced definition of performative subjectivity. His essay aptly draws out the connections between metatheatricality and religion that run throughout the volume while providing a fresh reading of a familiar script.

Religion and Drama in Early Modern England offers new readings of religious content on the early modern stage by focusing on the effects of material conventions, by considering the social function of the drama, and by rethinking allusions that are seemingly contradictory or ideologically illegible. In order to demonstrate broader trends in the public theater's treatment of religious content, the book combines essays on plays such as *The Winter's Tale* which have already received considerable critical attention, with others on plays such as *Sir Thomas Wyatt* and Kyd's *Solyman and Perseda*, which have received very little. This approach suggests the necessity of redrawing the boundaries of our analysis, focusing less on the plays' authorship and perceived literary merit than on the historical and theatrical conventions at work in them. We are suggesting, ultimately, that it is less useful to look for the "facts" of early modern religious experience in the scripts than to examine the theater's specific interventions in religious discourse, and what those interventions can teach us about how theater practitioners responded to the social forces shaping the world outside the playhouse. That response was conditioned by audience demand, but demand itself was shaped by the kinds of theatrical productions available in early modern London. Thus, the conventions are themselves a crucial clue to understanding what it was that audiences expected when they went to the theater: a certain degree of ideological instability. The intricate relationship between script, actor, and audience was the very thing that allowed the early modern theater to offer Londoners an experience they could find nowhere else—except, perhaps, in the daily practice of religion itself.

PART I
Theatrical Materiality and Religious Effects