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“BY HIS COMMON TALKE”: REPRESENTATIONS OF LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCE ON THE EARLY ENGLISH STAGE

A Dissertation in

English

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that early English drama demonstrates a conscious, social re-evaluation of the English language. It will show that, in accordance with the project of English nationalism, the language begins to define itself against the linguistic other of non-English languages and non-standard dialects. This study examines the stigmatization of various forms of linguistic difference on the early English stage. It looks specifically at Latin, French and dialect speakers and argues that they are one of the most effective lenses through which we can examine the early English national anxieties concerning the development, standardization, and superiority of the English language. It concludes that early English drama establishes a constitutive rhetoric designed to dissuade English audiences from using Latin, French and English dialects in favor of a standardized vernacular linguistic authority.

My argument fuses emergent theories of Historical Sociolinguistics with Literary Historicism. It establishes early English drama as an important lens through which we can view and interpret contemporary ideologies concerning the cultural, social and political relationships between different linguistic groups. Individual chapters also offer new readings of the influence of Lollardy and early Reformation ideals on the institutional authority of Latin, the role of the *de casibus / Mirror for Magistrates* tradition in political culture and the English court system, and the Humanist influence on the standardization of the English language.
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Introduction

From 1380 to 1580, England witnessed the simultaneous emergence of the English civic dramatic tradition and the rise of the English vernacular. Beginning in the thirteenth century, the idea of the English language was subjected to a number of changes which resulted in a growing concern about the place of the language and what it meant to be an English speaker. At this time England was, and continued to be, a multilingual nation. The interaction of languages such as Latin, French, and Italian gave rise to a number of tensions between the vernacular English and other forms of speech. These tensions eventually led to a movement towards a more normative language which began with the late 14th century institution of Chancery English and continued to its fullest expression in conjunction with the burgeoning Renaissance print culture. Through these processes, speakers of standard English gained a stronger position in relation to other language and dialect speakers. Although French and Latin maintained a strong foothold in England’s governmental and official usage through the early 17th century, the late 14th and 15th centuries saw a strong movement away from the use of those languages for many aspects of official English business. In addition, authors during this time began a strong push for the political standardization and legitimization of English in courtly literature and public non-fiction writing. While non-dramatic texts offer a look at the political landscape of England’s move towards vernacularity, it is drama which eventually gave voice to the linguistic tensions which had developed in multilingual England.

In fact, the English dramatic tradition began to flourish at precisely the same time that the English vernacular was on the rise. While liturgical plays were extant much
earlier in England, the first surviving civic play, *The Pride of Life*, is dated to approximately 1350. In addition, the first references to the Corpus Christi plays, specifically the York and Chester plays, have been dated to the mid 1370s, although, admittedly, surviving manuscripts are mid-sixteenth century. The early 15th century ushered in the era of the great English morality, beginning with the *Castle of Perseverance* (c. 1405-1425) and leading through plays like *Wisdom* (c. 1460) and *Mankind* (c. 1465-1470). The late 15th and early 16th century saw an explosion of English dramatists ready to make a name for themselves. Playwrights like Henry Medwall, John Skelton, John Heywood, and John Bale expanded the horizons of English civic, university, and court drama, paving the way for the explosion of dramatic work at the end of the century. While this was an era of vigorous creative production, the plays of this period have generally been seen as immature precursors to the great theater of the English Renaissance. This misconception has greatly diminished serious critical inquiry into these early English plays and interludes. This dissertation will argue that early English drama demonstrates a conscious, social reevaluation and renegotiation of the English language. It will show that, in accordance with the project of English nationalism, the language begins to define itself against the linguistic other of non-English languages and non-standard dialects. The study views the stigmatization of various forms of linguistic difference on the early English stage as one of the most effective lenses through which we can see the many early English national anxieties concerning the development, standardization, and authority of the English language as it developed throughout the period.
THEORIES OF LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE CHANGE

Language is a social construct and as such our understanding of it relies on a few key sociolinguistic theories of language and language change. Ferdinand de Saussure outlines two distinct types of language change: synchronic and diachronic. Synchronic changes, Saussure argues, “will be concerned with connexions between coexisting items constituting a system, as perceived by the same collective consciousness.” Accordingly, synchronic changes happen within a closed system at a specific point in time independent of any exterior forces. By contrast, diachronic change “will be concerned with connexions between sequences of items not perceived by the same collective consciousness, which replace one another without themselves constituting a system.”

Diachronic changes are often thought of as chronological in nature and may be representative of forces which act on the synchronic system. Diachronic changes are, therefore, the building blocks of historical linguistics and are the most important types of language change to this study.

Diachronic change often occurs as a result of outside political and cultural pressures on the linguistic system. As Michel Foucault argues, “languages evolve in accordance with the effects of migrations, victories and defeats, fashions, and commerce; but not under the impulsions of any historicity by the languages themselves. They do not obey any internal principle of development; they simply unfold representations and their elements in a linear sequence.” For Foucault, language changes are chiefly diachronic and the language itself has no agency for change. Language change is, therefore, a proportionate reaction to outside forces and an excellent mirror for those forces. Through an examination of language change and usage, we can infer contemporary ideologies.
concerning the cultural, social, and political relationships between different linguistic groups.

Diachronic language change also occurs as a result of internal forces within communities of speakers; this is often the case with dialect and standardization. According to Saussure, “As civilization in the process of development increases communication, a kind of tacit convention emerges by which one of the existing dialects is selected as the vehicle for everything which is of interest to the nation as a whole.” 5 What this means is that, without a driving force of standardization, dialects move in manner which is more or less distinct throughout time, each changing in its own way, sometimes diverging from the other dialects, and sometimes converging with related dialects. The reason for this, he notes, is that languages change independent of each other and have no distinct boundaries. It is only when one of these dialects becomes privileged because of political or social standardization that we are able to recognize the power of linguistic difference in representations of dramatic language. It is this process through which languages gain their prestige and power.

In addition to these seminal theorists, emergent theories of historical sociolinguistics provide an important approach to language change. These theories presume that “the changing patterns of language are not seen exclusively as changes in the linguistic shape of a language variety, but also as changes in social agreement on the linguistic norms of communities.” 6 While it can be precarious to impose modern theories on the past, sociolinguists Terttu Nevalainen and Helena Raumolin-Brunberg argue that such theories can be used to understand better earlier forms of English, provided the scholar takes into account “knowledge of past societies in their own right.” 7 Specifically,
they have examined the utility of these theories for early modern linguistic change and have argued that, for early modern English at least, linguistic change was directly tied to cultural change. In the conclusion to their meticulous analysis of linguistic change in Tudor and Stuart England, they note, “social factors significantly correlate with the diffusion of morphosyntactic changes in real time in the Tudor and Stuart period.”

However, Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg also note that, from a purely linguistic standpoint, “we have no knowledge of how socially aware people were of a given change in progress.” This study will partially answer this problem by providing new information to historical sociolinguistics by using early English dramatic texts as a lens through which we can view contemporary attitudes about language change. It will argue that the stigmatization of non-native and non-standard languages on the early English stage is one means through which we can evaluate the cultural awareness of language change and linguistic difference.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE VERNACULAR

Once a culture recognizes linguistic differences, speakers often establish a hierarchy through which they classify those differences. Historically, those languages we now call classical were held in the highest regard. Indeed, as Albert Baugh notes, during the early Middle Ages, “the vulgar tongues seemed immature, unpolished and limited in resource. It was felt that they could not express the abstract ideas and the range of thought embodied in the ancient languages.” The Middle Ages, however, saw a number of linguistic campaigns spreading across much of the Western world asserting the
excellence of vernacular languages for literary and official use. Dante famously argues in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* for the necessity and appropriateness of vernacular languages for literary aspirations.\(^\text{11}\) The result of this movement was a growing struggle for the acceptance of vernacular languages as equal to the classical languages; it is this struggle which leads directly to a claim for the primacy and supremacy of vernacular English.\(^\text{12}\) The early efforts of poets with nationalistic tendencies, such as Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, contributed greatly to the growing esteem of the vernacular.\(^\text{13}\) By the middle of the sixteenth century, debates about the primacy of English had moved from the realm of literary authority into a more public sphere. Richard Mulcaster, George Puttenham, Sir Thomas Elyot, George Pettie, and Richard Carew each took up the cause arguing in sundry ways for the excellence of English above all other languages.\(^\text{14}\) The growing acceptance of English as the primary language of the nation as represented in these texts did not emerge spontaneously; it was a long and arduous process shaped by the social and political milieux of the late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance. A number of forces acted as important catalysts which set in motion the elevation of the English language and the denigration of other languages in England at the time.

In one of the earliest expressions of English vernacular nationalism, the *Cursor Mundi*, dated approximately 1300, argues for the importance of English translations for Englishmen of the English nation:

Ofter haly kirkis state
This ilk boke ys translate
Until Ingeles tongue to rede
For the love of Enlis lede,
Englis lede of Engelande

The commune for til understand. …

Of Engeland nacioun

Ys English man thar-in commoun,

The speche that man with sone may spede

Mast tharwit to speke ware nede.”

In the *Cursor Mundi*, the relationship between the language and the nation is made clear. It is for love of the people and the nation that the translation is important. The *Northern Homily Cycle*, dated c. 1315, is also concerned with the translation “On Ingelis tong that alle may / Understand quat I wil say.” It argues that homiletic texts need to be opened up to English speakers and English readers in order to aid in both the education and salvation of the English peoples. The focus of the *Northern Homily Cycle* is also on the elimination of linguistic hierarchy. It argues that “Bot al men can noht, i-wis, /
Understand Latin and Frankis. / Forthi me think almous it isse / To wirke sum god thing on Inglisse, / That mai ken lered and laued bathe…” (73-77). English translations are therefore necessary and important because they will serve both the learned and the lewd; for this author, English becomes an equalizing and homogenizing force for the nation.

These egalitarian impulses appear in a number of medieval texts calling for the use of an open and accessible language. John Lydgate, for example, notes the importance of English translations to opening up the text to the unlearned of England. In defending his authorship of yet another Trojan War narrative, Lydgate suggests in his prologue to *Troy Book* (1412-1420) that the English is needed:
Bycause he [Henry V] wolde that to hyghe and lowe
The nocle story openly wer knowe
In oure tonge, about in every age,
Any ywriten as wel in oure langage / As in Latyn and in Frensche it is;
That of the story the trouth we nat mys.17

Lydgate thus offers his retelling as the most open way in which the English people can have access to the great lessons of the Trojan narrative. He validates his English authorship through the auspices of Henry V, champion of English nationalism and the English vernacular. All these fourteenth- and fifteenth-century authors argue that their translations should be seen as supplements to the French and Latin, not as replacements. These authors strive to establish English as an acceptable alternative to their French and Latin counterparts.

Contrastingly, Thomas Usk’s prologue to *The Testament of Love* (1384-1387) extols the virtues of the linguistic hierarchy. He suggests, “Let than clerkes endyten in Latyn, for they have the propertie of science, and the knowynge in that facultie; and lette Frenchmen in their Frenche also endyten their queynt termes, for it is kyndely to their mouthes; and let us [the English] shewe our fantasyes in suche wordes as we lerneden of our dames tonge” (26-29). For Usk, there are proper languages which are divided by both national and political boundaries as well as by material or content. Latin, Usk argues, is best suited for science and French for the “queynte terms” of French romance. In this prologue, Usk sets English in opposition to French and Latin rather than as an additional means by which messages of equal import can reach the English audience. He perpetuates the stereotypes about what languages are suitable for what tasks, but deftly
claims English as suitable for all English “fantasyes,” that is to say all English poetry and fiction. English thus becomes important in its own right, not merely as a supplement for Latin and French texts already in existence. For Usk, the use of English is a question of genre rather than of status.

In addition to defining the English vernacular against the Latin and French other, authors in the late Middle Ages also began to define a standardized English vernacular against disparate English dialects. In his 1385 translation of Higden’s *Polychronicon*, John Trevisa famously comments on the problem of language difference in his preface. Trevisa and Higden are concerned with both the intrusion of non-English languages -- mainly French -- into the English language and also the problem of various English dialects. Higden notes the phonetic differences between northern and southern English and Trevisa expands upon these ideas. His description of the northern dialect as “so scharp, slyttyng, and frotyng and unshape, þat we souþeron men may þat longage unneþe undurstonde”¹⁸ is not only a description of the speech, but of the sounds of Northern English. His concern with the variety in English and attempt to present both the sounds of the northern dialect and his need to explain the various relationships between the four major dialects of Middle English expose the national concerns about their diverse speech. He is careful to note that there exist as many varieties of French as there are English dialects, but argues that only native speakers are able to distinguish these varieties.

The tensions presented in the *Polychronicon* concerning the diversity of languages in England including French, Latin, and the use of English dialects are carried forward into the next century. Caxton’s prologue to his 1490 printing of *Eneydos* also contains evidence of these concerns. Caxton begins by defending the need for an English
translation of a text already extant in both French and Latin, thus showing a perpetual urgency concerning the need for a standard and primary English. Contained within his defense is a short aside about the diversity of the English language and its vocabulary. He tells a story about a pair of merchants who had difficulty requesting eggs because of a miscommunication dealing with the terminology used for eggs. Specifically, the problem is exemplified in the linguistic difference between the terms “eggs” and “eyren.” This tale of miscommunication is as much about dialect and linguistic difference as it is about non-English language. Caxton tells us that the woman at the house answered the man’s request for eggs stating that “she coulde not speke no Frenshe.”¹⁹ Caxton continues, “And the marchaunt was angry, for he also coude speke no Frenshe, but wolde haue egges.”²⁰ Both the merchant and the woman immediately assume that the misunderstanding is a problem of language and not one of dialect. Both blame a foreign language for the miscommunication. Ironically, it is a disperate English dialect which has caused the problem. In presenting this anecdote, Caxton demonstrates that while there are problems associated with the use of non-English languages on English soil, there are also linguistic problems brought on by the many dialectic varieties at work in fifteenth-century England.

The sixteenth century saw an explosion of prose writing concerning the status of the English vernacular and the English nation. Beginning with Tyndale’s 1530 translation of the Bible, scholars and authors were concerned with the place of the English language amongst its continental counterparts. Given the tenuous regard for both the English vernacular and English translations of Holy Scripture, Tyndale justifies his translation by emphasizing the need for an open text. In his preface to the Pentateuch he states:
Because I had perceiver how that it was impossible
to stablysh the laye people in any truth excepte þo scripture were
playnly layde besore their eyes in their mother tonge that they
might se the processe ordre and meaninge of the texte: for els what
so ever truth is taught them these ennymyes of all truth qwench it
ageyne partly with the smoke of their bottomlesse pyite wherof
thou readest apocalipsis .ix. that is with apparent reasons of
sophistrye & traditions of their awne makynge founded with out
grounde of scripture and partely in iugglinge with the texte
expoundinge it in soch a sense as is impossible to gether of the
texte if thou see the processe ordre and meaninge therof.²¹

By stressing the importance of an open text, and the ability of the English language to present holy truths to the people of England “in their mother tonge,” Tyndale establishes English (and, more generally, all vernacular languages) as essential parts of Christian learning. According to the preface, it is only through the use of the vernacular that lay people can see the true meaning of the text. For Tyndale, the Latin language becomes the language of the “ennymyes of all truth” who use their language as “the smoke of their bottemlesse pyite” to rearrange the “order and meaninge therof” with “traditions of their awne makynge / founded with out grounde of scripture.” In addition to being a rather scathing view of the sixteenth-century Latinate Church, Tyndale’s diatribe leaves no question of the importance of his English translation as it would be “impossible” for him to express the truth without it.
Tyndale’s preface further establishes the complex relationship between the language and the nation. This relationship is brought to the forefront by Richard Mulcaster in his 1580 preface to his *Positions*. Mulcaster writes:

> I do write in my naturall English toungue, bycause though I make the learned my judges, which understand Latin, yet I meane good to the unlearned, which understand but English… My meaning is principally to helpe mine owne countrie, whose language will helpe me, to be understood of them, whom I would perswade: to get some thankes of them, for my good will to do well: to purchace pardon of them, if my good will do not well. …When mine argument shall require Latin, as it will eare long, I will not then spare it, in the degree, that I have it, but till it do, I will serve my countrie that waie, which I do surely thinke will prove most intelligible unto her.\(^{22}\)

Unlike Tyndale, Mulcaster does not set English in opposition to Latin, and he is careful to note that his text will be useful to Latined as well as unLatined readers; his message is one of inclusion rather than exclusion. Even so, there is no question in this text about the relationship between the vernacular and the nation. Mulcaster states explicitly that his work is in the service of his country and the English speaking people. This is evidenced by the thorough use of English in his text. Although he remarks that he will use Latin in circumstances where appropriate, Mulcaster refrains from the use of Latin except where called for by terms for classification, authors and titles (he also uses Greek in many of these instances). The only other case of Latin in his text occurs in his brief proem to the
work: “Author ipse ad librum suum.” It is clear through his extensive use of English, that there are very few times when his argument “may require” the use of Latin. In this way, he demonstrates the excellence of English for such academic purposes. For Mulcaster, the excellence and acceptance of the vernacular are tantamount to the excellence and acceptance of the English nation itself. His repetition of the idea of the country demonstrates a profound understanding of the relatedness of the superiority and prominence of the language to the merit of the country.

By the end of the sixteenth century, the conversation had returned to some of the questions which were essential to the medieval debate about the English language, namely the question of the supremacy of the English language as an artistic form. In his 1598 *Arte of English Poesie*, George Puttenham argues:

> Then as there was no art in the world till by experience found out: so if Poesie be now an Art, & of al antiquitie hath bene among the Greeks and Latines, & yet were none, vntill by studious persons fashioned and reduced into a method of rules & precepts, then no doubt may there be the like with vs. And if th'art of Poesie be but a skill appertaining to vttterance, why may not the same be with vs aswel as with them, our language being no less copious pithie and significatiue then theirs, our concepts the same, and our wits no less apt to deuise and imitate then theirs were? If againe Art be but a certaine order of rules prescribed by reason, and gathered by experience, why should not Poesie be a vulgar Art with vs aswell
as with the Greeks and Latines, our language admitting no fewer rules and nice diversities then theirs?  

Puttenham is in some ways a throwback to earlier writers who struggled to justify their use of English in poetry; like his medieval counterparts, Puttenham again argues for the excellence of English in relationship to its classical equivalents. His argument is reminiscent of earlier arguments concerning English’s place as a poetic language; however, in this later argument Puttenham integrates the language and the nation, noting that ‘our language,’ ‘our concepts,’ and ‘our wits,’ are easily equal to those of the Latin and Greek poets. For Puttenham, the debate about the poesy of the English language is no longer about whether or not the language is suitable, but whether the English see themselves as suitable authors of this artistic form.

These texts are intended to show a breadth of interest and concern about the intersection of English and non-English languages throughout late medieval and early modern England; they are not, of course, all-inclusive. This dissertation will expand upon these non-dramatic texts and show that the concerns presented in them are not limited to a courtly, political, religious, and governmental sphere, but are present within localized English drama and by the late sixteenth century have been disseminated across the English countryside.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Critics of early English vernacular nationalism rightly historicize the complexities of the political, martial, and social relationships between England and its continental
counterparts. They argue that, during the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, the promotion of English as the great language of the nation was influenced by a number of historical pressures within religious, political, and martial realms. Religious reform, war, and civil unrest are three of the most significant historical forces of change during this time; specifically, 1.) the introduction of the Lollard tradition and the move towards the Reformation, 2.) the Hundred Years’ War and sixteenth-century military conflicts with Spain, 3.) the influx of immigrants due to burgeoning trade relations and the continental religious persecution, and the increase in local uprisings which led to changing opinions about the use of non-English languages in contrast with English. These historical events not only increased the national spirit behind the vernacular, but also drove the English to distinguish themselves, their country, and their language from a growing idea of the “other.”

As English came to prominence, it began to distance itself from the classical languages, most specifically from Latin. As English came to prominence, the relationship between English and Latin became more strained and the divide between them widened. Despite thirteenth century church efforts to increase the use of the vernacular, as Janette Dillon notes, “towards the end of the fourteenth century… two episodes combined at about the same time to halt the steady thrust of English towards a position of greater strength: the translation of the Bible and the English rising.” After this point, Dillon argues, the use of Latin and the vernacular were necessarily divided along political lines and the Catholic Church stopped promoting the use of the vernacular. The cultural backlash against this decision is most clearly demonstrated in the early Lollard insistence on common access to Biblical texts and Tyndale’s subsequent translation of the Bible
into English in 1526.\textsuperscript{25} The Lollard movement challenged the overarching authority of Latin and consequently resulted in an assault on the use of Latin for many official purposes. This Lollard influence resulted in the movement away from the use of Latin for both religious and official purposes. The Lollard focus on the exclusivity of Latin and the importance of open and universal access to all texts not only created a sense of the possibility of the primacy of English, but also aided in a growing distrust of the Latin language and those who used it. Dillon argues that “the quarrel over the translation of the bible was at root a quarrel over who should have access to the words of scripture.”\textsuperscript{26} The shift from the exclusionary Latin text to an open vernacular text illuminated the problems extant with an exclusionary language and text. The tensions brought to light by the Lollard tradition quickly led to increased skepticism throughout the country concerning the use and possible abuse of Latin in both religious and political spheres.

In addition to concerns about Latin’s status in England, the use of French also remained contentious due to strained diplomatic relations between England and France. The relationship between England and France -- and by extension English and French -- had been strained by political and social factors since the Norman Conquest in 1066. In addition to these tensions, the mid-thirteenth century saw a great influx of French noblemen due, according to Baugh, in large part to Henry III’s strong attachment and loyalty to the French throne.\textsuperscript{27} Baugh argues that during this time, “opposition to the foreigner became the principal ground for such national feeling as existed and drove the barons and the middle class together in a common cause.”\textsuperscript{28} He concludes, “One of the reproaches frequently leveled at [French noblemen] is that they did not know English.”\textsuperscript{29} These are the first kernels of English nationalism and resentment for the non-English
speaking Englishman which flourish in later periods. During the later middle ages and early Renaissance tensions were further exacerbated by political conflicts, not the least of which was the Hundred Years War.

The result of the prolonged conflict between England and France during the Middle Ages was twofold. The war not only exacerbated the tension already extant between England and France, but it also increased the nationalistic tendencies of each country. Ellen C. Caldwell notes that “whether their provenance is from the historical or popular arena, representations of the Hundred Year’s War have become intertwined with constructions of nationalism by both the English and French.” She examines the differences in the accounts of the war by the French and English. Gerald Knowles suggests that “one of the effects [of the war] was to force Englishmen and Frenchmen to see themselves as belonging to different peoples… Until this time, for example, English architecture had generally followed French architecture; English perpendicular architecture of the fifteenth century is independent of the French flamboyant style.” The growing separation between the English and the French is thus signified in many of the arts, not the least of which is the literature of the time. Both R.F. Yeager and John M. Bowers examine the influence of the war on canonical writers such as Chaucer and Gower in *Inscribing the Hundred Years War*, an anthology examining the place the war played in the creation of both English and French identities. Yeager, for example, argues that “times of tumult, of war and of social unrest, of totalitarian threat enforce disclosure of the politics of language, often making them the difference between life and death.” He concludes convincingly that Gower’s selecting of language is “altogether rhetorical” and that his rhetoric helped to shape a medieval English national identity.
These critics examine the early representations of the political conflict that helped to shape the literature of the time and they show the incredible power this war had in shaping the idea of an English nationalism and an English national language.

The social and political conflicts during this time also resulted in changing the way English speakers identified themselves. The new ideas of identity, in turn, grew into new ideas of English nationalism which were necessarily tied to the unification of the English language. From these various tensions and conflicts, the critical notion of burgeoning English nationalism as recorded by critics such as John H. Fisher and Simon Horobin is intertwined with the overarching process of linguistic standardization throughout this time. Fisher and Horobin assign the agency of this process of standardization to a number of social, literary and political movements. John H. Fisher argues for a political project of advancing the primacy of English within the Lancastrian reign culminating with Henry V. He argues that through “the conversion to English of the signet clerks of Henry V, the chancery clerks and eventually the guild clerks; and the burgeoning of composition in English and the patronage of that literature by the Lancastrian court circle… we see Henry IV and Henry V attempting to establish their shaky administration.” The Lancastrian project presented by Fisher firmly positions language standardization within a growing idea of English national identities of the Middle Ages. Whether agency is assigned to a Lancastrian political project and the Chancery or more broadly to the politics of literature, the movement towards a standard language is evident in a number of texts of the later fourteenth century and continues throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.
The sixteenth century was a time of great political, religious and social upheaval in England. Not only did tensions between England and France remain strained but the threat of imminent Spanish invasion put great strain on English foreign relations during this time. The 1588 defeat of the Spanish Armada not only secured the English nation against its invaders, but also stimulated a surge of nationalistic sentiment across England. Additionally, A.J. Hoenselaars attributes the great influx of religious refugees from both France and the Low Countries in the later half of the sixteenth century to the continental conflicts and the growth of the English merchant class and the possibility of greater social mobility.

In addition to threats from abroad, the sixteenth century was also a time of great domestic upheaval in England. The 1381 Peasant’s revolt opened up the possibility of rebellion from the lower classes. The 1381 rebellion, stemming from three consecutive poll-taxes, demonstrates a growing tension between the Commons and Lords in the fourteenth century. Rebellion was in the air again in 1450 with the uprising commonly referred to as Cade’s Rebellion which pitted the aristocracy against itself, largely due to mismanagement and political discontent. This aristocratic rebellion was followed by some time of domestic quiet which was interrupted by a number of small uprisings in the 1540s. These disruptions were due in large part to unhappiness about inflation and changing farming practices leading up to 1549. In 1549, social unrest came to a head and two distinct and independent uprisings challenged the authority of the ruling class. These were Ket’s Rebellion in which Robert Ket led an uprising of peasants against perceived political and social inequities in Norfolk and the Western Rebellion in Cornwall and Devon, the main complaint of which was religious persecution.
The result of this perpetual domestic unrest was greater awareness of non-natives and non-standard speakers on English soil. Hoenselaars concludes that, “The influx of foreigners during the second half of the sixteenth century placed a heavy burden on the native economy and coupled nascent national awareness with a strident form of popular xenophobia.” Given these mounting tensions, it is, perhaps, not surprising that we find strong statements about Englishness and the English language in the late sixteenth century. Through these rebellions and their influence on English culture and language, we can see growing tension in England about the social hierarchy and place of peasants within the nation; these growing tensions led directly to the stigmatization of dialect on the early English stage. Along with this stigmatization was a cultural movement to homogenize the language. Indeed, as James Simpson writes, “in the first half of the sixteenth century, a culture that simplified and centralized jurisdiction aggressively displaced a culture of jurisdictional heterogeneity.” He argues that the social and political upheavals of the sixteenth century “provoke cultural practices that stress the values of unity and novelty above all.” Despite the impending explosion of language brought about by the vast borrowings which eventually led to the “Inkhornt Controversy,” late sixteenth century authors maintained a steady distrust of non English speakers on English soil and sought to unify the nation and its speakers. This study will show that dramatic representations of linguistic difference on the early English stage both reflect these cultural concerns and shape the landscape of the English language.

These two hundred years shaped not only the face of the English nation, but also her language. The social and political tensions, both foreign and domestic, unified the nation and, with it, the language. Modern scholars have identified a number of important
threads which shaped the history of the English language in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance including the relationship between the church and the state, the political unrest and domestic conflict. This was a time of vast linguistic changes resulting in the standardization of England’s national language. As N. F. Blake writes, “The period from 1400 to 1660 is central to the development of Modern English and the formation of the standard…Whereas at the start of the period covered [1400] … the general attitude to English was one of despair at its lack of elegance, towards its end [1660] the growth in the standardization of English, the frequency of literature of quality in English, and the realization that English was an ancient language that had had its own church and its own writing for many centuries led people to appreciate its strength and status.” These cultural practices are reflected in dramatic presentations of the stigmatization of non-English and non-standard speakers on the early English stage.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

This dissertation includes chapters which analyze the representations of Latin, French, and dialect speech on the early English stage. Chapter One, “Diverse Voices: Drama and Linguistic Identity,” demonstrates the importance of early English drama in the critical conversation concerning the history of the English language. It argues that medieval and early modern English drama offers a perspective on the development of the English vernacular which has been largely ignored in the criticism thus far. It also lays out the known manuscript provenance and production histories of the plays examined in this dissertation. Chapter Two, “Malice and Vice: The Use and Abuse of Latin on the
Early English Stage,” primarily focuses on the ways in which the dramatization of Latin in the Corpus Christi plays and early Moralities represents underlying cultural concerns about the institutional power inherent in the Latin language and the propensity for the corruption of that power. It argues that these concerns led directly to a rejection of Latinate authority in favor of a vernacular, and therefore English national institutional authority. Chapter Three, “Distrust and Disdain: Foreign Speakers on English Soil,” examines the social and political tensions inherent in the relationship between English and French as demonstrated by the de Casibus / Mirror for Magistrates tradition on the early English stage. Further, it argues that the establishment of an English national identity is represented through the stigmatization of French speakers on the early English stage.

Chapter Four, “The English ‘Other’: Rustic Speakers and Rustic Speech,” argues that the representation of dialect-speaking characters in medieval and early modern drama signifies a growing cultural concern about the problems inherent in a disparate language system as English struggles to define itself against itself. In this way, representations of dialect on the early modern stage make evident a clear concern about linguistic diversity and demonstrate the supremacy of standard speaking English men and women, thus enticing all speakers to a more standardized English. My dissertation concludes with an epilogue which briefly examines the later manifestations of these linguistic concerns in plays like Thomas Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy and Shakespeare’s Henry V. It concludes that these plays represent a re-imagination of the fears extant in the earlier plays and shows the ways in which the public theater reacts to the changing understanding of the place of the English language within the culture.


3 Saussure, 98.


5 Saussure, 194.


8 Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg, 202.


13 While Gower also wrote in Latin and French, a number of critics have commented on his project of English nationalism and crafting a stronger English vernacular.

14 Baugh and Cable, 199-230. Although these authors were primarily concerned with 16th and early 17th century poetry, the social anxieties about language they express are also seen in early English drama.


16 Wogan-Brown et al., 127 ll. 63-64.

17 Wogan-Brown et al., 45 ll. 90-95.


20 Bühler, 17.


27 Baugh, 127-129.

28 Baugh, 130.

29 Baugh, 131.


31 Gerald Knowles, 50.


33 R.F. Yeager, “Politics and the French Language in England During the Hundred Years War: The Case of John Gower,” in *Inscribing the Hundred Years War in French and English Cultures*, 127-128.

34 Yeager, 128.


38 Tim Machen has recently argued against a simple acceptance of the idea of English nationalism, claiming instead that these changes in the language are evidence of rhetorical strategies of containment for foreign peoples in England. His monograph, *English in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), explores these issues. While he argues against the Lancastrian project, his attention to the anxieties about non-English speakers in England will also inform my project.


41 Simpson, 1.

Chapter One:

Diverse Voices: Drama and Linguistic Identity

In comedies, the greatest Skyll is this, rightly to touché
All thynges to the quicke: and eke to frame eche person so,
That by his common talke, you may his nature rightly know:
A Royster ought not preache, that were to strange to heare,
But as from virtue he doth swerve, so ought his woordes appeare

(Prol.14-18)

One of the most important tasks of crafting great comedy, according to the prologue to Richard Edwards’ *Damon and Pithias* (1571), is for authors to create a precise language and vocabulary for each character according to his or her kind. Here, Edwards encapsulates the early modern belief that drama could, through the speech of a character, demonstrate the ‘nature’ of the man. He believes that the each character should be framed by such language that the audience may know his place and his “nature” by the language the characters uses. J. E. Kramer argues that in this prologue, “… the playwright is, above all, concerned at the start to prepare in his audience the proper expectations which will affect the proper response.” While Kramer gives a convincing reading of most of the prologue, in support of his strong argument that *Damon and Pithias* is an apology for the courtly entertainment Humanist drama had become, he conveniently skips these lines which clearly define the importance of language to characterization. Kramer’s reading is, of course, correct; the sheer existence of a prologue signifies an authorial or editorial concern with the reception of his work. But, although the prologue is mainly concerned
with the content and tone of the characters’ speeches—it goes on to note that an old man should be sober, a young man rash, a matron grave and so on—it also reveals a concern about the construction of individual speeches on a linguistic level. It calls for all authors to make language choices for each character which will enable the audience to identify their nature through their “common talke.” More generally, it reveals an awareness and a concern about the language used to portray different characters and the ways in which a person’s moral or social rank can be established through an examination of the kind of language he or she uses, or in the case of drama, the kind of language the character is given.

The portrait Edwards provides encapsulates the complicated role language played in the 200 year birth of the English dramatic tradition. The three hundred years of the 13th to 16th centuries was a time of abundant community festivity and pageantry in England and across the continent. In addition to the liturgical and civic drama developing during this time, there were also open air tournaments, processionals and pageants, as well as court mummings and masks, and university performances. All of these productions helped to shape the community as whole. As David Mills argues, “whatever the overt subject of play or tableau or the overt occasion for a procession or entry, all served to promote social cohesion. Each occasion reflected to a community—nation, town, village or social group—an ideal image of itself, drawing upon and reinforcing myths of its past.”3 This study will show that one of the most effective means by which early playwrights could affect social cohesion was through the portrayal of different types of languages, the stigmatization of foreign and dialect speakers, and the elevation of a more standard English. It will demonstrate that early dramatic texts constitute a rhetoric
of linguistic and cultural unity which operates through the stigmatization of foreign and non-standard speakers and elevates the English language as the emergent language of the English nation.

The purpose of this chapter is two fold. First, I hope to demonstrate the ways in which medieval drama might have been influential to a medieval cultural understanding of language. Second, my broad examination of the history of medieval and early modern pre-professional drama is meant to provide both textual and contextual background which will supplement my readings of individual texts in later chapters. To those ends, this chapter will outline the development of early English drama, examine each dramatic genre’s relationship to the history of the English language, and demonstrate the ways in which these texts—and the performances they represent—may have possessed the power to shape the attitudes of their respective audiences concerning the English language. This study follows critics like Ruth Nisse who views “civic theater as a form of political and historical Discourse that invents and defines its community” and argues that early drama demonstrates a “‘politics of interpretation,’ the process by which poet-playwrights, players, and spectators brought specifically hermeneutic problems to a public stage in order to negotiate their potential communal consequences.” Although this study is only tangentially interested in hermeneutics, it will rely heavily on Nisse’s understanding of the cultural significance of early English drama in establishing a collective consciousness of community and language.

The relationship between community, culture and language has been explored by cultural anthropologists beginning with the foundational structuralist: Claude Levi-Strauss. Cultural anthropology is a useful category in this study, as it has been defined
by Alfred L. Kroeber and Talcott Parsons as the "transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-meaningful systems as factors in shaping of human behavior and the artifacts produced through behavior." Cultural anthropologists who follow Levi-Strauss’ teaching have identified a diachronic model of social change which takes into account aspects of language, individual behavior, environment and culture. In this model, the language symbols and the language system of a community represent a storehouse of all available systems of meaning. From that storehouse, cultural norms are negotiated through a circular process. Those norms are then manifested as individual behaviors. These individual behaviors are subsequently affected either positively or negatively by the environment of that culture. If the behaviors are viewed by the community in a positive light, they are reinforced and the cultural practices which set in motion that specific set of individual behaviors are rewarded and retained. If, on the other hand, the community views the individual behaviors negatively, a renegotiation of the language symbols from which the culture was initially drawn is necessary. Thus, the community goes back to its linguistic storehouse and the culture is adapted so as to alleviate the negative outcomes of the undesired individual behaviors. This system is, perhaps, best demonstrated graphically:
For the purposes of this study, the specific environment I am interested in is the dramatic sphere. It is my contention that Early English drama constitutes a specific environment in which the individual linguistic behaviors of the community can be both demonstrated and examined. When linguistic characteristics are portrayed in a positive light (as in the use of standard dialects) those language choices are reinforced and the culture continues to reward that type of linguistic behavior. In contrast, when linguistic choices are shown in a more negative light (as subsequent chapters will demonstrate can be the case when Latin, French, and various dialects are used in various circumstances) the community is forced to renegotiate its linguistic behaviors, thus changing the culture, individual behaviors, and, eventually, the drama as well. The “environment” of drama, then, reflects current linguistic practices, comments on those practices, asks audiences to evaluate their own linguistic practices, and forces either a renegotiation or reinforcement of those linguistic practices.

This model is complicated by the early English dramatic focus on the significances of the differences between languages. When applied to the linguistic choices made by early playwrights, Bakhtin’s understanding of the dialogic of multiple
languages working in concert with each other demonstrates that “meaning derives not only from reference to the world but from differential relationships in a language system.” Bakhtin’s work clearly demonstrates the role of competing languages in medieval society and culture. This chapter and the following argue that the complex relationships between competing languages dramatized on the early English stage effectively shaped both the culture and the language of the time. My argument picks up Michael Hattaway’s statement that “language is not just a function of reality but an instrument that itself serves to constitute that reality,” and demonstrates that the dialogic of early English drama worked to shape both the language and the culture of medieval and early modern England in a number of new and important ways. 

To understand the cultural import of and transformative properties made possible by medieval drama, we might also examine the theatrical sphere. It is my belief that the ways in which people experience the theatrical space has remained, at least in the most important ways, relatively constant over time. Certainly tastes, genres, and modes of performance have changed, and our new technologies have offered many new ways of thinking about the theatrical sphere; nevertheless, I contend that the pedagogical and didactic experiences of the theatrical space have remained relatively static. Renowned film critic, Henry Giroux argues that, “films can enable people to think more critically about how art can contribute to constructing public spaces that expand the possibility for pleasure and political agency, democratic relations, and social justice.” He further notes we must examine films critically to discover “how the historical and contemporary meanings that films produce align, reproduce, and interrupt the broader sets of ideas, discourses, and social configurations at work in the larger society.” This study will
show that early English drama works to “align, reproduce, and interrupt” the broader set of ideas about linguistic difference in late Medieval and early Renaissance England in much the same ways that modern films do. I see the relationship between early English drama and its culture, like all good film, as a fluid entity. Playwrights are necessarily influenced by their communities while at the same time they are working to influence those same communities. Much of this study is based on the premise that a theatrical space can align, reproduce, interrupt, and question social norms at one and the same time. In this way, the playwright becomes both the driver and the passenger, working to shape the ideologies of his audience while at the same time mirroring those cultural premises which seem most appropriate to his staged world. This study will argue that early English drama functioned in much the same way a modern film, in that it created a critical sphere wherein the role of language and linguistic difference could be examined by its early English audience.

Early English drama demonstrates a cultural negotiation of the contemporary linguistic climate. As such, drama is not only “one of the main forms of a broader Fifteenth-century vernacular theology,” but also as one of the primary and first forms of vernacular linguistic theory.\(^\text{13}\) When applied to the linguistic choices made by early playwrights, Bakhtin’s understanding of the dialogic of multiple languages working in concert with each other demonstrates that “meaning derives not only from reference to the world but from differential relationships in a language system.”\(^\text{14}\) Bakhtin’s work clearly demonstrates the role of competing languages in medieval society and culture. This chapter and the following argue that the complex relationships between competing languages dramatized on the early English stage effectively shaped both the culture and
the language of the time. My argument picks up Michael Hattaway’s statement that “language is not just a function of reality but an instrument that itself serves to constitute that reality,” and demonstrates that the dialogic of early English drama worked to shape both the language and the culture of medieval and early modern England in a number of new and important ways.15

Not all critics view the language of medieval drama in this way. In his analysis of the earliest English drama, John Wesley Harris, for example, notes, “characterization, too, is hindered by the fact that all the characters use exactly the same language. Pilate speaks just like his soldiers, vicious Caiaphas precisely like pious Joseph, and what later writers called the ‘decorum’ of speech is not observed, it is not ‘made proper’ to the situation and personality of the character uttering it.”16 However, in the following chapters, I hope to show that the characters do not all use “exactly the same language.” This study will show that early English dramatists made conscious decisions to vary their language in response to cultural and political pressures and through their work early dramatists were able to shape the voices of the English communities. In order to better understand the cultural work that is taking place in these plays, we need to look closely at the “environment” of the early English dramatic tradition.

ORIGINS OF MEDIEVAL DRAMA

Beginning with Glynne Wyckham’s early study on the role of the early English stage, critics have argued for the value of medieval drama as more than simply a crude precursor to the glamour of the Elizabethan stage. Indeed, in 1959 Wyckham noted the
depth of the dramatic canon and called for “a new assault on the annals of our drama in the Middle Ages: to look for drama and not necessarily literature: conflict, contrast, portrayal of life as lived and honest endeavour to interpret its significance on the count of content: beauty, colour, form, movement in a word, spectacle, on the count of staging: and value of money or the trouble taken to attend on the part of the audience.”17 Since then there have been a number of advances in our understanding of the role of the early English drama within early English culture. Indeed, the REED project has done much to increase our understanding of the cultural significance of the early dramatic tradition and critics like David Bevington, Pamela King, Ruth Nisse and Martin Stevens have successfully opened up medieval drama as an avenue of important and productive literary criticism.

The earliest surviving examples of an English dramatic tradition are those of liturgical drama. Records from the tenth century testify to the detailed dramatic presentations of many significant Biblical events. The most prevalent of these were the Easter service dramatizations of the resurrection, the most famous of which dramatize the Marys’ discovery of the empty tomb (previously identified as the Quem Quaeritis but now often known by the more general title Visitatio Sepulchri). The first surviving text of this type of play is dated to the reign of Edgar (959-975). The proliferation of this types of performance is evidenced by the Shrewsbury fragments which provide some lines assigned to characters in plays about the Nativity, Resurrection, and a Peregrinus (Pilgrim) play. William Tydeman notes that “records confirm that Durham, York, Beverly, Lincoln, Lichfield, Norwich, Salisbury and Wells all had their liturgical repertoires.”18 These liturgical plays were primarily performed within the confines of the
church, often as part of an Easter celebration or mass. They were performed by clerics and were sung or chanted; the Shrewsbury fragments survive with some references to musical accompaniment. Most of the early liturgical drama was sung in Latin, but the Shrewsbury fragments also provide evidence that these types of plays were sometimes performed in English.\(^{19}\)

While early critics hypothesized that these early liturgical dramas acted as precursors to the English vernacular dramatic tradition, recent critics argue that civic productions originated simultaneously with and independently from the liturgical tradition. Hans-Jurgen Diller argues that one of the most important distinguishing features between liturgical drama and religious civic plays is the relationship between time and space and the audience’s participation in that relationship. He notes:

While the play has to ‘create’ the time and place of the world represented in it, the liturgical ceremony finds them, as it were, ready-made by the liturgy: the altar suggests the sepulcher, Easter matins evoked the first morning after Christ’s resurrection… The play is also distinguished from the liturgical ceremony in that it presupposes an audience which it ‘confronts’; the ceremony knows only a congregation consisting above all of participants; it may, but need not, include onlookers.\(^{20}\)

Although both the cycle plays and the early liturgical plays dramatize biblical history and focus on the Christian redemption of the soul, they differ significantly in their modes and intentions. As Tydeman has argued, “The impulse and spirit behind the two forms of medieval scriptural play seem too dissimilar to sustain the notion that the sacred material became ‘secularized’ and hence downgraded to become a popular form of entertainment
of which the Church disapproved." Critics now agree that the medieval civic drama developed independently and was not simply a product of the liturgical dramas being forced out-of-doors. Because we now believe that early English civic drama was not simply a reworking of dogmatic liturgical drama, modern interpretations of the texts have been freed to explore more carefully the social, political, and cultural influences of the drama on early English society.

The earliest English drama—both liturgical and secular—was strongly didactic. The earliest dramatic presentations were designed to teach the audience (who were primarily made of up congregation members) about good Christian living. The plays were designed, as Peter Happé has argued, “to instruct the audiences in such matters as moral behaviors, or the sanctity of baptism; to give them such information as to help them how to live their lives in spiritual terms.” As the genre of drama developed and the plays became more secular, the scope of what might be taught through dramatic performance widened. Early English plays were then able to offer models in which a medieval audience could discover not only how to live a good Christian life, but also how to lead a good English life. For early English playwrights, one important tenant of living a good English life was the use of a clear and standardized English language. The stigmatization of foreign and dialect speakers on the early English stage thus encouraged, even taught, medieval audiences about the right kind of character and the right kind of speaking. This is not to say that early English drama simply worked on a top-down model of disseminating information. These plays were socially produced and many were so large in scope as to invite a kind of social authoring. Because these plays were founded on socialized activities, they are also infused with the social, cultural, and
political concerns of their playwrights, actors, and audiences. This is especially true of the civic drama and Corpus Christi tradition. Later chapters will show how the question of language usage and linguistic difference was quite literally played-out on the early English stage.

CIVIC DRAMA CYCLE and the CORPUS CHRISTI TRADITION

The largest and most spectacular forms of medieval drama were, arguably, the cycle plays. The origins of the cycle drama were tied to the Feast of Corpus Christi. They were performed annually during the feast which celebrated the consecration of the host on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, usually at the end of April or in early May. J.L Styan argues that two separate but significant events converged to create an atmosphere suitable to the propagation of the cycle plays: the 1244 prohibition on *ludi theatrales* by the Bishop of Lincoln which restricted acting inside the church and the proposal of the feast by Pope Urban IV in 1264 leading to the confirmation of it by Clement V in 1311 at the Council of Vienna. While I do not mean to suggest that the cycle plays were liturgical plays which simply moved outdoors, I agree with Styan that these two events “opened the way for secular elements to appear.” Although the surviving manuscripts of the cycle plays are dated to the sixteenth century, the REED project has uncovered evidence of their playing as early as the fourteenth century. Richard Beadle notes, “The casual mention of a place where three Corpus Christi pageant-wagons were stored in 1376 is the first possible indication that some sort of dramatic presentation may have been taking place” but he also qualifies this dating, “Whether this should be taken to
imply the existence of a cycle of the kind found more fully documented in the fifteenth century is a matter for dispute.”

Despite the problematic dating of an originary moment for these plays, their popularity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is clear. In addition to the complete texts surviving from York, Wakefield, and Chester, and fragments surviving from Norwich, Newcastle, and Brome, records also suggest some form of Corpus Christi playing in Kendal, Preston, Lincoln, Louth, Ipswich, and Worcester.

Historical records indicate that the production of these massive cycle plays was primarily the task of trade guilds. Indeed, many of the records the REED project has uncovered pertaining to the complicated history of medieval drama have been in some way related to guild participation in the staging and production of these plays. According to Styan, “only the great medieval trade guilds had the money, the resources and the organization for this task.”

The guilds were charged with stage and set construction as well as casting roles and rehearsal. The presentation of pageants became a great point of pride for individual guilds and, as Meg Twycross notes, “the spirit of competition between the guilds would ensure that each attempted to outdo the others.”

The festival was also quite costly. The guilds were primarily responsible for the cost of production of their individual plays and often excised an additional annual tax, known in York as “pageant-silver” and in Chester as “pageant-pence,” on the guild members. Some civic productions were supplemented by “a fund raised by fining delinquents, from collections in the guild chapel and from certain related ground rents.”

The vast nature of these cycles, many of which included between 30 and 50 individual pageants, must have required incredible feats of oversight. For this reason, many towns appointed a pageant
master who was, in effect, in charge of producing the pageants and cycles; he was also charged with collecting the “pageant-silver.”

At their height, these cycles were massive cultural events, involving the churches, guilds, community leaders and members; the proliferation of recorded performances suggests that they were perhaps one of the single most influential cultural activities in England during the period. Twycross argues that this popularity was due in large part to the coupling of spiritual and civic enthusiasm. She notes, “The mystery plays were at the same time a religious festival and a tourist attraction: their players could draw on a charge of heightened religious emotion and civic pride which we can never recreate.”

It is precisely this relationship between the religious and the civic life which has captured the attention of recent critics. Styan argues that the integration of the sacred and the secular does more than imply popular interest; this integration constitutes the cycle’s ingenuity. He states, “The early English stage demonstrated its genius for compelling and workable dramaturgy, and for a remarkably inventive stagecraft, both by undertaking the task of dramatizing the copious materials of the Bible and by making them responsive to local needs and feelings.”

James Simpson goes so far as to privilege the secular content above the educational or catechismal purposes. He argues, “The cycles are not ‘instructional’ at all. Instead they offered a space in which the members of many institutions could reflect on their own practice in everyday life.” He continues, “The plays take possession of salvation history by writing the pain of family and political life into scriptural narrative.” In these ways, Simpson and Styan, along with a number of other modern critics and scholars, have argued that medieval cycle plays dramatize the concerns of the community within its presentation of biblical history. My following
chapters will show that one of the most significant of these concerns was the form and function of an early English linguistic identity.

While the pageants were performed with some regularity from their fourteenth century beginnings well into the sixteenth century, they were often met with strong opposition. Perhaps the earliest documented statements against the cycle plays are found in the early fifteenth century *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*. This unique document, widely believed to be a product of the Wycliffite or Lollard movement, is written in two parts by two distinct authors, the first likely a priest and the second a devout Lollard. The first part very clearly denounces plays of this type as sinful and deviant:

> Thanne, sithen miraclis of Crist and of hise seintis weren thus effectual, as by oure bileve we ben in certain, no man shulde usen in bourde and pleye the miracles and werkis that Crist so ernystfully wrouughte to oure helthe. For whosoever so doth, he errith in the byleve, reversith Crist, and scornyth God.\(^{36}\)

The first author goes on to identify these plays as reversing the teachings of Christ and of discipline. In this part of the treatise, the author sets out the six most common arguments for miracle playing and responds to each individually.\(^{37}\) The second part of the treatise is a more hostile and specific reaction to a contemporary of the author, a “half friend” (386), whom the author wishes to convert to a whole friend by convincing him of the evils of miracle playing. The second part focuses primarily on the sinful nature of performing as Christ, specifically in recreating the Passion sequence: “But, frend, peraventur yee seyen that no man schal make you to byleven but that it is good to pleyen the passion of Crist and othere dedis of him” \(^{(674-676)}\). The *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*
is generally recognized as the most comprehensive antitheatrical tract dealing with the medieval cycle plays; however, here has been some recent scholarly debate about which specific medieval dramatic traditions this treatise objects to most vehemently. Lawrence Clopper, for example, argues that the plays which are identified as most abhorrent are not those of the civic cycle, but instead of festive drama. Clifford Davidson rightly points out the vagueness of the term and idea of the miracle play. He notes, “‘Miracle’ apparently may not originally have necessarily signified a religious play, for it seems to have included a type universally condemned by ecclesiastical authorities, who objected to the participation in such plays by the clergy.”38 Despite the problems of defining exactly what types of dramatic performance were forbidden by the treatise, its vehement denial of the significance of these performances, nevertheless, belies the cultural significance of medieval civic drama.

THE YORK CYCLE

The York Corpus Christi cycle is believed to be the earliest of the medieval cycle plays. The manuscript which survives, dated between 1463 and 1477, comprises fifty individual pageants, designated not only by their titles but also by the individual guilds which were responsible for their playing. For this reason, it seems clear that this manuscript was intended as an official register of plays offered for performance at the Corpus Christi feast in York. While the manuscript is of a relatively late date, external references to the York cycle plays suggest that some version of this cycle was being played in the second half of the fourteenth century. Additionally, a number of references
to guild participation in Corpus Christi pageants in the 1380s and 1390s have been
uncovered by the REED project, including indications that the Tailors, Skinners, Bakers,
Listers, and Plasterers were involved in pageant production during that time.\(^{39}\)

While scholars are still trying to uncover details about the inception of the Corpus
Christi cycle, the later playing history of the cycle has been well documented.\(^{40}\) When
played in its entirety, the York cycle was a day long celebration of biblical history which
wound its way through the center of town. As Twycross has demonstrated, “there were
between twelve and sixteen stations along the processional route, which ran from Holy
Trinity Priory just inside Micklegate Bar down the main streets of the city in a left-
headed sickle shape to end on the Pavement.”\(^{41}\) These pageants must have taken over
every aspect of civic life during their playing. The REED project has discovered a city
ordinance requiring the players of the first pageants to be ready for performance by 4:30
a.m. and it has been estimated that it would take each wagon from seven to eight hours to
complete the route; from the time the first actor took the stage to the final bow must have
taken upwards of twenty hours of continuous playing in the streets of York.\(^{42}\) Moreover,
the sheer size and scope of the cycle must have been all-consuming for the community;
the cycle contained nearly 14,000 lines of dialogue and required “twenty-four men
capable of taking on the role of the adult Christ.”\(^{43}\) Even so, the York cycle enjoyed a
long and prosperous history stretching from the late 14\(^{\text{th}}\) century to its final performances
in 1569. Given these performance practices and the grand size of the York cycle
performances, it seems clear that the plays would have held great significance for the
community. The time, money, and energy spent on these performances suggest their
significance to the community. Keeping in mind this significance, the York cycle had
quite a potential to both reflect and inflect the community which worked so hard to bring it to the stage.

The York cycle (and those sections of the Wakefield cycle which are borrowed from York) shows an awareness of the everyday life which is not as strongly present in the other cycles. This attention to the local needs and interests of its audience has prompted a number of critics to identify an individual author, often referred to as the “York Realist” following the seminal work of J. W. Robinson in 1963. This author is, according to Robinson and others, responsible for the eight Passion plays of the York cycle. Robinson focuses primarily on the linguistic dramaturgy of these plays and concludes that “it is [the York Realist’s] imaginative and applied realism—a realism continually apparent in word and phrase, argument and debate, character and action, and probably in the introduction of whole episodes—that marks him off from the other medieval playwrights.” Pamela King is very wary of what she terms “the problematically designated ‘York Realist,’” but agrees that these plays are in some ways different from others in the cycle. She attributes these differences to the playwright’s interest in the social workings of the community, specifically his interest in the cultural implications of the legal system. She argues: “This dramatist both recognizes that the process of litigation has a number of rhetorical properties which lend themselves to dramatization, and that it is an effective vehicle for exposing how discrete groups operate to gain, assert, and protect political power and factional advantage.” The only evidence of the authorship of the York Realist is internal and suggested by similarities in tone, meter, lyric and dramatic presentation; as such, the existence of such an author may never be fully resolved.
Since Robinson’s initial identification of the York Realist, a number of critics have expanded his analysis of the Passion plays and have argued that the entirety of the York cycle is more concerned with the dealings of the city than are comparable cycles and moralities of the period. Ruth Nisse, for example has examined the civic role of the York cycle in regards to what she views as Lollard impulses within the pageants. She concludes: “The York plays articulate a program of urban self-legitimization that emphasizes, like more familiar forms of protohumanist political discourse, the role of public rhetoric in civic rule. In the plays’ stagings of biblical history, York's concerns with political voice and citizenship become inextricably bound up with the issues of exegesis and authority central to Lollardy.”

In this way we can see a close relationship with not only the secular, but a specific piece of secular life, namely the city itself. Speaking specifically about the York cycle’s use of language, Peter Happé notes that “it appears that within the York Cycle itself there is a remarkable homogeneity of language, showing itself in the use of the same vocabulary and restricted choice of words even though the plays were written over a long period and by different authors.” It is the general homogeneity of language that allows for the examination of civic and cultural impulses which are evident in the representation of non-standard language in the cycle. Given the general regularity of language in the York cycle, linguistic anomalies such as foreign language usage or dialect speakers are clearly designed to stand out as cases of linguistic difference. Subsequent chapters will show the York cycle’s attention to the role of language, specifically the English language within the civic community and will argue that the representations of linguistic difference in the cycle demonstrate a conscious reevaluation of the place and significance of the English language and its speakers.
THE TOWNELEY CYCLE

The cycle manuscript commonly referred to as the Towneley Cycle—named for the first known owners of the manuscript and sometimes referred to as the Wakefield Cycle—is, like most early dramatic texts, subject to much critical speculation and conjecture. The manuscript, now housed at the Huntington Library, is a relatively complete compilation of plays on 132 vellum leaves and dated to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. Martin Stevens has described this manuscript as “a complete book.” He argues against A.C. Cawley and others who have proposed that the Towneley manuscript is a kind of register of Corpus Christi plays. Instead, Stevens argues it was “something like a presentation copy of the play for the safekeeping of the lord of the manor or some other eminent person.” Stevens’ argument seems likely given the Towneley manuscripts’ general lack of marginal notation or corrections relating to acting or performance and of guild proprieties.

The Towneley manuscript is believed to be a record of performances between 1450 and 1550. Stevens and Cawley argue convincingly for the location of the Towneley cycle being played in Wakefield from a few external indications references made in the Wakefield Burgess Court Rolls of 1556 and 1559. Additionally, Peter Meredith notes the existence of a letter dated May 27, 1576 from the ecclesiastical commission in York, barring many of the sins associated with miracle/cycle playing on the occasion of a planned presentation in Wakefield. In addition to these historical citations, critics have argued that there is sufficient internal evidence to locate the cycle in Wakefield. They note that the city of Wakefield has been added to the first title as well as to the Noah pageant in the single hand of the manuscript. Further, there are four
allusions to regional locations. While the provenance and purpose of the manuscript is still a matter of critical contention, what is clear is the depth and breadth of the content of this surviving manuscript.

Perhaps the most famous medieval playwright is often identified as the Wakefield Master. First identified by A.C. Cawley, the Wakefield Master is believed to be responsible for five plays, all of which use his distinctive nine-line stanza and which show an advanced use of linguistic parallels, and colloquial idioms. In his extended study of the Wakefield Master, Purdon has argued that, “the Wakefield Master’s unique dramatic art invites his audience to renew understanding of itself as community—that is, as a collective of individuals living in a constructive and practical relation to the materiality of create reality and its Creator by scrutinizing everything they may have previously taken for granted about themselves as well as the world around them and its inherent order.” One of the most significant things which might have been taken for granted and which the Wakefield Master demands his audience reconsider is the role of language and linguistic difference in his community. While this dissertation does not limit its examination of language in the Towneley cycle to the Wakefield Master’s plays, the Second Shepherds’ play, perhaps the most famous of the Master’s pageants, is one of the most useful examples of the relationship between early English drama and the establishment of an English national vernacular.
THE CHESTER CYCLE

According to the Chester volume of the REED project, the first record of performance in Chester was in 1422. The cycle was still being performed as part of the Chester Corpus Christi celebration in 1472, although it may not have been performed as a processional at that time. The end of the fifteenth century saw a unique change for the Chester cycle; records indicate that the cycle was no longer performed as one long processional nor associated with the feast of Corpus Christi. Twycross notes, “In Chester, the cycle moved back from Corpus Christi Day to Whit Week some time between 1475 and 1521: by the 1530’s the twenty-five plays were spread over three days, the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Whit Week.” While we have no concrete explanation of why these changes occurred, Mills suggests that one motivating factor may have been economics and notes that after the process was divided “companies performing on different days could share a single wagon, and our first recorded ‘wagon-sharing agreement’ dates from 1531/1532.” Regardless, the Chester production of the cycle pageants thrived for some fifty more years, well into the sixteenth century. The last recorded production of the Chester cycle was in 1575 and Mills notes that a single play—The Shepherds’ Play—was extracted and performed for Lord Derby and his son in 1577.

The provenance and original authorship of the cycle is, like most the other cycles, largely unknown. There are no less than three men attributed with bringing forth the Chester cycle: John Arnway, Henry Francis and Ralph Higden. In what is often referred to as the late Banns (1616-1618), David Rogers identified the first mayor of Chester as Sir John Arneway who, Rogers claims, commissioned the publication of the cycle plays
authored by one Rondoll, a monk of the Chester abbey (later identified as Higden). Rogers states:

Reverend lordes and ladyes all
That at this tyme assembled be,
By this message understande you shall
That sometimes there was mayor of this cittie
Sir John Arnewaye, knight, whoe moste worthelye
Contented himselfe to sett out in playe

The devise of one Rondall, moncke of Chester Abbaye.62

This Bann, a sixteenth-century addition to the Chester text, is recorded in five manuscripts, including most famously Rogers’ Breviary. The relationship between the Chester cycle and the Arneway family is also attested to by a 1531 proclamation by the town clerk, William Newhall, who maintains Arneway’s involvement with the text, but ascribes authorship to Henry Francis, a monk whose name appears in the 1377, 1379 and 1382 St. Wernburgh’s lists. Unfortunately, both Rogers and Newhall appear to have been basing their histories on an inaccurate mayoral list naming Arneway the first mayor of Chester, in 1328. This error was corrected in 1594 by William Aldersley who showed that Sir Walter Lynett had been the first mayor of Chester from 1257-1260, and located Arneway’s mayoral term at 1268-1276, predating the proclamation of the Feast of Corpus Christi in 1311, as well as the lives of Higden and Francis.63 While Sir John Arneway has thus been eliminated from the historical dating of the Chester cycle, the mayoral rolls list one Richard Arneway as mayor from 1360 to 1362, a date which coincides with the end of Higden’s life and predates Francis’ appearance by only 10 years and may substantiate
the relationship of the Arnewaye name with the origin of the Chester cycle. It is possible, then, that this later mayor Arneway had some connection to the production of the cycle.

The question of authorship is similarly difficult. The cycle is believed to have been primarily authored by a single playwright who used standard eight-line stanzas throughout and was significantly influenced by the French playwrights of the *Mystere du viel testament* and *Passions*. As noted above, in a singular 14th century proclamation William Newhall attributed authorship to Henry Francis, about whom very little is known. More substantial, if circumstantial, evidence supports authorship by the Rondoll mentioned by Rogers, now generally accepted to be the Chester monk, Ralph or Randall Higden. The association of Higden with this manuscript is especially important to this study because of Higden’s interest in the role of the vernacular in his *Polychronicon* outlined in the introduction of this dissertation. Indeed, the Banns gestures specifically to Higden’s interest in bringing biblical history to the people in their own vernacular:

These storyes of the testamente at this tyme, you knowe,

In a common Englishe tonge never reade nor harde.

Yet thereof in these pagiantes to make open showe,

This moncke—and noe moncke—was nothinge affrayed

With feare of burning, hangeing, or cutting of heade

To sett out that all maye deserne and see,

And part of good belefe, beleve ye mee (21-27).

This idealized representation of Higden as a reformatory pioneer who, facing burning, hanging and beheading, forged ahead to bring an open text to the people, is certainly, as
Mills has noted, a “spurious and propagandistic” fiction. Unfortunately, Higden’s association with the cycle is marred by the unreliable nature of Rogers’ testimony concerning the role of Arneway; Rogers’ mistake calls into question the attribution of Higden as primary author of the cycle. In addition, Clopper notes that marginal notation in the manuscript suggest that Higden was not the original author, but that “sixteenth century antiquarians may have mistaken Higden for the author of the plays when all that the original records claimed that he was the ‘authority,’ that is, that the plays were not written by Higden, but were based on some version of his Polychronicon.” Whether he was an original author or simply a source of inspiration, Higden’s influence seems clear and the cycle’s attention to the place and function of the vernacular highlights and the importance of English to the purpose and production of the Chester cycle.

THE N-TOWN CYCLE

The final full cycle of civic drama survives in a single composite manuscript composed and compiled in an East Anglian dialect at the end of the fifteenth century. It is currently referred to as the N-Town cycle, but was previously known as the Ludus Coventriae, the Coventry Plays, and the Cotton Plays. The designation of Ludus Coventriae stemmed from a seventeenth century flyleaf description by Richard James, of the Cotton library. The latter labels also come from the housing of the manuscript in the Cotton Library. The current conventional title, N-town, is taken from the end of the proclamation where the third speaker announces, “A Sunday next, ye Dat we may, / at vi of ye belle we gynne oure play / In N–town.” The reference to “N-town” is now
thought to be an abbreviation for *nomen* town signifying where the name of the town could be inserted into the proclamation. Despite the vagueness of this title and because it is the only designation established by manuscript authority, the title *N-Town Cycle* seems to be the best suited at this time.69

The difficulty modern scholars have had establishing an acceptable title for this manuscript is due largely to a number of problems localizing the text. Because of its early association with the title *Ludus Coventriae*, many early scholars assumed some relationship between the manuscript and the town of Coventry. However, the East Anglian dialect of the manuscript eliminates Coventry as a possible site of composition or production and it is more likely the plays were written for and possible performed in Lincoln or Norfolk.70 Later linguistic scholars who affirmed the East Anglian dialect of the text argued that the language usage in Lincoln was significantly different from the language of the text. These scholars tend to localize the play in the heart of the East Anglian dialect, in Norwich.71 More recently, critics have begun to look at a few smaller towns known to have had some ties to medieval dramatic performance; specifically, critics have argued for Bury St. Edmunds and Thetford as further possible playing locations.72 Bury St. Edmunds’ may also have had some ties to the Macro and Digby manuscripts which house a number of medieval moralities and saints plays.73 Thetford had been proposed by critics like Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher.74 Critics who support Thetford for N-Town production also note its thriving guild structure, more than capable of cycle production, as well as the town’s relationship with the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*.75 Unfortunately, all evidence of historical play production is circumstantial at best. In the absence of more substantial evidence for compilation and
production, most modern critics have resigned themselves to following Victor Scherb’s lead and simply discuss the text as representative of East Anglian drama.

The exact purpose of the manuscript is unknown, but modern scholars agree it is a compilation of texts from a number of different sources and/or performances. 76 The manuscript is perhaps most correctly defined by Spector who identifies it as a “codex.” Despite its patchwork production, the N-Town cycle remains moderately unified which modern critics have explained in a number of ways. Peter Meredith, for example, argues that that the compiler “may have set out from the first to make only a rough and ready but comprehensive collection of material, a handy manuscript, easily portable, that could be put to a variety of dramatic purposes by extracting sections for separate performance and, finally, with rubrication, tidied up.” 77 Like many critics, Meredith argues that the text may have been intended for a traveling version of the mystery cycle. Rather than speculate on the playing and production history of the manuscript, critics like Victor Scherb focus on the role of the N-Town manuscript as a text. Scherb notes that the compiler “seems to have conceived his manuscript as both an anthology and a more or less coherent cycle.” 78 Rosemary Woolf marries these two different readings of the manuscript and argues for a singular compiler author who collected plays performed on diverse occasions into a single manuscript. She comments on what she terms the “striking imaginative unity” of the text and argues that a single poet/compiler may have “composed a Passion play and a Nativity play and a full cycle of which these independent plays formed a part.” 79 Because of the composite history of the N-Town cycle, any unifying themes must be viewed as both culturally and textually significant. The following chapters will show that a number of individual plays in the N-Town cycle
participate in a dialogue about the vernacular. While it may be that the compiler made his selections based in some small part on their stigmatization of foreign and non-standards speech, it seems more likely that the prevalence of these themes throughout the N-Town cycle is a symptom of widespread community concerns about the status of the English language during this period which made their way into multiple texts during the period.

The Corpus Christi cycles died out in the mid-sixteenth century due in large part to the religious turmoil in England. The production of the cycles was actively suppressed after Henry VIII’s break with the Roman Catholic Church in 1534 which led to the eventual demise of the genre.\textsuperscript{80} In addition to the pressures of the Reformation, the Corpus Christi tradition was also adversely affected by its sheer size and cost of production. The economic decline of the urban centers hosting the cycles—“a decline resulting from a steady rise in population, the progressive collapse of the old wool trade, the migration of weavers into cheaper premises in the suburbs, and the growth of the national market for goods which undermined the local monopolies of the guilds”—all resulted in the decline of the great cycle tradition.\textsuperscript{81} The final recorded playing of a full cycle was in York in 1569 and the final presentation of Corpus Christi plays occurred at Chester in 1575.\textsuperscript{82} The long production history of these texts and the sheer scale of their production suggest that they would have had a significant and lasting effect on the audience and English culture. As the following chapters will show, in addition to their message of moral Christian living, the cycle playwrights used their vast cultural influence and employed techniques of linguistic stigmatization as a means of negotiating linguistic change.
In addition to the medieval cycle drama, there are also five surviving texts of medieval morality plays. Probably the earliest known medieval morality play was *The Pride of Life*. At one time, the manuscript in which it survived was dated between 1337 and 1346. Unfortunately, the text was lost in an explosion in 1922, before any reproduction had been made. Modern critics have attempted to reconstruct the action of the text, if not the language, from a photozincography image of the first page including a long prologue.\(^3\) *The Castle of Perseverance, Mankind,* and *Wisdom*—collectively referred to as the Macro plays—are housed in a single manuscript now held in the Folger Library. Although originally written independently, these texts were collected by Rev. Cox Macro in the 18\(^{th}\) century and finally bound into one manuscript in the early 19\(^{th}\) century.\(^4\) *The Castle of Perseverance* is the most complete surviving medieval morality play; its section of the manuscript has been dated to c.1440 and critics believe it was composed in the early fifteenth century. The manuscript of *Mankind*, on the other hand, was copied at the end of the fifteenth century and critics believe the text to have been composed between 1465 and 1470. The manuscript of *Wisdom* was written in the same hand as portions of *Mankind* and is dated accordingly. *Everyman* is an English translation of a Dutch text from the 1490s. The English version was first printed by John Scot in the 1520s.\(^5\)

The medieval morality tradition is a deeply allegorical genre. In all of these plays, a protagonist, representative of all mankind, battles vices and temptations on his path to redemption. Many of these plays externalize an inner struggle between the desires of the body and the desires of the soul. The main temptations are often set in motion by a
primary vice character who usually orchestrates the fall of man. Characters are led astray by the vice and the personified sins—who often act as his servants or lackeys—and are brought back to Christian salvation by personified characters of virtue. Pamela King notes, “against the variegated temptations to sin, he could invoke the fortification of Christ and the compensatory effects of his own good deeds.” The medieval morality tradition conceptualizes this struggle in three stages: during the life of man, in the moments before his death, and in the parliament in heaven. Of the surviving plays, only the *Castle of Perseverance* covers all three of these battles; *Mankind* and *Wisdom* are primarily concerned with the struggle for man’s soul on Earth, while *Everyman* and the *Pride of Life*—as far as it can be reconstructed—depicted the fall of man and focused primarily on the salvation of his soul in the moments before death.

The production practices of the surviving moralities are quite varied; some were performed on raised platforms on scaffolding, some on temporary thrust stages, and some were traveling performances played within inns or large halls. The *Castle of Perseverance* manuscript provides the most concrete evidence of early scaffold productions. The frontice piece of the text portrays a total of five large scaffolds to be erected, one at each cardinal point, and the “castle” in the center. The staging directions note that, if possible, the playing area should be surrounded by a moat and the producers should take care to keep the audience outside of the playing area. Most critics agree that these scaffolds were built on stilts in open areas near the market place of the host town. John Wesley Harris, however, notes that, in Cornwall at least, “earthwork amphitheatres known as “rounds” seem to have been constructed for dramatic purposes on what had originally been prehistoric fortifications or cattle-enclosures.” Although the historical
record for play production in England is not as fully developed as we might hope, scaffold play production was prevalent across the continent with late 15\textsuperscript{th} century examples in Metz, Wismar, Rouen, and Mons.\textsuperscript{89}

Whether they were built on stilts or utilized the earthen amphitheaters, this type of productions required the cooperation of a large section of the populace for scaffold construction, costume design, and even pyrotechnic displays. The title page of \textit{The Castle of Perseverance} clearly notes that they play could incorporate up to 37 players: “Summa xxxvj ludentium.”\textsuperscript{90} In addition to the large cast, the action itself was often spectacular. On the bottom of the staging diagram, the Castle of Perseverance calls for “he ßat schal pley belyal loke ßat he haue gunnepowdyr brenynyge in pypys is his handys and in hys erys and in hys ars whanne he gothe to batayl.”\textsuperscript{91} The large scale of this play as well as the extravagance of its performance suggests that the performance of \textit{The Castle of Perseverance} would have required a strong community involvement; most of the town must have had some hand in the presentation of the play. Given these performance practices, it is clear that some medieval morality plays would have been as culturally significant as the cycle productions and would have been able to reach a large portion of the community where they were presented. This type of production gave voice to a number of playwrights who were then able to question and reinforce any number of cultural ideologies. Later chapters will show how this type of production confronted the problem of medieval and early modern linguistic difference.

In contrast, \textit{Mankind} and \textit{Everyman} are minimalist in their use of cast, set and props. \textit{Mankind}, for example, has a mere 7 speaking parts and requires only a shovel, wooden board, bag of seeds, rope, and a coat for its production; it requires almost no set
for adequate performance. The cast sizes were limited and, as Bevington has shown, even those with a larger number of roles could have been played by a small troupe of 5 to 6 players since most were carefully scripted to allow for part doubling. These plays, it is believed, were performed by traveling troupes of semi-professional players in small open courtyards, inns, or dining halls. Medieval playwrights used this kind of venue to their advantage; the intimate nature of these performances encouraged audience participation and engagement in ways that larger-scale productions could not—Mankind famously includes both a sing along and a collection of donations arranged as payment for the appearance of the vice character, Tutivillus. Because traveling moralities were able to reach more disparate audiences in a more personal setting, they were ideal for the dissemination of linguistic propaganda touting the excellence of the vernacular over foreign languages and non-standard dialects.

Near the end of the fifteenth century, the medieval morality began to change its scope drastically: strict Christian allegories gave way to more secular moralizing. Norland argues that the morality plays were more adaptable than early civic drama or saint’s plays because they were not tied directly to biblical history or strict Christian dogma. For this reason, he notes, “The adaptability of the morality form eventually led to its secularization, for it could as readily express views on education or politics as on religion.” For example, William Wager’s Enough is as Good as a Feast includes the medieval vice character of Covetousness, but also portrays non-allegorical characters like a physician, servant, and hireling in its dramatization of a decidedly secular moral. This secularization, it seems, was also responsible for the growing popularity of this type of dramatic entertainment. As Norland points out, the surviving medieval moralities account
for only 5 percent of all dramatic activity in the fifteenth century; however, “in the first thirty years of the sixteenth century, moralities increase to 15 percent of recorded drama.”

These plays flourish in the early part of the sixteenth century, at times accounting for nearly 25 percent of all English drama.

The popularity of the medieval morality was short lived. In the face of increased religious tension and “as it became assimilated with the more mimetic genres, it began to wane as an independent entity.” The morality play was subsequently replaced by new and innovative types of sixteenth-century dramatic performance, venue, and genre, for example: Cambises, the first English tragedy; the University dramas of Oxford and Cambridge; the early farce of Ralph Roister Doister; and the so-called “prodigal play,” Misogonus. Generally cataloged as early Tudor interludes, the roughly seventy sixteenth-century plays produced before the official opening of the London theaters constituted a new era of English drama. As King has noted, “For Tudor drama before Shakespeare, the construction of dramatic discourse involved a political positioning and an act of cultural assertiveness variously performed and justified by the many men and boys…who found in the theater a potent vehicle through which to gloss, debate, or attempt to dumbfound the shifting culture and ideologies of the time.”

Because of the great variety of early sixteenth century interlude, this chapter will refrain from sweeping generalizations about such a disparate genre. Instead, later chapters will discuss individual works in terms of their political and cultural contexts where appropriate.

The early English dramatic tradition was a wide ranging and varied genre; each play addressed its audience in a new and inventive way, but all were attentive to the cultural effects they had on the community. Medieval cycle plays, for all their pomp and
spectacle, were didactic works designed to educate the people and to demand analysis and critique of the social milieu in which they were conceived and performed. Their fusion of biblical history with social and cultural constructs made them one of the longest lasting dramatic genres of their time and allowed them to shape both early English culture and language. The medieval moralities played to smaller audiences through which they were able to construct a local community and identity; in the case of the linguistic identity, this was accomplished through the stigmatization of non-standard language and speech. The sixteenth-century interlude was also a genre of great influence not only on its contemporary audiences but also on later dramatic forms. The early English dramatic tradition advanced a strong argument that the English language was essential in the formation of an English nation. As the following chapters will show, early English drama, in all its various forms, demands that a standardized English language usurp the institutional power of Latin, the regnal authority of French, and the local distinctions of regional dialect and establish itself as the language of the emergent English nation.


5 Nisse, 5.


8 I would like to extend my greatest thanks to Mr. Mark Shutes, formally of Youngstown State University, for this graphic representation of structuralist theories of cultural change.


10 Hattaway, 95.


12 Giroux, 7.

13 Nisse, 5.

14 Hattaway, 95.

15 Hattaway, 95.


19 See also Peter. F. McDonald, “Drama in the Church,” in Revels History of Drama in English vol. 1 (New York: Metheun, 1983); Tydeman, “An Introduction,” 1-36.


22 Happé, 26.


24 Styan, 17.


27 Styan, 23.


29 See Styan, The English Stage, 24-25; and Wyckham, Early English Stages 1300-1660, 293-296.

30 Wyckham, 295.


32 Styan, 16.

33 Simpson, 509.

34 Simpson, 509.

36 *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, ll. 22-27. Subsequent line numbers given parenthetically.

37 It has been suggested by Rosemary Woolf that the first half of the treatise may have been written in response to a tract in support of miracle plays. See Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 85-86.

38 *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, 1.


40 For more on the production history of the York cycle, see also Twycross, and *The York Plays*, ed. Richard Beadle (1982).

41 Twycross, 39.

42 See Twycross, 40-44.


Specifically, Robinson identifies The Conspiracy, The Agony in the Garden and the Betrayal; Christ Before Annas and Caiaphas; Christ before Pilate 1: The Dream of Pilate’s Wife; Christ Before Herod; The Remorse of Judas; Christ Before Pilate 2: The Judgement; and The Death of Christ as those belonging to the work of the York Realist, 241 (titles of plays provided by Beadle).

Robinson, 251.

King, 194.


The Towneley manuscript contains 32 individual plays, dramatizing biblical history from the creation of the world to Judgment Day. Of these 32, five plays (Pharaoh; Doctors in the Temple; Deliverance; Resurrection; and Judgment) are closely related to their counterparts in the York cycle. In addition to resemblances in these plays, a number of Wakefield’s offerings include entire stanzas and exact lines from the York cycle. Whether the Towneley cycle borrowed from the York cycle, the York cycle borrowed from the Towneley, or whether they stem from a shared original text remains uncertain. All sides of this argument have been hotly contested in recent years. Although it is missing some of the plays present in other cycle manuscripts, contains seven incomplete or fragmentary plays, and appears to have three of its plays out of order (the Pharaoh, Prophets, Lazarus and Judas plays), the Towneley manuscript is nonetheless a
superior record of the plays which may have been presented in or near Wakefield in the fifteenth century.

51 Stevens, 94.


53 *The Towneley Play*, eds. Stevens and Cawley, xxi.


57 Lawrence M. Clopper, ed., *Records of Early English Drama: Chester* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1979), 6-7. The Chester plays survive in eight manuscripts, three of which are fragments or single plays. Of the five manuscripts which preserve the cycle production of pageants, all are dated to the end of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, roughly 25 years after the final recorded performance in Chester. Because of the late dating of the surviving manuscripts, it is generally assumed that the surviving manuscripts are late recreations of whatever civic dramatic productions were ongoing in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Mills identifies a number of cultural impulses which may have led to the vigorous manuscript production and preservation in
sixteenth century Chester, including civic pride; the erroneous attribution of the text to Higden, Chester’s most famous son; and “the strong antiquarian movement in Chester, which valued the plays as part of the city’s history and traditions” (Mills, 111). Whatever the reason for the survival of so many manuscript copies, the Chester cycle is probably the best documented of the medieval cycles.


59 Twycross, 39.


63 Mills’ work has been invaluable in this area. See Mills, “The Chester Cycle,” 111-113; and Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, 166-168.


For more on the naming of the cycle see *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Spector, xiii-xv.


For arguments proposing Norwich as the primary location of the N-Town plays, see also Mark Eccles, “*Ludus Coventriae* Lincoln or Norfolk?” *Medium Aevum* 40 (1971): 135-141; and Jacob Bennett, “The Language and Home of the ‘Ludus Coventriae,’” *Orbis* 22 (1973): 43-63.


See Fletcher, and Beadle, *The York Cycle*. 
The N-Town manuscript is a very complex textual artifact. It includes an opening proclamation, followed by 41 plays dramatizing biblical history from the creation of heaven and the fall of Lucifer to Judgment day. Among those 41, eleven plays or segments of plays are unique in theme from the other three full cycles. It begins with a Proclamation play announcing a total of 40 plays to be played the following Sunday. While some of the pageant summaries given here are remarkably similar to the actual pageant texts, the proclamation also makes a number of inconsistent references to actions and plays which are not accurately represented in the play texts. These inconsistencies have led critics to believe that the Proclamation and those texts which closely follow it may have come from a single source and that other pageants were added at a later date. Spector identifies these unique plays as: “Lamech’s killing of Cain (Play 4), the Jesse Tree (Play 7), the story of Joachim and Anna (Play 8), the Presentation of Mary in the Temple (Play 9), the Parliament of Heaven (Play 11), the Trial of Joseph and Mary (Play 14), the Cherry Tree episode (Play 15), Death’s slaying of Herod (Play 20), the appearance of Veronica (Play 32; cf York 34), the Harrowing of Hell segmented into two plays (33 and 35) surrounding the burial, the risen Christ’s appearance to the Virgin Mary (play 35)” (Spector, xii, n. 1).


Woolf, English Mystery Plays, 309-310.
80 Styan, 39.

81 Harris, 188.

82 Happé, 259-260.


88 Harris, 113.

89 Harris, 110.

90 Eccles, 2. In From Mankind to Marlowe, Bevington notes that the play could be performed with as few as 22 players with the use of doubling (74).

91 “The Castle of Perseverance,” in The Moralities Plays 1 transcription, B.

92 Bevington, From Mankind to Marlowe, 68-85. Bevington argues that the doubling of parts was an essential feature of early interludes and moralities. He notes that “during the first twenty years of Elizabeth’s reign a three-to-one ratio becomes quite common in the popular theater” (73).
93 Howard B. Norland, *Drama in Early Tudor Britain 1485-1558* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 40.

94 Norland, 37.

95 Norland uses a very strict definition of morality to extrapolate these numbers. The remaining 75 percent is made up of what he terms folk drama, university drama, Terentian comedies, and prodigal plays.

96 Norland, 47.

Chapter Two:

“Counterfeit Language”: Representations of French in Early English Drama

The late Middle Ages and early Renaissance were defined, in part, by the near-simultaneous formulation of English nationalism, rise of the English vernacular, and refinement of the English drama. Each of these cultural shifts was in some way brought on or enhanced by the complicated relationship between England and France during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Despite England’s claims to widespread multilingualism, dramatic evidence suggests a strong tradition of marginalizing and satirizing French speakers on the early English stage. These representations both reflect and inflect cultural concerns about French speakers on English soil during the period. The French speakers portrayed in early moralities are designed to warn the English-speaking audiences against the ills of using the French language. At the same time, the negative, often comic, portrayals of French speakers in early moralities also amplify the cultural stereotypes already resonating within the culture. Further, images of French-speaking kings in both medieval cycle plays and Tudor interludes operate within the de casibus / Mirror for Magistrates tradition and embody the abuses of power and language which these early plays advise strongly against. Their portrayal demonstrates the necessity and importance of creating a strong English tradition within the court as well as the country. As such, early English drama establishes a constitutive rhetoric meant to rally the English
audiences against the use of French and distinguish English values from the vices of France.

The French language at the end of the Middle Ages occupied a uniquely liminal position within English culture and literature. The Norman Invasion has long been heralded as the moment at which French became an integral part of the English language; the linguistic contact which resulted from that invasion forever changed the English language. Despite the obvious implications of this linguistic contact, modern critics have long struggled to define the exact quantity and quality of the French incursion into English in the Middle Ages. Bertrand Clover, in 1888, completed the first modern exploration of the use of French in 11th to 14th century England.¹ His text offered the first comprehensive examination of French in England and sparked a number of subsequent linguistic and historic debates about the place and function of French in medieval England. More than one hundred years later, critics are still struggling to define the character of the French during the period; the debate has, in some ways, polarized the socio-linguistics community.

Some recent critics have gone so far as to argue that the French influence on the English language was so significant that Middle English might be considered a creolization of French, Latin and Anglo-Saxon.² One critic, speaking of the linguistic crisis which followed the Norman Invasion, goes so far as to argue that “[English] was helpless, it seemed, before an inevitable pressing down, a percolation which would eventually saw away at it and so reduce its powers that more and more of its speakers would feel compelled to put it aside. It was not a language of advancement, a language of power, a language of hard commerce or even educated conversation.”³ Despite the
obvious linguistic impact of the invasion, other critics have tempered arguments concerning the impact of French speakers on English soil. Begona Garcia, for example, notes that “[French] never stopped being the language of the invaders and of successive waves of foreigners who occupied institutional and non-institutional posts…These groups spoke conversational French and intermingled with the native. Nevertheless, they constituted a minority in contrast to the vast majority of the English speaking population.”

Matthew Townend agrees, noting, “It is important to stress that French speakers in England always formed a minority; the majority of the population were monolingual, and the language they spoke was English.” Additionally, critics like W. Rothwell and Bernard Diensberg have enriched this conversation by distinguishing the Anglo-Norman influence from the French. They argue that any scholarly inquiry into the relationship between English and French must also take into account that influence on the development of the English language. This study will not make any distinctions between French and Anglo-Norman influences primarily because the French presented on the early English stage was in such a state of disrepair as to be only vaguely aurally French in most cases, thus making regional or dialectical differences secondary to its aims. Even so, this author recognizes that if those distinctions were possible, they would greatly add to the depth and breadth of this chapter.

Despite scholarly debates on the exact character and quality of the French influence on English during this period, it is clear that, following the social and political upheaval of the 11th century, French became the language of prestige and power in England. The influence of French on the English lexicon was widespread and French became instrumental in the English legal system and literature. As Norman Blake has
argued, “French, therefore, had a twofold hold in England at this time: in one form as a language of bureaucracy, and in its other form as a language of literary excellence.”

However, by the end of the 14th century, French was beginning to lose its foothold in England. While French continued to be used in many official capacities and the nation remained multilingual, it was during this period that English, for the first time since the conquest, came to power and became recognized as the unofficial language of the English nation. Douglas A. Kibbee notes, “The ravages of the plague, in combination with the prosperity engendered by the Hundred Years War, furnished the middle classes and lower classes, again English monolinguals, with the opportunity and the wealth to gain access to power.”

All of these external forces combined to initiate great changes in the status of the English language and, finally, in 1362, parliament passed a statute requiring the use of English in all courts of law. Although this statute was, paradoxically, written in French, it nonetheless ushered in a new linguistic era for Parliament. Following the 1362 statute, English began gradually replacing both French and Latin in the English legal system. The impact was, of course, not immediate. As Paul Brand has shown, Latin and French maintained a strong hold on all court proceedings well into the 14th century. And while the English language opened parliamentary proceedings in 1363, there is evidence that French was still being used in parliament nearly 15 years later in 1377.

Nevertheless, the end of the 14th century marked the emergence of the English language as the language of the English government and the English nation.

Although French maintained a foothold in parliamentary proceedings for some years, the use of French in the English legal system declined greatly in the 15th century. John H. Fisher has recently argued quite persuasively for a Lancastrian project of
propaganda designed to elevate the reputation of English over the French which had been associated with the Plantagenets.\textsuperscript{11} Fisher has also documented quite clearly the move in English parliamentary documents from French (and Latin) to English in the mid-15\textsuperscript{th} century. As evidence of this, he examines the 15\textsuperscript{th} century records of petitions. He notes that there were only 6 petitions written in English in 1422 as compared with 35 in French and 5 in Latin. By the mid 1430’s the numbers had evened out, with 15 documents in both English and French and 11 documents in Latin between 1436 and 1437. A decade later, in 1444, English far outstrips both French and Latin; there were 34 petitions in the native language and only 8 in French and 9 in Latin.\textsuperscript{12} This movement towards Anglicization clearly demonstrates the gradual shift occurring in the 15\textsuperscript{th} century during which English was established as the language of parliamentary power and authority in England.

THE DE CASIBUS TRADITION

Perhaps one of the most significant genres through which medieval and early modern authors were able to evaluate and critique their contemporary political and linguistic landscape was the \textit{de casibus / Mirror for Magistrates} tradition.\textsuperscript{13} This genre was introduced to English authors through Boccaccio’s dream vision \textit{De casibus virorum illustrium}, which presents a series of vignettes demonstrating the inevitable fall of illustrious men throughout Biblical and World history. Boccaccio’s text serves as an exemplum for his educated audience about the inevitability of fortune and also sparked a new tradition in English literature, heralded by Chaucer’s adaptation of the genre in the
Monk’s Tale as well as his transposition of the tradition in *The Legend of Good Women*. Boccaccio’s text was translated into French in 1409 by Laurent de Premierfait, who titled his work *The Des Cas des Nobles Hommes et Femmes of 1400*. It is, arguably, this French translation which served as the source for the most thorough development of the *de casibus* tradition in the late Middle Ages, Lydgate’s *The Fall of Princes*. Recent criticism has shown that while Lydgate (and to perhaps a lesser extent, Premierfait) looked to Boccaccio’s work as a source of inspiration each was increasingly interested in the contemporary political climate in which they were writing. Paul Strohm has recently argued that “rather than follow their predecessors in recommending caution in the face of erratic Fortune, Premierfait and Lydgate recommend precautionary action.” In this way, fifteenth century authors enhanced the genre by moving it away from the realm of historical exemplum and by creating texts which lead by the example of past princes, but which ask their readers to take a more active role in staving off the wheel of fortune through good and prudent living. While Lydgate’s *The Fall of Princes* remained popular well into the sixteenth century, it was “promptly and decisively eclipsed” by the 1559 printing of William Baldwin’s collaborative effort, *Mirror for Magistrates*, which cemented the place of the *de casibus* tradition in English literature.

As it evolved, the *Mirror for Magistrates* tradition became increasingly influential in shaping not only political and princely action, but also the political rhetoric of the period. Paul Strohm has recently shown the importance of the *de casibus / Mirror for Magistrates* tradition in Medieval and Early Modern texts. In his examination of the fifteenth and early sixteenth-century interest in and innovation of what he terms the *politique*, Strohm notes,
This genre’s ‘danger’ rests in the relation it establishes between the past and the present. This relation shifts from cast to case and author to author, but the constancy of the genre’s appeal rests in the unfixed and highly adaptable nature of its exemplarity. The plaintive prince’s lesson might finally land anywhere, affix itself to any contemporary case. The past is, one the one hand, safely over, sealed from the present, and sanitized as ‘tradition’; it yet lies, on the other, open to reinterpretation, subject to unruly and unpredictable revival as an affront to settled arrangements of power.\(^{18}\)

In this way, the *de casibus / Mirror for Magistrates* tradition affords Medieval and Early Modern authors a literary voice with which they can examine the political climate of the time. Jessica Winston argues: “in the *Mirror for Magistrates*, we shall find, the authors turned a kind of writing designed to speak to power into one that depicted and fostered a conversation about power, about the obligations and responsibilities of those who rule the commonwealth.”\(^{19}\) This shift is evident not only in those texts specifically designed as *de casibus / Mirror for Magistrates* texts but also in dramatic presentations of kings and princes which operate within this tradition.

While they would certainly not be classified as traditional *de casibus* tales, many early plays function in much the same way as Boccaccio and Lydgate’s texts. Many portray the rise and fall of great men as exempla from which the audience is expected to take moral and spiritual guidance. Medieval cycle drama is one example of this hybridized genre. Although the cycle plays were primarily intended for a much wider
audience, the many presentations of the fallen kings in the medieval pageants were certainly offered as examples by which the medieval leaders, even perhaps kings, might better live their lives. Later permutations of these same plays follow the trajectory laid out by critics like Strohm. The representations of fallen kings become more than mere exempla; they become a mouthpiece through which early dramatists are able to examine the role of the king and to voice cultural concerns about power and authority. The following section will argue that, in many ways, the *de casibus / Mirror for Magistrates* tradition is relocated onto the early English stage, where authors and playwrights examine the role of the English language as a unifying force in the emergent English nation. The following sections will examine the ways in which the stigmatization of French speakers in plays following the *de casibus / Mirror for Magistrates* tradition constitutes an active program of linguistic purification. These sections will argue that the portrayals of French speaking kings and high level officials demonstrate a conscious social reevaluation of the role of French in the English court and offer their audiences only one linguistic alternative: standard vernacular English.

**HEROD THE GREAT**

The dramatic character of Herod has a long and copious history in Medieval and Early Modern literature. This history is complicated by the fact that medieval English dramatists often conflated the three historical King Herods of the Bible.²⁰ Most dramatic representations make little distinction between Herod the Great, King of the Jews; his son Herod Antipas, who was represented as responsible for the beheading of John the Baptist;
and Herod Agrippa, grandson of Herod the Great, who is said to have sent Peter to prison. In spite of, or perhaps because of, his questionable lineage, Herod becomes one of the most diverse and fascinating characters of the Medieval Corpus Christi tradition. He is such an exaggerated character that “Herod” becomes synonymous with dramatic extravagance; Chaucer compares Absolon’s wooing of Alison to “Herodes upon a scaffold hye” (MillT 3386), and more than two hundred years later, Shakespeare’s Hamlet famously warns his actors against overacting by advising, “it out-Herods Herod, pray you avoid it” (III.ii). David Staines’ seminal article in Comparative Drama outlines the important ways in which Herod is depicted in the English tradition. He argues that the N-Town Herod is the most serious presentation of the villain. He notes that the Chester Herod maintains some of the somber nature of the N-Town Herod, but also shows signs of the comedy which he finds present in the York and Towneley Herods. While we may not agree that “in the York and Towneley plays… comedy becomes the determining, indeed sole, factor in the depiction of Herod” (45), it remains that the York and Towneley Herods are the best developed and most intricate portrayals in the surviving manuscripts.

While much attention has been paid to the tradition of the raging Herod and his extravagant linguistic style, relatively little attention has thus far been paid to his use of French in the pageants. Three of the four Corpus Christi pageant manuscripts present Herod as existing in a world which is, at least in part, French. In all but the N-Town plays, part of the bombastic quality for which Herod has become famous is tied to his use of French. The Chester plays contain the most thorough representation of Herod as a French speaker and include the Magi as part of his French court. The York plays present Herod’s French as a blasphemous language through which Christ is taunted, while the
Towneley plays dramatize significantly less French speech, but call much more attention to the importance of Herod’s use of the language than either the York or Chester plays. The French of Herod’s marks one of only a few times in the medieval cycle tradition where the French language plays a significant role. Although in each case the language used is not only that of French, the representation of French speakers in the court clearly marks an important linguistic difference in the play. Each Herod necessarily uses English as his primary language, but the mere suggestion that he is a French speaker in a French court is enough to mark him as marred in some ways. These three cases (out of four surviving cycles) constitute a tradition in which the villainy of Herod is expressed through his portrayal as a French speaker, and make very clear the negative implications of a French-speaking King on an early English stage.

By referring to Herod here as a French speaker, I mean, primarily, one who uses the French language. Herod’s dialogue is not limited to French in any of these plays. Clearly, he is a multilingual speaker and the vast majority of his lines are in English. Nevertheless, the oddity of French here calls for a closer reading of Herod as a speaker of the French language than has heretofore been given. As subsequent sections will show, the use of French associated with Herod ranges from about 20 lines (in the Chester cycle) to a mere 2 (in the Towneley cycle). While these scant lines may seem rather insignificant, the use of any language other than English is, as Dillon notes, “so conspicuous” (xi) and jarring that they must be given their due significance. Herod is also unique in that the only instances of French in any of the cycle plays occur in and around his court. While, this may be a false dichotomy of sorts, the stark contrast is carried out in the representations of Herod’s linguistic difference.
The Chester Vintner’s Play presents the most thorough representation of King Herod as a French speaker; Herod has more lines spoken in French in this play than in any other surviving dramatic portrayal. In addition to the king, the Magi speak French for the first and only time on the early English stage. Upon their entrance, each of the three has an introductory stanza in French. They slip into French again as they approach Herod’s castle:

_Messinger_: Tidings now, my lord, I shall you tell

That these three kinges doe shewe unto mee.

From whense thee binne I knowe not well;

Yonder thee stond, as yee may see.

_Primus Rex_: Syr Roy, ryall and reverent,

_Deu vous gard, omnipotent

_Secundus Rex_: Nos summes veneus comoplent,

_Novelis de enquire.

_Herodes_: Bien soies venues, royes gent.

_Me detes tout vetere entent.

_Tertius Rex_: Infant querenues de grand parent,

_Et roy de celi et terre.

_Herodes_: Syrs, avise you what you sayne!

Such tydinges makes my harte unfayne.

I read you take those wordes agayne

For feare of velanye. (149-164)
The Magi’s use of French in their entrance situates Herod’s court squarely within a 
French context. Because the Magi do not speak French in the Mercer’s play, The Gifts of 
the Three Kings, which follows immediately the Vintner’s play, we can infer that it is not 
the nationality of the Magi which should be identified as French, but instead the special 
representation of the bilingual court of Herod. The use of French in this passage 
bordering on nonsense makes clear that what is at stake is not necessarily the vocabulary 
or phraseology of the Magi; it is enough that their dialogue sounds realistically French 
even if it is syntactically incorrect. If David Staines is correct that, in English liturgical 
representations of Herod “rather than develop his character, the plays develop the setting 
until the court is a world of flattery, pomposity, and pretense in direct contrast to the 
simplicity, solemnity, and divinity of the manger setting” (37-38), the representation of 
the Chester Magi locates this world of pomposity and pretence specifically in the French 
court.

Interestingly, the Chester Herod may have ties to some of the continental plays. 
Miriam Anne Skey notes the cordial nature of Herod’s court in European drama. She 
writes, “In the vernacular drama of the continent, great emphasis was often placed on the 
role of Herod as a courteous and sophisticated ruler, meeting foreign guests in a highly 
civilized and sumptuous medieval court” (330). It is perhaps for this reason that the 
French introduction sequences in the Chester play are quite cordial. In fact, it is not until 
the Magi reveal that they are in search of “Infant querenues de grand parent, / Et roy de 
celi et terre” that Herod abandons the polite banter of the court and begins to rage (as he 
is apt to do) in English. This in some ways represents a reversal of the use of the French 
language we will see in the York and Towneley cycles, where Herod’s move to French
usually signifies a loss of control and dignity. Despite his performative courtesy, the Chester Herod is one of the more bloody representations on the early English stage and by placing him squarely within a French court, the Chester play highlights the ill-repute and notoriety French speakers were gaining on the early English stage.

In the York Listers’ pageant, Christ Before Herod, Pilate sends Christ to Herod to be punished for some nondescript act of treason he has committed in Galilee. Even before Christ is brought before him, Herod determines to amuse himself at Christ’s expense:

Rex: Nowe gois a-bakke both, and late þe boy blowe,
For I hope we gete some harre hastely at hande.

I Miles: Jerusalem and þe Jewes may haue joie,
And hele in ther herte for to here hym.

Rex: Saie! beene venew in bone fay,
Ne plesew et a parle remoy.

II Miles: Nay, my lorde, he can of no bourdyng, þis boy.

Rex: No sir, with þi leue we schall lere hym. (141-148)

Upon hearing that the prisoner is the man named Christ, Herod states, “And in faith I am fayne he is fonne, / His farles to Frayne and to fele; / Nowe þes games was grathely begonne” (116-119). Once Christ has been brought before the king, it becomes clear that the games which he intends to play with Christ are, at least in part, linguistic in nature. Herod’s first words to Christ are in French. He welcomes Christ to the court, stating, “Saie! beene venew in bone fay, / Ne plesew et a parle remoy?” [Welcome in good faith,
does it not please you to speak with me?] (145-146). Christ’s silence to this request prompts the second soldier to advise the King, “Nay, my lorde, he can of no bourdyng, his boy” (147). Beadle and King gloss this line as “he has no small talk” however, Beadle also notes that bourdyng can mean sport or pleasure and the verb form can mean to play, jest, or play the fool. Here the York pageant aptly conflates the frivolity of the French court with the malevolence of Herod’s treatment of Christ. Christ thus becomes the butt of the French joke. It is unclear exactly what Herod plans to teach Christ, when he subsequently threatens that he will “lere him” (148); however, we can be relatively certain that the idea of a lesson is meant to invoke both a linguistic and an academic and probably a physical transformation.

After repeated questioning, throughout which Christ remains silent, Herod again returns to French and the idea of a linguistic game. In a rage at Christ’s disobedience and refusal to speak, Herod shouts:

We schalle haue gaudis full goode and games or we goo.

Howe likes þa, wele lorde? Saie. What deuyll, neuere a dele?

I faute in my reuerant in otil moy,

I am of fauour, loo, fairer be ferre.

Kyte oute yugilment. Vta! Oy! Oy!

Be any witte þa Y watte it will waxe were.

Servicia primet,

Such losellis and lurdaynes as þou, loo,

Respicias timet.

What þe deyll and his dame shall Y now doo?
Do carpe on, carle, for Y can þe cure.

Say, may þou not here me? Oy man, arte þou woode? (238-248)

Here Herod’s French, along with his authority, are reduced to gibberish and mere noise (as has been noted by Jeffrey J. Cohen) and his French nonsense stands in stark contrast to Christ’s sustained silence. In fact, despite repeated attempts by both Herod and his soldier to force a response out of their captive, they are merely greeted with a stunning silence. As Beadle and King note, “Undoubtedly, the silent Christ dominates the scene” (175). Christ’s refusal to participate in Herod’s linguistic game and his refusal to acknowledge the repeated French questions the king has posed to him thus represents Christ’s refusal to participate in Herod’s world. Not only is French portrayed as a perverse language through which the holy (Christ or Christ like) may be taunted and tormented, but the portrayal of Christ’s denial of the authority of Herod also denies the linguistic and social authority of his French.

Some of these same issues can be seen in the Towneley Play, Herod the Great. While the Towneley Herod’s French is not as thoroughly developed as that of the York Herod, his use of the French is in some ways more significant than that of the York king. The Towneley Herod speaks only a single phrase of French in the Herod the Great play: “Yei, ditizance doutance!” (248). This phrase, though short and rather innocuous, has given readers and editors alike a number of interesting problems. Steven’s and Cawley note that this phrase is, perhaps, “a corruption of ‘dîtes sans doutance’ [say without a doubt].”22 They go on to argue that “These scraps of French do not indicate that the playwright was following a French source; they were no doubt commonly used by English people, especially those who had little French but great pretensions.”23 In
addition, Liam O. Purdon argues that Herod’s use of French here is a “myopia of pretentiousness… revealed in the sudden misunderstanding of the audience as consisting solely of members of the authority culture like Herod himself, who, victimized by their own lack of self-knowledge, tend to use undemotic French expressions such as ‘ditizance doutance’ to emphasize a point.”\textsuperscript{24} However, the stanza opens with Herod raging against his soldiers for letting the Magi escape his grasp. In quick succession, he terms the soldiers \textit{losels, lyars, lurdans, tratoures} and \textit{knafys} (235-238), all of which signify a depravity of character necessarily eliminating them from the French speaking gentility:

\begin{quote}
Fy, losels and lyars,
Lurdans ilkon!
Tratoures and well wars!
Knafys, bot knyghtys none!
Had ye bene with youre eres,
Thus had thay not gone;
Gett I those land-lepars,
I breke ilka bone.
Fyrst vengeance
Shall I se on thare bonys;
If ye byde in these wonys,
I shall dyng you with stonys-
Yei, \textit{ditizance doutance}! (235-248)
\end{quote}

While Herod’s use of French is certainly filled with aristocratic pretension, it seems unlikely that Herod has mistaken his audience for French speaking aristocrats. Further,
Herod’s pronouncement that their punishment will come ‘ditizance dountance’ is a direct response to the third soldier’s objection to having been threatened by Herod “withoutt cause” (230) in the previous stanza. The soldier states,

Why put ye sich reprefys
Withoutt cause?
Thus shuld ye not thrett vs,
Vngaynly to bete vs;
Ye shuld not rehett vs
Withoutt othere sawes (229-234).

By responding to the soldier’s objection in French, the Towneley Herod may not only be showing his pretension, but may also be satirizing the English tradition of using French in court proceedings. By pronouncing their ‘sentence’ in French, Herod participates in the tradition of using the French language in the English court system, a practice which came under much scrutiny throughout the period.

Perhaps the most significant moment in which Herod is identified as a French speaker comes at the end of the Towneley play. Here, despite the fact that he has used only one phrase of French,—much less than in both the York and Chester plays—Herod identifies himself as a French speaker. In his ironically jubilant closing speech, Herod warns all “knaves that raves” (726)—and perhaps other Herods—that they should follow his example and not be too cruel on pain of, ironically I believe, having their brains broken. He raves:

For if I here it spokyn
When I com agayn,
Youre branys bese brokyn
Therfor be ye bayn.
Nothyng bese unlokyn;
It shal be so playn.
Begyn I to rokyn,
I think all disdain
For-daunche.
Syrs, this is my counsel:
Bese not to cruell.
Bot adew! – to the deuyl!
I can no more Franch. (729-741).

This advice is, of course, ironic coming from the well known tyrant who has just been
gloating over the reported slaughter of the innocents. It is at this moment that the
Towneley Herod slips back into French for the last time. His parting words “Bot adew! –
to the deuyl! / I can no more Franch” (740-741) leave a lasting impression on the
audience of Herod’s Frenchness. Despite the fact that he uses very little actual French in
the Towneley play, this Herod self-identifies as a French speaker. In this way, Herod’s
final lines condense all of his villainy, all of his pretension, and all of his linguistic
bombast onto the French language– a rhetorically brilliant move. What the medieval
cycle presentations of King Herod suggest is that, like the burgeoning de casibus/ Mirror
for Magistrates tradition, early English drama was also establishing a conversation about
kingly duty and action. In addition to the vices of pride and anger, what these French
speaking Herods demonstrate is a growing urgency for an established and permanent English speaking nation and king.

EARLY MODERN REPRESENTATIONS

While the Medieval cycle representations of Herod the Great operate in a sphere which I would argue is loosely based on the *de casibus* tradition, later manifestations of the tradition are more conventional in terms of the genre. One of the most patently traditional plays in terms of the *Mirror for Magistrates* tradition is *Magnificence*, the sole surviving play by John Skelton, made laureate at Oxford, Cambridge, and the University of Louvain at the end of the fifteenth century. Skelton’s play was probably written in the second decade of the sixteenth century during the years leading up to his death in 1529. Although some internal evidence has been argued by Ritson to suggest the play could not have been written after 1520 (due to a reference by Fancy about the death of “King Lewis of France”), Paula Neuss has shown that this date is suspect due to the complicated relationship between England and France as well as our inability to determine whether the reference is to Louis XII or Louis XI. This internal reference is also suspect given Fancy’s position as a rather untrustworthy character; as such, we are left to agree with Neuss that, “It must be accepted that *Magnificence* could have been written anywhere between 1515 and 1523.” This dating places the composition of *Magnificence* between the waning tradition of the medieval Cycle plays and the waxing of the early modern Humanist interlude and well within the period when English authors were recasting the *de casibus* tradition.
Magnificence’s structure and themes also demonstrate its liminal position within the early English dramatic tradition. The title page from the 1530 printing announces the play as “a goodly interlude,” but, as critics like David Bevington and Neuss have shown, the play’s use of allegorical personification, its reliance on the theme of redemption, and its didactic nature are reminiscent of the medieval morality play. Alternatively, Magnificence’s intricate reevaluation of the mirror tradition, incorporation of the teachings of classic of authorities like Horace and Aristotle, and strong political undertones place it more in the vein of the early modern Humanist dramatic tradition. As Neuss has argued, “Magnificence, then, resembles a moral play like Mankind in its structure, but its aims and overall effect are more complicated.” In this way, Magnificence integrates some of the features of the medieval tradition while anticipating the Early Modern move towards the political. As Norland notes, “In the period from 1530-1558, twenty-one of the forty-four identified moralities and interludes are linked to the political and religious controversy.”

Whether it is classified as a medieval morality or a Humanist drama, critics generally agree that one of the most influential aspects of Magnificence is its intricate reevaluation of the Mirror tradition. Even without internal evidence, Skelton’s position as Henry VIII’s tutor might solidify the play’s place as a mirror; however, we need not look to biographical interpretations of the play for evidence of the mirror tradition. Skelton has offered textual clues as to the role of the text as a political mirror. Howard B. Norland notes the undertones of the Mirror for Magistrate tradition in Magnificence and argues that, “The play may have sought to instill particular values, as in other educational moralities, but is also sought to define the roles of the monarch and his advisers, and
occasionally other groups in society as well.”\textsuperscript{32} Neuss also categorizes the play as participating in the Mirror tradition, but notes that “prosperity is lost by the prince’s own action, through his submission to will rather than reason, and Adversity is seen not as an undeserved visitation of Fortune, but as a punishment for sin.”\textsuperscript{33} Even so, Skelton’s conclusion locates itself explicitly in the Mirror tradition:

Circumspection: A mirror encleared is this interlude,

This life inconstant for to behold and see:

Suddenly advanced, and suddenly subdued;
Suddenly in riches, and suddenly poverty;
Suddenly in comfort; and suddenly adversity;
Suddenly thus Fortune can both smile and frown,
Suddenly set up, and suddenly cast down (2520-2526).

Despite the fact that the play’s latest possible date is a full thirty years previous to the first printing of the \textit{Mirror for Magistrates}, Skelton has prefigured the image of the mirror and makes clear the role of the text as a Mirror in which the audience can view “the life inconstant” and from which they can take instruction.\textsuperscript{34} In addition to the image of the mirror, Skelton’s conclusion also harkens back to the \textit{de casibus} tradition through its emphasis on the role of fate in the downfall of Magnificence. Norland finds Circumspection’s conclusion insufficient: “The morality framework prevails in the final movement of the play as the political implications for the king and his counselors remain unexplained.”\textsuperscript{35} However, it seems that this concentration on the role of fate, rather than a return to a morality framework, is, instead, a return to the \textit{de casibus} tradition of earlier authors like Boccaccio and Lydgate. This conclusion is thus perfectly suited to conclude
this play which takes many of its cues from the *de casibus / Mirror for Magistrates* tradition.

Given its place within the *Mirror for Magistrates* tradition, it is not surprising that, like many of the plays of the early sixteenth century, a familiar current of anti-French sentiment runs throughout the play. Like the medieval cycle presentations of Herod the Great, the portrayal of the French language in *Magnificence* makes clear the problems associated with a French court. Early in the play, Skelton makes clear the ill repute in which the French language and French speakers are held. Upon his entrance, Counterfeit Countenance extols the virtues of his counterfeiting in yet another boastful introductory speech. In his long list of counterfeiting accomplishments, he states:

- Counterfeit kindness, and think deceit;
- Counterfeit letters by the way of sleight,
- Subtly using counterfeit weight;
- Counterfeit language: *fayte bone geyte*.

Counterfeit Countenance’s condemnation of the French language is far from the underhanded and subtle slights usually used to denigrate that that language. In his prideful fervor, Countenance comments directly on the counterfeit nature of the use and propensity of corrupt or mistaken French language in England, calling it a counterfeit language. Neuss notes that the phrase “Counterfeit language: *fayty bone geyte*” is probably a corruption of ‘faits et bone geste’ and an example of corrupt language, although it seems more probably a corruption of ‘faits et bone gaiete.’ As with the corrupt lines in Medwall’s *Nature*, it is impossible to tell whether these mistakes are scribal or authorial; however, given the tenor of the rest of the text concerning the place
of French speakers in England, the erroneous French seems central to Skelton’s characterization of Counterfeit Countenance and thus, authorial in its intention. Indeed, in this single line, Skelton is able to cast both French speakers and pretentious English speakers who are often chastised for putting on the airs of the French language in a negative light. For a non-fluent audience member, the aural quality of the French is enough to establish the French language as the object of Skelton’s criticism. A fluent speaker, or perhaps more likely, a fluent reader, may gain a slightly more nuanced understanding of this line as a condemnation of the pretenses of English speakers who demonstrate their linguistic flaws in their misguided attempts to ‘put on’ the language. In either case, be it legitimate French or the performance of depicting the performative nature of a pretended French, Skelton singles out the French language as one vehicle through which Counterfeit Countenance is able to corrupt men and to affect these vice-like qualities.

Early in his temptation of Magnificence, the primary vice character Fancy, while acting under the false name of Largess, also uses the French language to effect his ruination of Magnificence. In this scene, Fancy presents a letter to Magnificence which has, ostensibly, been composed by Sad Circumspection recommending Largess to the prince. This letter is yet another attempt by Fancy to bring about the downfall of Magnificence, and is said to have been composed “at Pontesse” (343). Neuss comments that “Probably this town just occurred to Fancy on the spur of the moment, but it may have had some particular significance to Skelton’s audience.” However, given the unfavorable picture Fancy paints of his retrieval of the letter, the location of France seems to be an important part of the deception. Indeed, Fancy invents a tale of his narrow
escape from “… such a watch / That no man can scape but they catch him.” (351-352). Windsor notes the strained relations between England and France and the treacherous travel conditions during this time. He states, “the state papers are replete with stories of suspected spies on both sides of the channel, of piracy, and of the dangers in trade and travel… and a plethora of requests for ‘safe conduct’ throughout the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII.” By playing up the trouble he went to in retrieving the letter, Fancy foregrounds the tumultuous relationship between England and France. Later, Magnificence clarifies the importance of the location of the letter when he is confronted by Circumspection near the end of the play. When Magnificence accuses Circumspection of leading him astray by recommending Fancy as a favorable companion, he again makes mention of Pontesse as the place from which the letter was sent. Through his insistence on Pontesse as the originary, if imagined, location of the letter, Skelton identifies France as the place from which most of Magnificence’s troubles have stemmed. What is made clear through this particular mirror is that English kings ought to be wary of instructions received from France, especially those concerned with the best ways of living in and ruling the English nation.

Perhaps the most overtly French character in Skelton’s Magnificence is Courtly Abusion who enters singing many songs associated with the Vice characters and the French:

**Abusion:** Huffa huffa, taunderum taunderum tayne, huffa huffa!

**Collusion:** [To audience] This was properly prated, sirs; what said a?

**Abusion:** Rully bully, jolly rutterkin, heyda!

**Collusion:** De que pays este vous?
[And let him make as if he doffs his cap ironically]

**Abusion:** Deck your hofte and cover a louse.

**Collusion:** Say vous chaunter ‘Venter tre dawse?’

**Abusion:** Wyda, wyda

How sayst thou, man; am not I a jolly rutter? (745-752)

While there is still much work to be done on the provenance of these lost folk songs, it is clear that the *Huffa Gallant* lyric was well known to early English audiences. This lyric also appears in *Mary Magdalen, Hickscorner, Youth, Nature, and The Four Elements* and is sung by a vice character or corrupt element in each. Neuss notes: “it was perhaps the same as the popular dance Lusty Gallant.”40 The first surviving record of this tune occurs in the 1569 printing of William Elderton’s *A Proper New Balad in Praise of my Ladie Marques, Whose Death is Bewailed, to the Tune of New Lusty Gallant* printed in London by Thomas Colwell and the tune is also used for two anonymous lyrics printed in 1600 and 1612.41 While Elderton’s lyric is dated a full 50 years after the accepted date of *Magnificence*, this dirge centers on his travel to the court to mourn the death of the Lady Marquis. Although this does not locate the court in France, it does suggest a relationship between this tune and the Anglo-Norman court system. Further, according to Neuss, Courtly Abusion’s “Rutty bully, jolly rutterkin, heyda” references a fifteenth-century *basse-dance* the *Roti Bouilli Joyeux*, a popular fifteenth and early sixteenth century French dance.42 Although there is still much work to be done on early music traditions, the relationship with the French seems clear. This relationship is enhanced in the subsequent lines. Given his employment of these French ditties, it is perhaps not surprising, then, that Cloaked Collusion addresses Courtly Abusion in French and
inquires into his region of origin. This is one area that needs much more critical study, but Courtly Abusion answers with yet another corruption of French when he answers: “Wyda, Wyda” (751). This is exactly the type of mistaken French which Counterfeit Countenance identifies as counterfeit language. Taken as a whole, it seems clear that Courtly Abusion’s repertoire, the French exchange, and his semi-French response are meant to mock the Frenchness of the court and its absurdity.

Later, in his boastful soliloquy outlining all of his accomplishments, Courtly Abusion proclaims:

This new jet
From out of France
First I did fet;
Made purveyance
And such ordinance
That all men it found
Throughout England.

All this nation
I set on fire
In my fashion;
This their desire,
This new attire,
This ladies have;
I it them gave. (878-889)
In his exceptional reading of the importance of dress as a signifier in *Magnificence*, John Scattergood has also noted the relationship between the French fashion and vice, stating “Fansy and Courtly Abusyon are irresistibly linked, particularly in terms of apparel with France, and by implication with vice.”\(^{43}\) In addition, he notes that the negative image of French garb in the English court may have stemmed, in Skelton’s case, from a specific incident in which a few of Henry VIII’s ‘minions’ or particular favorites returned from a raucous trip to France where, according to Edward Halle’s *Chronicle*, “theye with the frenche kyng roade daily disguised through Paris, throwing Eggges, stones and other foolish trifles at the people,” and continued their unruly behavior.\(^{44}\) Halle goes on to note that “when these your gentlemen came again into Englande, thei wer al frenche, in etyng, dryntyng and apparel, yea, in French vices and bragges, so that all the estates of Englande were by them laughed at.”\(^{45}\) Within the context of this event, it is clear that Skelton is, in fact, using his text to demonstrate the folly of the intrusion of French customs and dress into to English court and to warn the king against such raucous and destructive behavior. It is no coincidence, then, that the character of Courtly Abusion is the most explicitly French character in the play; part of the abuse Skelton is making reference to, I believe, is the clearly ties his ideas of the abuse of the court to his Frenchness and his use of the French language. Thus, Skelton provides a negative portrayal of the use and misuse of French in an English court and asks his audience, be they kings or peasants, to re-evaluate the role of French customs in the English court.
SOCIETAL DISTRUST OF FRENCH

It was not only in the *de casibus / Mirror for Magistrates* tradition that French came under attack. Despite its continued use as a language of power and authority, there remains a strong anti-French sentiment in much of the literature from the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. In a number of early texts extolling the virtues of the vernacular, the use of Anglo-French was often criticized as a result of the problems created by miscommunication and a resultant distrust associated with French speakers on English soil. Perhaps the best example is from William Caxton’s 1490 introduction to *Eneydos*. Here, Caxton famously comments both on the problem of miscommunication and the disdain in which some English speakers held French speakers. After establishing the importance of and need for an English translation of a text which was already extant in both French and Latin, Caxton’s famous anecdote about a merchant’s search for eggs demonstrates the frustration that was caused by England’s multilingualism. Caxton tells us that in response to the merchant’s request for eggs, the woman of the house responded that “she coulde not speke no Frenshe.”46 Caxton then explains that the exasperated merchant became quite angry because “he also coude speke no Frenshe, but wolde haue egges.”47 While Caxton’s story is primarily meant to show the variety and disparate nature of English dialects, the wife’s immediate assumption is that her inability to understand the merchant stems not from regional difference, but from national differences. Additionally, the merchant’s immediate and vehement denial of his status as a French speaker makes clear the ill regard in which French speakers were held during the period. Caxton’s vignette demonstrates the many problems brought about by the many linguistic differences in Medieval England.
This skeptical representation of French speakers was carried into a number of early English dramatic texts. In many early interludes and morality plays, the French language is used by seedy characters with malicious intention. In some cases, these references to French exist in only a few short lines. In Bales’ 1538 King Johan, a play remarkably concerned with the political status of the English nation, in which Bale introduces a character named England who voices many concerns of England, the unsavory characters of Dissimulation and Sedition greet and address each other in French. In the anonymous play Wealth and Health, originally printed between 1553 and 1555, the pickpocket character of Shrewd Wit enters and is announced by a French greeting: “Dieu vous garde playsaunce [God keep you in pleasure].” While brief, this line situates the sordid character of Shrewd Wit, who by his own admission has recently been in the company of thieves and whores, directly within the culture of French speakers in England during this period. In these ways, both King Johan and Health and Wealth associate their vice characters with the French language. Later representations of French are seen in comic characters like Grimme the Collier in Richard Edward’s Damon and Pithias (printed in 1571) and Dame Chat in Gammer Gurton’s Needle (c. 1552). In Damon and Pithias, Grimme the Collier’s scant French, which he claims to have learned as a soldier, supplements the representation of the collier as an uneducated dolt. While he manages a simple reply to a French toast, his French is garbled at best. Grimme is ridiculed and shaved by Jack and Will, who spend a good portion of the text belittling him for his lack of education. In Gammer Gurton’s Needle, Dame Chat provides much of the comic action in her vicious, if misguided, attacks on Gammer Gurton, Gammer’s farm hands—who Dame Chat has been led to believe have stolen her cock—and on
Doctor Rat—who she smites on the head, assuming him to be yet another thief. Dame Chat, while not a patently French character, in both title and name is identified with at least some level of Frenchness. This, coupled with her occasional use of phrases like “avaunt” and “anon,” clearly nationalizes Gammer Gurton’s bellicose neighbor as a Frenchwoman. Dame Chat’s “Frenchness” makes the petty squabbles and subsequent violence between her and the English dialect-speaking members of Gammer’s household all the more politically relevant and irreverent. While each of these characters uses French only briefly and their status as French speakers adds only nominally to their larger portrayal, they also demonstrate some of the ways in which French speakers had come to be viewed on the early English stage.

Like other medieval moralities and sixteenth-century interludes, *Nature* introduces the relationship between the French language and vice; however, Henry Medwall’s presentation of this correlation is much more thorough and nuanced than in the cases of his sixteenth-century contemporaries. Medwall’s *Nature*, first printed by William Rastell circa 1529 but composed perhaps as early as 1496, stands conveniently between the tradition of the medieval morality and the Humanist plays of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Moeslein argues that this play incorporates aspects of both dramatic traditions. While he admits that “*Nature* includes in its make-up many of the constituents of the canonical morality play,” he is quick to note that “Medwall has in most cases altered the valence, so that they combine to form a new and distinctive product.” Indeed, a quick look at the play’s cast of characters will show its indebtedness to the medieval morality. With characters like, Reason, Sensualye, Innocencye, Wrath, and Charyte, it is not surprising that Medwall has drawn heavily from
the medieval tradition of allegorical morality. However, the play diverges from the
tradition of morality play in a number of ways, most notably the comic presentation of
the Seven Deadly Sins.\textsuperscript{54} It also concerns itself with the Humanist questions of prudent
and moral living in the world and integrates the Humanist interests in the classics into its
medieval structure. As John Gannon has observed, “what makes one regard Nature as a
transitional form of the morality play is, I suppose, the introduction of Renaissance
learning and ideas, and more particularly, the suggestion that Aristotle may stand as a
source of spiritual wisdom scarcely less important than the Bible itself.”\textsuperscript{55} In its new take
on the morality structure, \textit{Nature} concentrates not on the moment of death, nor the
salvation of the soul, but instead on the growth of Man ‘in his prime’ and his struggles to
live a reasoned and moral life. In these ways, Medwall’s \textit{Nature} bridges the gap between
Medieval and Early Modern dramatic traditions. In addition to standing generically
between the medieval and early modern, Henry Medwall also establishes a continuum of
concern about the French speakers on English soil.

In this humanist morality play, the vice character of Pryde is an opulently dressed,
self- proclaimed Frenchman who is addressed in French. In his long and boastful opening
speech, Pryde describes himself as a “noble progeny” (I. 733) noting that “My fader a
knight, my moder callyd Madame” (I. 734). By making specific reference to his
mother’s appellative, Pryde establishes his French pedigree. He goes on to explain that
since his parents’ death, he has been the inheritor of great renown and he is “spoken of
more than they all, / Hens to Parys gatys” (I. 738-739). While this may be a reference to
the more local Paris Gardens, given Pryde’s earlier establishment of his French ancestry
and the French salutation which follows this speech, it seems more likely a reference to
Paris, France. Proclaiming that he is spoken of, even more than his great ancestors, from here to the gates of Paris, Pryde further emphasizes the relationship between the vice of pride and the English perception of France.

This relationship is further explored with the entrance of the Boy. Near the end of his speech, Pryde notices, apparently for the first time, the presence of Sensuality on stage. In response to his surprise, his Boy, who has entered nearly 50 lines earlier, explains to Pryde that Sensuality is the man he seeks. In this strange comic bit, the Boy becomes the voice of knowledge and reason for Pryde, despite Pryde’s order that the boy “Com behind and folow me” (I. 824). Demonstrating this comic role reversal, the boy quips irreverently, “Yes, in the best wyse, trust ye me!” (I. 826). This exchange sets up a reversal of expected roles of master and page. It is at this moment that the boy slips into French to address Pryde. In response to Pryde’s seeming social impotence, the boy urges, “Ale, Seygniour! Ale vouse avant!” [Go, milord! Get you forward] (I. 827). After what is certainly some physical prodding, Pryde addresses Sensuality with his own version of French: “Salvus to you, sir!” (I. 828). Pryde’s earlier insistence on his Frenchness, as well as his opulent dress, a common English stereotype of the French, and his use of this faulty French suggests a clear relationship between French speakers and the vice of Pride: the vice against which this Humanist interlude struggles.

Unfortunately, Pryde’s French is quite incorrect. Moeslein notes that Pryde’s attempt “manages to avoid both of the permissible words: salus “health (to you, sir),” or the customary greeting, salve.” This error is not reproduced in all extant printings and the sole surviving manuscript and it is impossible to eliminate the possibility of either scribal error or authorial intention here. But, if taken as an intentional error, the mistake
creates a fitting end to the comic scene between the boy and Pryde. It may be that Medwall complicates his presentation of Pryde as a false, French speaker. If the mistake is intentional, it becomes clear that Medwall’s criticism is not necessarily of all Frenchmen, but of those (primarily Englishmen) who put on French pretenses, and who get it wrong. In either case, it is clear that Medwall intends to draw a distinct correlation between Pryde and the French. The opening speech identifies very clearly Pryde’s French lineage and his use of French at the end of his speech reinforces the image of the Vice as a Frenchman. In this way, the French fashion and French language become one and the same with the sin of pride whose influence, this morality suggests, all mankind and Nature should avoid.

Pryde is not the only character in Medwall’s play that uses French; however, Medwall is careful to restrict his use of French to fallen characters. In the second part of the play, Man falls for the second time. After being returned to the company of Reason at the end of part one, Man is again seduced by the vices of Sensuality and Bodily Lust early in part two. Soon after his second fall, Man learns from Sensuality that Margery—a scandalous woman with whom Man has had some dealing in the first part of the play—had taken up residence in a terrible whore house which served even the most destitute of men because of her great sorrow at his previous conversion. It is this news that acts as a catalyst for Man’s second fall. When Bodily Lust returns with the promise of news from Margery, Man questions him in French: “Et que novellys?” [And what news?] (II. 257) to which Bodily Lust replies, “Je nescey” [I don’t know] (II. 257). Although this exchange is quite brief, it is clear that Man’s desire for news of Margery sparks his fall into the
degenerative French language; Man’s use of French here is appropriate because it signifies the fallen state of his soul.

The importance of language to Man’s state has been established by Medwall previously in the second part. Early in the second temptation scene, before Man has given himself fully to the vices, he slips for a moment into Latin, calling his devotion to the vices into question:

**Bodily.** Understande ye what I mene?

**Man.** Ye, Ye!

**Bodily.** Tell me in myne ere.

**Man.** *Quid est Latinum propter ‘le steyys’?*

**Bodily.** What! Latin! now thys of the newys!

I herd never thys ere!

I trow ye begyn to waxe shamfast!

**Man.** Nay, nay, hardly! That gere ys past,

Meny dayes a gon.

I am as wanton as ever I was! (II. 182-190)

Bodily Lust’s reaction to the use of Latin is immediate. He assumes that Man’s use of the language of the Church suggests his repentance and that Man has begun to “waxe shamfast.” As John Gannon has noted, “the very sound of Latin is anathema to Bodily Lust.” By assuming that Man’s use of Latin signifies a change in his morality, Bodily Lust demonstrates ways in which Man’s language can designate the status of his soul.

Additionally, this passage demonstrates the perception that French language is best suited for corrupt material. This is made evident by Man’s attempt to translate his
scandalous whereabouts into Latin when he asks Bodily Lust, “What is the correct Latin term for ‘le stewys?’” The addition of the French definite article ‘le’ is clearly meant to signify the Frenchness of this term (we can image that this line might be most effective if a French accent is employed at this point). Using French to speak of the Stews, a vulgar term for London brothels, Medwall clarifies the relationship between the use of the French language and the corrupt element in the play. Although Bodily Lust seems to miss the linguistic gag, Medwall’s attention to the hierarchy of language, the pious nature of Latin, and the corrupt perception of the French language on the early English stage is clear. Indeed, throughout his text, Medwall examines the role of language in signifying the status of a man. Both his portrayal of Pryde as a French man and his portrayal of Man’s use of French in a fallen state demonstrate a cultural concern about the place of French speakers in English during the time. What these depictions suggest for the audience is that, in addition to the Vices and Seven deadly sins, they should also strive to avoid French speakers and French speaking.

The presentation of vice characters who use the French language, to demonstrate their degenerate nature, to cause confusion or to enhance their villainy, becomes so commonplace by the end of the sixteenth century that playwrights begin to exploit the trope for comic effect. For example, the Vice character Inclination in the Trial of Treasure—published in 1567 and often attributed to William Wager—attempts to use French as well as Dutch to deceive the characters Just and Sapience in order to escape their grasp. The convention is here so overdone as to be comical. Before his linguistic deception, Inclination makes his plan clear: “Or els learne to speake language another whyle, / And so I may Happén the knaues to beguyle.” Immediately following
Inclination’s use of French, Sapience calls attention to the ruse, noting, “To deceiue vs nowe him selfe he doth prepare” (413). Not to be so quickly undone, Inclination again declares his ignorance of English in a stilted stage Dutch dialect. Although Sapience is not duped by either of these linguistic ploys, the Vice’s attempts to confuse and beguile the virtues through this linguistic trope call attention to the cultural concern about the dubious nature of French (and to a lesser extent Dutch) speakers in England during this time. What Wager seems to be suggesting in this comic portrayal is that any English citizen with the least bit of Sapience should see through this ruse quickly; however, even in this comic portrayal, the constant threat of miscommunication and linguistic incongruence resulted in a widespread apprehension about French speakers on the early English stage.

Early English drama stigmatizes the use of French in a number of ways. The representations of Herod in the cycle plays follow the _de casibus_ tradition and draw a clear line between the Herods’ use of French and their portrayals as a tyrant kings. By aligning the famously tyrannical Herod with the French court, the cycle plays stigmatize both the French courts and those English royals who might abandon English in favor of French. Later moralities and interludes following the _Mirror for Magistrates_ tradition speak more directly to the courtly audience and warn against the dangers of using the French language. The representation of French speakers in plays operating in the _de casibus / Mirror for Magistrates_ tradition criticizes courtly French and argues that if a king is to be a good, moral, and upstanding king, he must establish English as the language of his kingship. Other sixteenth-century interludes stigmatize French speakers as vice ridden characters in a fallen state of morality. These plays make clear the
relationship between the use of French and the immoral state of a man’s soul. Whether the portrayals of French speakers on the early English stage are moral exempla for large scale audiences or specific warnings for a royal readership, what early English drama reflects is a growing cultural discontent with the use of the French language on English soil and an increasing desire to establish English as the national language of the English royal authority.


2 Recently, historical linguists have called for a re-evaluation of the influence of the French language on English in the Middle Ages. See Xavier Dekeyser, “Romance Loans in Late Middle English: a Case Study,” in *Perspectives on the English Lexicon: A Tribute to Jacques Van Roey*, ed. Granger Sylviane (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1991); Christiane Dalton-Puffer, “Productive or Not Productive? The Romance Element in Middle English Derivation,” *English Historical Linguistics* (1992): 247-260. These linguists have argued effectively for the growing prominence of the French language in concordance with English. Dekeyser has demonstrated that after c.1300, the influx of French (and more broadly Romance) terminology far outweighed the Anglo-Saxon heritage of the English language.


9 Kibbee, 59.

10 Kibbee, 63.


Strohm, *Politique*, 89.


Jessica Winston, 382.

Of course English representations are not the only representations. Miriam Anne Skey has outlined the many permutation of the European Herod in “Herod the Great in Medieval European Drama,” *Comparative Drama* 13 (1979-1980): 330-364.

Interestingly, this line combines a number of linguistic stigmatizations covered in this study. It is a French phrase rendered in an English dialect. For more on the stigmatization of dialect, see chapter 4.


Liam O. Purdon, The Wakefield Master’s Dramatic Art: A Drama of Spiritual Understanding (Gainsville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2003), 165.


Neuss, “Introduction,” in Magnificence, 15-17. Leigh Windsor suggested that the date of composition may have been as early as 1504 and argues that the language, themes and characters are similar to those of Skelton’s earlier works. Even so, the conventional dating of the play remains critically accepted. See Leigh Windsor, “Skelton’s Magnificence” Renaissance Quarterly 23:1 (1970): 14-25.

Neuss, 15. Windsor also questions to which Louis this is making mention and argues that the reference is probably to King Louis XI (1461-1483).

Neuss, 17.

Many critics have noted the importance of the mirror tradition to Magnificence including contemporary examples like Lydgate’s Mirror for Magistrates and Machiavelli’s The Prince and Erasmus’ Education of a Christian Prince, which Norland notes are derived from Cicero’s De Officiis. See also Howard B. Norland, Drama in Early Tudor Britian 1485-1558 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 175-187; and Neuss, 19-23. The use of the classics can also be seen in the utilization of the
proverbial ‘measure is treasure’ which has been attributed to a number of classical sources, including, Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and Horace’s *Odes*. For more see Neuss, 19 and William O. Harris, “The Thematic Importance of Skelton’s Allusion to Horace in Magnyfycence” *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 3 (1963): 9-18.

Norland further notes that, “fourteen were written or performed between 1533 and 1540 (ten by John Bale), and seven were produced between 1548 and 1553” (177).

The image of the mirror as exemplum appears in a number of texts which predate Skelton’s work. The image appears in both Chaucer’s Franklin’s Tale and the *Cursor Mundi*. It also appears twice in the York cycle plays. Both John the Baptist and Jesus hope to be made mirrors by which men may see the path to salvation.

My thanks to Robert Edwards for pointing out this possible translation of the corrupt lines.


Windsor, 16-17. Windsor further argues that the image of these watches suggest “the more vigilant border patrols established by Henry VII during Perkin Warbeck’s threat to the English crown (1491-1497)” (17). While these watches were not specifically geared towards the problem with travel to France, given the social unrest demonstrated by Windsor, it is probable that Skelton had these guards in mind.
The relationship between Fancy and French is further demonstrated when Follygreats Fancy in French later in the play: “Hem, Fancy! Regardes-voyes” (1199). Neuss notes, “there is no need to regularize or emend… Folly’s French would inevitably be inaccurate” Magnificence, 140 n. 1199.

Skelton, Magnificence, 111-112 n. 745.

All references available on EEBO. While Elderton’s lyric is dated a full 50 years after the accepted date of Magnificence, it may be significant that this dirge centers on his travel to the court to morn the death of the Lady Marquis. While this title does not locate the court in France, it does suggest a relationship between this tune and the Anglo-Norman court system. He also makes reference to the Flemish Taunder Naken.

Skelton, Magnificence, 112 n. 747. She also notes that this song is mentioned in Skelton’s Coystrowne and “in the fifteenth-century Scots poem Colkelbie Sow.” He also makes reference to the Flemish Taunder Naken. See Neuss, Magnificence, 112 n. 745.


Edward Halle, The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and Yorke. London, 1548, f. 66r.

Halle, f. 66v.

Curt F. Bühler, William Caxton and his Critics: A Critical Reappraisal of Caxton’s Contributions to the Enrichment of the English LanguageWith Caxton’s Prologue to Eneydos in Facsimile and Rendered into Present-day English (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press 1960), 17.

Bühler, 17.

49 The stage direction immediately proceeding this entrance directs the character to enter singing and the character of Hance is directed to enter singing a Dutch song immediately following this scene. Therefore, it is entirely possible that Shrewd Wit enters singing some– perhaps scandalous– version of the French traditional carol, “Noel: Dieu Vous Garde.”

50 Damon and Pithias is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four of this dissertation.


52 Mewall, 255.

53 Mewall, 255.


56 Moeslein notes that this reference is “perhaps to Paris, but Pryde’s fame is more likely to have extended no farther than the gates to the Paris Gardens, which lay between Lambeth and the ‘stews’ of the Liberty of the Clink. Once the Manor of Robert de Paris,
it became an amusement center in the Tudor times, site of a bull-baiting arena and
eventually of the Swan theatre” (Medwall, 429 n. 739).

57 Translation from Mewall, 431 n. 827.

58 See my later discussion of Fancy and Courtly Abusion in Skelton’s Magnificence.

59 Mewall, 431 n. 828.

60 John Gannon, 268.

61 Interestingly, Medwall may also be participating in the dramatic tradition explored in
the previous chapter. If we imagine Man as fully fallen at this point, his use of Latin
demonstrates a misappropriation of the language similar to those seen in the many plays
previously discussed. This would, perhaps, make Bodily Lust’s misreading of the scene
even more comical.

online through English Verse Drama Full-Text Database. Lines 409-410. All subsequent
citations given parenthetically.
Chapter Three:

Malice and Vice: The Use and Abuse of Latin on the Early English Stage

The relationship between English and Latin during the later Middle Ages was necessarily complicated by the religious and political turmoil of that time. Pre-Reformation tensions concerning the role of the vernacular in scriptural interpretation have often been seated at the heart of this debate. Indeed, much of the religious unrest of this period has been mapped directly onto the medieval struggle for linguistic supremacy, and a number of scholars have identified the growing tension between Church and State as one of the most important influences on the English departure from Latin. Critics like Janette Dillon, Jill C. Havens, and Ruth Nisse identify the Lollard movement as the main force which drove these linguistic changes. While religious tensions are a large part of any discussion about the place and prominence of Latin and English, this chapter—and, more generally, this dissertation—will show that the growth of the English vernacular was not merely a result of the influence of the Lollards but was, instead, a broader cultural call to arms which resonated throughout fifteenth and sixteenth century England. I hope to resituate early representations of the rise of the vernacular within the social realm and to refigure the way in which early dramatic representations of the tensions between English and Latin are ascribed. This chapter will argue that the nationalistic impulses that drove English to define its vernacular against the foreign other were augmented by a cultural desire to form a domestic, independent identity outside of the powers of Latin. Because there is no strictly ‘foreign’ other against which the speakers
and the language can define themselves, the struggle with Latin becomes a struggle for an independent English linguistic identity of institutional authority.

The wealth of Latinate macaronic verse evident on the early English stage dramatized the English speaker’s struggle to craft a unique linguistic and national identity during this period. This chapter will primarily focus on the ways in which the dramatization of Latin in the Corpus Christi plays and early Moralities represents underlying cultural concerns about the institutional power inherent in the Latin language. It will show that the interaction between Latin and English in texts such as the Corpus Christi cycles (most notably the Towneley cycle), *Mankind* and the Digby *Mary Magdalen* shows a serious cultural concern with the abuse of Latin and of those who use the language. Throughout the corpus of early English drama, a number of demon characters, as well as morally abject men, like Pilate and Herod, give voice to their moral degradation through their manipulation and misuse of the holy language. In addition to marking the speaker as a linguistic and often moral ‘other,’ Latin also becomes the language through which malevolent characters are able to deceive and corrupt the pious and moral English speaker. Often Vice and demonic characters are shown to appropriate the language of the Church and use it as a veil under which they disguise their insidious intentions. While there were still many pious Latin speakers whose depiction reinforced the authority of the Church and State in specific contexts, the propensity for the corruption of linguistic power dramatized on the early English stage encouraged a rejection of Latinate renegotiation of the linguistic system. These negative images forced audiences to question the authority in favor of Latinate speakers outside the contexts of
Church and State, and justified the establishment of a vernacular, and therefore English, national institutional authority.

THE ROLE OF THE LOLLARDS

The linguistic struggle between Latin and English during the later Middle Ages has recently been tied to the growth and popularity of the Lollard movement. Due in large part to the Lollard idea of an “open text” and insistence on a vernacular Bible, a number of critics have identified this religious movement as the primary catalyst which sparked the late medieval reevaluation of the vernacular in England. Recent critics argue that Lollardy had pervasive and long-lasting effects on the language and the nation. Janette Dillon, for example, places much of the responsibility for the tensions between English and Latin on the Lollard insistence on vernacular translations of the Bible as well as their attention to vernacular literacy. She notes that, “…Lollards identified themselves by their focus on the word, and in particular by their focus on the word in English.” Because of the close affiliation of Lollard ideologies and the vernacular, she argues, the division between English and Latin were drawn along religious lines.

The institution of the church had not always been at odds with the growth of the vernacular; however, the relationship had always been a bit tenuous. As Theresa D. Kemp has argued, “while it was necessary to use English to promote religious doctrine which had traditionally been set forth in Latin, the use of the vernacular remained a problematic venture because of its ability to foster subversion and because of the difficulty in controlling its usage.” Her readings show that the Latin speaking authority
was well aware of the problems of vernacular and understood the importance of negotiating the terms of the place and significance of vernacular teaching. She notes that clerics needed to keep Latin in power and “needed to distinguish between proper uses of the vernacular for teaching the laity and improper uses of it to demystify theological discourse.” While the church was cautious about the ways in which it allowed and even encouraged the use of the vernacular, it remained supportive of the didactic benefits of using English, until the mid-fourteenth century.

However, the birth of the Lollard tradition in England further complicated the linguistic relationship between English and Latin and forced the Catholic Church to take a strong stand against the growth of the vernacular. Although the church had instituted a program of vernacularization and “before the 1380s the church had worked precisely to break down the barrier of language at strategic points, recognizing that any real attempt to expand lay understanding of the faith must address the laity in its own language,” the threat of the Lollards forced church officials to maintain stringent control of the language of scripture. Not surprisingly, the Lollard movement’s desire for vernacular translations of scripture caused a great unease among the religious community. In response, the Church instituted a program designed to maintain control over the scripture and abandoned their efforts to integrate the vernacular into religious teachings. As Anne Hudson notes, it was “better that the laity should remain doctrinally ignorant than that they should, whether through deliberate subversion or through inadvertent arousing of curiosity, succumb to heterodoxy.” For these critics, the church’s attempt to restrain heterodoxy by suppressing access to doctrinal language further polarized the language of the Church and the language of the people.
Critics who see the Lollard movement as the primary factor in the linguistic debate often see the tensions between the use of English and the use of Latin as a struggle between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Dillon, for example, argues:

The church, in taking a stand against the legitimacy of an English translation of the bible, could not continue its policy of increasing vernacular provision for the laity, and gradually took on a more confrontational role that demonized English as the language of potential heretics. The choice of English now came to seem a defiantly anticlerical gesture, and one which, increasingly in the fifteenth century, questioned the need for mediating clergy at all.  

For Dillon, the question of linguistic authority cannot be divorced from questions of religious authority. She goes so far as to argue that “the Medieval struggle between English and Latin was no less than a struggle between opposing claims to truth, and the participants recognized that an attempt to outlaw a language from its particular area of discourse was in fact an attempt to outlaw its user’s claims to have any access to truth.”

In addition, Nisse argues that “The York plays’ authors and directors, working from Lollard-influenced English sermons in the likely repertoire of lay reading still at their disposal in the 1420s and 1430s, adapt Wycliffite concepts of secular exegetical authority and common speech to the political desires of all participants.” Although Nisse is careful to qualify readings of Lollard impulses in the York cycle—the plays were still Catholic ceremonial celebrations to be sure—she nevertheless argues for the primacy of Wycliffite ideals in the formation of the text.
However, even strident scholars of Lollardy acknowledge the integration of cultural concerns with those of the Wycliffite movement. In her discussion of Lollard allusions in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, Hudson notes, “What emerges in all this is the way in which “Wycliffitye” concerns coincided with the intellectual interests of the time; authors other than Chaucer make it clear that such concerns also extended into the areas of social, theological and ecclesiastical questions.” The social concerns identified as culturally pervasive are not those which eventually led to the most rigorous accusations of heresy—opposition to the teachings on transubstantiation, for example—but are instead cultural concerns over the vernacular and scriptural interpretation. Even Dillon, who locates the exigence of the growth of the vernacular within the Lollard tradition, argues that “what we see in the fifteenth century is a collision between the Lollard struggle to empower English and the simultaneous drive towards English from a wider base that refuses alignment with Lollard thinking beyond issues of language.” Despite acknowledging the larger cultural movement working to establish English as the language of power in England, Dillon continues to privilege the influence of the Lollards above this social movement.

Not all scholars view the Lollard movement as a driving force of English culture and vernacularism. Richard Rex argues strongly against the influence of Lollardy on early England. He states, “With regard to early Lollardy, it is maintained that the movement was simply never as popular or as powerful as many nervous contemporaries feared and some recent historians have hoped.” He is especially critical of claims asserting the importance of the Lollard tradition as a precursor to the Reformation and goes so far as to state: “Lollardy is of virtually no importance to the success of the
In his strident rejection of Lollardy’s theological significance, Rex argues instead that the most pervasive ideologies commonly labeled “Lollard” were instead largely cultural movements. He notes that, “what the huge number of vernacular biblical manuscripts indicates is not the strength of Lollardy, but the thirst for the vernacular scriptures among the literate and pious laity.” Rex re-imagines the movement towards vernacularity as a cultural development rather than a religious one and views the pervasiveness of the English desire for a vernacular superiority as a unique social movement and not as a religious one.

While I concede that the controversy between the use of English and the use of Latin was in some ways a religious problem, I believe that recent criticism has placed too much emphasis on the Lollard teachings. I believe it is best to conceptualize the influence of the Lollard movement less as a strict heterodox and more as a religious movement which was closely tied to growing cultural concerns. I see Lollardy as John F. Thompson does, more as a “set of more or less consistent attitudes than as a set of carefully worked out doctrines.” This set of cultural attitudes pervades the early English stage and led to a closer examination of the place of the Latin language in the identity of early English speakers. While vernacular translations of scripture were certainly a prescript of early Lollardy, the existence of Lollard ideals on the early English stage suggests that this was a cultural movement more than a religious one. Medieval civic cycles and moralities, for all their social awareness and attention to the daily politics of medieval life, were still didactic Catholic celebrations of theology. To argue that these plays in some way espoused the heretical teachings of the Lollards is to deny the essence of the early English dramatic tradition. We must also remember that the English language had begun
to come to prominence in the fourteenth century as evidenced by poets such as Chaucer and Langland. The fifteenth century orthographic standardization of Chancery English also played an important role in English’s struggle to gain acceptance as a language of power and prominence. Scholars of the history of the language and of drama focusing on the Wycliffite movement, seems to place undue importance on one contributing factor: the Lollard tradition. The movement for a strong, independent English language has roots universally acknowledged and entrenched long before the Lollard movement. The following sections will show the social and cultural concerns about the use of Latin developing during this time, contemporary to, but distinct from the Lollard traditions of the period.

APPROPRIATING LATINATE AUTHORITY

Despite the fact that Latin remained the official language of the Church, of the legal system, and of institutional power in the fourteenth, fifteenth and even early sixteenth centuries, these tumultuous eras also saw the rise of the vernacular and subsequent English translations of the Bible. The inequity of the medieval power structure, as well as the rampant corruption of such power (as evidenced by the numerous peasant uprisings and allegations of religious corruption), led directly to the distrust of that power structure and all things which represented it. The reputation of the Latin language suffered alongside the reputation of officials of both Church and State. Early English playwrights began to register a growing cultural distrust of the institutional authority of Latin; they used this distrust in their representations of fallen or abject
characters to explore cultural concerns about the role of Latin in England during that time. One of the most significant means by which early playwrights were able to confront the cultural concerns about Latin was by demonstrating the ways in which the authority of the Latin language could be appropriated by the morally abject through the use of macaronic texts.

The Towneley cycle includes some of the best developed representations of macaronic verse in any of the cycles. The *Processus Talentorum* [The Play of the Dice] is unique in the surviving cycles and tells the story of Pilate and his soldiers casting dice for Christ’s coat after the Crucifixion. It has been argued by critics such as Mendel G. Frampton and Martin Stevens that this play may have been based on an earlier version in the York cycle and expanded upon by the Wakefield Master. The pageant shows some signs of the Wakefield Master’s poetic style and thus his concern with the misappropriation of the Latin language which Stevens describes, stating: “The Wakefield author is pervasively concerned with ‘vayn carping,’ as Abel accusingly calls it, or to put it more fundamentally, with the abuse of language, especially by those who oppose God.” Even given the Wakefield Master’s concern with the misappropriation of language, the extent to which the abuse of language is examined in this pageant makes it exceptional amongst early English drama. This pageant is unique not only in its content but also because it, perhaps more so than any other surviving pageant, dramatizes the tensions between English and Latin, showing both the ineffectual nature of Latinate oratory as well as the potential for the abuse of a closed language system.

The *Talentorum* opens with Pilate’s characteristic rant. The tyrant begins in Latin, ordering the audience’s attention and obedience. He demands:
Despite the fervor of his boastful threats, Pilate’s opening rant is ineffectual. His demands that the audience keep quiet—“Vos cedam ni taceatis”—fall on deaf, or perhaps more rightly unLatined ears. After this introductory rant he is forced to change his register and to address the audience in a language they can better understand in order to get the response he so desires. The next four stanzas are macaronic verses which become progressively more English as Pilate becomes more frustrated and moves away from the use of Latin in his speech. His initial inability to communicate with his audience marks Pilate as outside of the English community and thus outside of the relevant Christian community. In this way, he shows the ineffectual nature of his Latin verse as he adopts
an increasingly English vocabulary demanding silent obedience and proclaiming the
glory of his name.

Pilate holds onto his Latin vocabulary as long as possible; the move into English
is a slow one. Even as Pilate moves out of his Latinate rant in the second stanza of this
pageant, the materia of his argument remains incomprehensible to an unlearned public.
He rails:

Stynt, I say! gyf, men, place

*Quia sum dominus dominorum;*

He that agans me says,

*Rapietur lux oculorum.*

Therfor gyf ye me space

*Ne tendam vim brachiorum,*

And then get ye no grace,

*Contesto iura polorum.*

*Caueatis!*

Rewle I the lure

*Maxime pure;*

Towne *quoque rure,*

*Me paueatis!* (14-26)

In these lines the audience may be able to pick up on his desire for attentive quiet, but
would certainly still have difficulty following the English passages as a well developed
argument. Pilate’s English lines in the second stanza consist mainly of empty demands
and function as transitions between the ideas expressed in the Latin lines. He demands of
the audience: “Stynt, I say! gyf, men, place” (14); “He that agans me says,” (16);
“Therfor gyf ye me space” (18); “And then get ye no grace,” (20); Rewle I the lure.” (23). In this stanza, the interlinear Latin lines still hold the core of Pilate’s meaning:
“Because I am Lord of Lords, … the light of [his] eyes shall be plucked out … Lest I put forth the strength of my arms. .. I call the powers of heaven to witness /
Beware!...Wholly, entirely / Those of you living in town as well as country / tremble before me.”21 Because the most important parts of his rant remain in Latin, they are, at best, partially incomprehensible to the vernacular-speaking audience and, at worst, a wholly nonsensical performance of the wrath of Pilate.

It is in the third and fourth stanzas that Pilate finally moves from a firm reliance on the Latin and translates his argument to English. The materia of these stanzas is in English and finally, the English speaking audience is able to comprehend the crazed Pilate. The English sections of his speech boast: “Kyng Atus gate me of Pila;”(28); “Am I ordaned to reyn apon Iuda” (30); “Pownce Pilate, that may ye well say;” (32); “Should call me founder of all lay” (34); “Pleasse me and say so.” (37); “Mighty lord of all,” (39); “Down of knees ye fall!” (41); Greatt god me sanctificauit” (42); “Me to obey ouerall” (43); “Hanged hy, that he sall,” (46); “I swere now. / By ye youre hedys / Bare in thies stedys, / Redy my swerde is / Of tham to shere now” (48-52). In these stanzas the Latin is relegated to smaller phrases, transitions and repetitions of the English boast; Latin is marginalized and English takes precedence. English’s hold on Pilate is transitory; however, in that the fifth stanza reverts to using even more Latin before Pilate finally gives up and rant settles in English verse and the pageant continues.
The macaronic verse which opens the *Processus Talentorum* was significant not only to further the characterization of Pilate in the Towneley plays as “unwaveringly evil,” but also as a representation of the severe distrust evident in English society for Latinate discourse.²² Along these lines, Peter Happé has argued that, “The effect of the Latin presumably was to recall familiar phrases of worship for a medieval audience, but that being so, it must also have been blasphemous.”²³ The blasphemy apparent in this section is not only the reappropriation of Christian ritual but, perhaps more importantly for the Wakefield Master, the reappropriation of Christian idiom. By translating the formal boast with which Pilate opens the pageant into Latin, the playwright identifies Pilate as operating outside of the linguistic and social conventions of England; he also reveals a serious concern about the possibility of the appropriation of the language of the church by those who would use it for malicious purposes.²⁴ This apprehension stems from a fear that ill-intended characters are as capable of performing what appears to be a legitimate form of the language of the Church as are officially sanctioned speakers. For an un-Latined audience, there is no difference between Pilate’s blasphemous use of scripture and the genuine uses of Latin performed by pious characters. The malleability of language explored in the macaronic opening of Pilate’s rant illustrates the growing distrust of Latin speakers on English soil. The ineffectual nature of Pilate’s rant and his subsequent acceptance and employment of the vernacular also suggests the necessity that the English ruling power be translated from its Latinate authority. Like Pilate, the institutional powers of England must convert to a vernacular authority, or risk suffering the same impotence.
Perhaps one of the most frequent abusers of the Latin language on the early English stage is the character Tutivillus. The demon Tutivillus has two main roles in early literature: he is first a gatherer of mumbled and overlooked Latinate phrases which careless preachers have let fall from their sermons. He is, second, a demon who writes down the idle words and gossip (primarily that of women) in church. As such, Tutivillus is a demon primarily concerned with language, with the negligence innate in oral preaching, and with the incursion of the vernacular into the Latin ritual. The Tutivillus of the Wakefield Judgment play focuses on language and the use of Latinate macaronic verse signifies a very serious unease about the appropriation of Latin and the malevolent abuse of scripture. In his chapter on “The Playwright as Poet,” Stevens provides an excellent reading of Tutivillus’ approach to and manipulation of language; however, he marginalizes the demon’s use of Latin in favor of more generalized readings about language as a whole. While it is certainly true that Tutivillus’ use of language mirrors the Wakefield Master’s concern for the abuse of language, which Stevens has identified elsewhere by describing the Wakefield Master as one who “distrusts all foreign languages and dialects,” it more importantly exposes his appropriation of the language of scripture for demonic purposes and reveals the performative nature of his ill-formed Latin.

Within the first few lines of his introduction, Tutivillus marks out a hierarchy of the most prominent uses and misuse of Latin while simultaneously demonstrating his superior control over the malleability of language. Upon his entrance in the Towneley Judgment pageant, Tutivillus identifies himself to the first demon, boasting, “I was youre chefe tollare / And sithen courte-roller; / Now am I master Lollar, And of sich men I mell me” (309-312). Here, Tutivillus identifies the three spheres in which his collection of
garbled Latin is most productive. He was first a “chefe tollare.” The MED identifies uses of ‘tollere’ to signify both tax collecting and usury. Identifying the linguistic manipulator Tutivillus as a leader of both the tax collectors as well as usurers demonizes the use of Latin for civic as well as mercantile purposes. Tutivillus goes on to identify further the spheres in which he is most active. He notes that he has since become the “court-roller,” here making reference to the use of Latin in the civil judiciary system. His sentiment again holds a double meaning in that he is the registrar of linguistics sins—a roll taker employed by the court—but he also takes rolls of the misused Latin within the court.

Finally, he identifies himself as a “master Lollar,” which has been read by critics one of two ways. Most critics take this line to be in reference to the Lollard movement already discussed. However, Oscar Cargill notes that the sentiment might instead be: “now I desire to be a lollar (one who lolls) – a master loafer.”\(^{28}\) Thus, each phrase Tutivillus uses to identify himself contains a double meaning. He is a tax collector and/or usurer; a court recorder and/or recorder of the Court; a Lollard and/or a loafer. It is no coincidence that the places where the majority of the sins which Tutivillus is most interested in take place within Latinate institutions—institutions of tax collecting, the economic system, law and the courts, and finally religion. By aligning Tutivillus, the Recorder Demon, so closely with these misuses of Latin, the Wakefield Master drains the Latinate institutions of their linguistic power; the only choice which remains is for vernacular institutions to replace the Latinate institutions of Church and State which the playwright has identified as inherently corrupt through Tutivillus’ linguistic brilliance.

Once the First Demon is convinced of his allegiances, Tutivillus goes on to explain his motivation and his place in the demonic system. He declares himself, stating:
Me name is Tutivillus;
My horne is blawne.

_Fragmina verborum,_
_Tutiullus colligit horum;_
_Belzabub algorum,_
_Belial belium doliorum._ (30.363ff)

Here Tutivillus identifies him self primarily as a collector of the “fragmina verborum”: the broken words of careless speakers (careless Latinate speakers, to be precise). Martin Stevens argues that in demonstrating the ease with which he is able to exploit the language Tutivillus mimics the Wakefield Master himself. Stevens states: “To the extent that Tutivillus at once practices the abuse that he is designed to guard against— that is, the incoherent and excessive utterance of words— he is a most interesting reflection of the Wakefield author himself.”29 While Tutivillus’ introduction certainly poses some very interesting questions about the Wakefield Master’s own manipulation of language, more importantly, it dramatizes the exclusivity of the Latin language and the many comprehension problems associated with that exclusivity. Tutivillus boasts about all the different types of souls he is able to bring to hell and even complains that his bags are too full; however, it is only in the Latin lines that he specifies precisely what sins he has collected in his bag: the _Fragmina Verborum_. Had the audience been unaware of Tutivillus’ literary legacy, they may never have fully grasped the linguistic nature of his demonic duties. Here the Wakefield Master brilliantly conflates the sins of misspeaking with the common sins of Pride, Lust, Envy etc. It is difficult to tell whether the sins he is collecting are expressed by these _Fragmina Verborum_ or whether the _Verborum_
themselves are the sins being collected. I suspect is it both. By manipulating the Latin he provides for Tutivillus, the Wakefield Master further identifies the problems associated with the use of Latin in an un-Latined culture. Putting this false Latin in the mouth of the Recording Devil allows the Wakefield Master to tap into a cultural distrust of the Latin language, showing the ease with which the demonic speaker can manipulate his audience and can appear to be a genuine Latin speaker. For the non-Latined audience, this section is no less legitimate than the spattering of scriptural Latin found throughout the cycle.

Even in his assertion of having blown his horn, Tutivillus works to re-appropriate the power of the Church. The Judgment Play opens with a lengthy section in which a number of damned souls and devils lament the second coming and the horn which was sounded signaling their impending damnation. Given the earlier concentration on the importance of the horn, Tutivillus’ assertion that he himself has blown a horn (and recently) reenacts the originary fall of Lucifer (which is dramatized in the Creation play of the Towneley cycle). While this is not a linguistic appropriation of scripture, it is an aural one. Just as he seeks to usurp Latin for his own malicious purposes, the blowing of the horn is the ‘Sound’ of God which Tutivillus seeks to imitate and make his own. Tutivillus’ assault on the Church and its language is also represented in his citation and often misuse of a number of different scriptures throughout the Judgment Play. He echoes Psalms 105:29 and 39 in line 428, Matthew 21:13 and 25:41 in lines 441-442 and 558-59 respectively. These demonic embezzlements of scripture demonstrate the apprehension evident in early English culture about the performative nature of the language and extent to which it is vulnerable to misappropriation.
The macaronic nature of *Mankind* cannot be parsed as nicely as the macaronic sections of the Towneley Cycle. Even so, there are a number of places where the demonic characters are shown to embezzle Latinate phrases in their attempts to seduce Mankind and to empty the language of the power of its institutional authority. One example occurs when the three demons of New Gyse, Nowadays, and Nought endeavor to tempt Mankind away from his pious toils:

**Mankynnde:** To haue remos and memory of mysylff Þus wretyn yt ys, To defende me from all superstycyus charmys: ‘*Memento, homo, quod cinis es et in cinerem reuerteris.*’

Lo, I ber on my bryst Þe bagge of myn armys.

**New Gyse:** The wether ys cold, Gode sende ws goode ferys!

‘*Cum sancto sanctus eris et cum peruerso peruerteris.*’

‘*Ecce quam bonum et quam jocundum,*’ qoud Te Deull to Þe ferys,

‘*Habitare fratres in vnum.*’

The malleability of language is here expressed in a number of ways. Not only does New Gyse’s statement mark the demonic exploitation of Latinate scripture, it also marks the pliable nature of language. He begins by complaining of the cold and calling for a fire. The phonetic relationship between “ferys” and “frerys” leads him directly to his blasphemous Latinate suggestion that it is “quam bonum et quam jocundum” [both good and joyful] for friars to “Habitare fraters in vnum” [live together as one] with the Devil. New Gyse’s ventriloquizing of the Psalms (17: 26, 27; 132:1) deconstructs Mankind’s speech act warding off evil. Mankind’s desire to protect himself from evil by
remembering that ‘Man is dust and to dust he shall return,’ is immediately undone by
New Gyse’s ability to manipulate scripture to his own ends.

Throughout Mankind, there are significant differences between demonic uses of
Latin and the passages which demonstrate legitimate usages of Latinate authority. First,
in phrases used by the demon characters are rarely translated for the audience while pious
speakers translate their Latin intermediately. Second, what translation exists for these
non-pious speakers is often incorrect or intentionally misleading. Finally, the Latin used
by the demons is often integrated into the verse in a way as to suggest that it is no
different from the English phrases. For example, in addition to co-opting legitimate
references to scripture, the demonic characters use Latin when English would easily
suffice, for example: Nought’s “I say, New Gyse, Nowadays: ‘Estis vos pecuniatus?’”
(471) and Myscheffe’s “When owr hedys wer togethere I spake of si dedero” (456). This
is not a context in which Latin is called for, nor does the Latin suggest any real religious
content. This is a marked difference from all other Latin used in the cycle plays where
Latin is always in service of the scripture or in reference to the law. No other characters
are shown to use Latin conversationally. By using Latin in this way, the demon characters
are, at one and the same time, snubbing their noses at the authority of the language of the
church, appropriating some of that authority, and clouding their malicious intentions.

The highest concentration of this abuse of Latin in Mankind occurs in the section
where the three demons take up a collection from the audience, signifying in action what
the play has been dramatizing: that the un-Latined may be swindled of their money or,
more sinisterly, their souls, through demonic manipulation of the authority of the Latin
language. In this way, the demonic ventriloquizing of Latin speech telescopes the
problem of miscommunication in a linguistically segregated society and dramatizes the
cultural trepidation with which the Latin language was viewed at this time. The primary
differences are: first, that these Latin phrases are rarely translated for the audience while
pious speakers translate their Latin intermediate; what translation exists for these non-
pious speakers is often incorrect or intentionally misleading, and finally, that they are
integrated into the verse in a way as to suggest they are no different from the English
phrases. The vignette begins with the incorporation of Latin seen previously: the
seamless use of “si dedero” and is followed by no less than five (seven if you include
“patus” and “gatus”) Latin phrases in the span of nine lines:

I haue cryede a fayer wyll, I beschrew your patus!

Nowadays: Ita vere, magister. Cumme forth now your gatus!
He ys a goodly man, sers; make space and be ware!

Tutivillus: Ego sum dominancium dominus and my name ys
Titivillus.
3e þat haue goode hors, to yow I sey caueatis!
Here ys an abyll felyschyppe to tryse hem out at your
gatys.

Ego probo sic: ser New Gys, lende me a peny! (471-478)

The first of these establish Nowadays and Nought’s linguistic power to conjure the devil,
and the last demonstrate the character of Tutivillus. Lynn Forest-Hill has noted that in
Mankind, “The signifying power of language is shown to be defined by the contexts in
which it is used, in conjunction with traditional values ascribed to particular kinds of
language. Recognizably "idle" language is still to be avoided for its association with sin
and vice, while the virtue of language is shown in *Mankind* to inhere in its use rather than simply in its form." In this way, the demonic ventriloquizing of Latin speech telescopes the problem of miscommunication in a linguistically segregated society and dramatizes the cultural trepidation with which the Latin language was viewed at this time. While it may be argued that the lack of translation and the integration of the Latin into the English line makes it sufficiently different from pious uses, the contexts of this usage are very similar to the contexts in which pious Latin speakers use the language. Rather than denoting the fluidity of English and Latin, this seamless integration of Latinate phrasing into English verse indicates a potential for misunderstanding the importance of the delineation of English and Latin phrases and the precarious position the of the un-Latined in determining whether or not the Latin is used in a pious or impious contexts.

The incursion of Latin into English is commented on and ridiculed earlier in the play when New Gyse lampoons Mercy’s aureate language. He cries: “Ey, Ey! Yowr body ys full of Englysch Laten.” (124) Interestingly, this outburst is not in response to Mercy quoting Latin scripture, but is instead a reaction to Mercy’s use of the terms “denomynacyon” (121) and “communycacyon” (122). Although it is ostensibly the incursion of Latin into the English lexicon to which New Gyse reacts so strongly, the subsequent frivolity makes clear New Gyse’s attempt to call the authority of Latin into question. Following New Gyse’s rejection of Mercy’s “Englysch Laten,” Nowadays demands a translation of a scatological verse. He states:

\[
\text{To haue ðis Englysch mad in Laten:}
\]

\[
\text{‘I haue etun a syschfull of curdys,}
\]

\[
\text{Ande I haue schetun yowr mowth full of turdys.’}
\]
Now opyn yowr sachell with Laten wordys
Ande sey me Þis in clerycall manere! (130-134)

Implicit in this mock-translation is the idea that even the most lewd concept will be made holy if it is pronounced “in clerycall manere.” A translation of this type would effectually debase Latin to the language of the lewd. Janette Dillon argues that the abuse of language in *Mankind* serves primarily to renegotiate linguistic stereotypes. She notes: “The audience, then, is asked to unfix its stereotypes, to consider the effects of obscene Latin used to mock virtue and of plain English use to rebuke vice.”

It is just such a juxtaposition which the demons seek to manipulate in an attempt to undermine the linguistic and spiritual authority of Mercy. Additionally, were Mercy to oblige, the aural quality of his verse would be virtually indistinguishable from legitimate proverbs to the illiterate audience. Fortunately, Mercy’s only response is to chide the demons for their abuse of language. He states, “Thys idyll language 3e xall repent. / out of Þis place I wolde 3e went” (147-148). More than simply an unfixing of stereotypes, the demons’ attempt to force Mercy to abuse his language demonstrates a distrust of the authority of the Latin language and the stereotypes of power in which it is seated. It shows the English speaker striving against the institutionalized authority and exposes the very real threat that limited access to the language of institutionalized power will lead directly to the abuse of that power, thus calling for a move to the open access of vernacular institutions.
The misappropriation of Latin by demonic characters is only one way in which early English playwrights were able to express a cultural anxiety about the exclusivity of Latin. Within the early dramatic canon there also develops a strong tradition of mock Latin (or dog Latin) which demonstrates both a disdain held by many English speakers for Latinate language as well as a nervousness about the possibility that ill-intended speakers—be they demonic or mortal—could construct a linguistic formula which sounded much like legitimate Latin and thus carried with it the full weight and power of that language should the uneducated by unable to identify the false structure of the language. Cawsy states, “The humor and counter-discursivity operates on several levels here: the application of Latinate endings to English words mocks Latin discourse and hints at a criticism of clerics who use bad Latin, and the entire passage parodies the scholastic apparatus of biblical explication.”

Just as Mankind is a representation of humanity’s struggle against sin and against the desires of the body, it is also a representation of the medieval struggle to delineate the authority of the Latin language and the place of the vernacular in the burgeoning English nation. The first linguistic assault in Mankind occurs when Myscheffe appropriates Mercy’s reference to Matthew 3:12 and Luke 3:17. In his opening speech, Mercy pronounces, perhaps trying to convince the audience: “The corn xall be sauyde, þe chaffe zall be brente” (43). Myscheffe immediately co-opts the scripture and employs mock Latin to reinterpret the biblical axiom for what he calls Mercy’s “leude wnderstondyng” (58). He mocks the Latin, in teaching Mercy that, “Corn seruit bredibus, chaffe horisbus, straw fyrybusque” (57). In interpreting this phrase, Myscheffe misguides his audience by
arguing that each has its use—the bread, the horse, or the fire—all of which, being equally useful to man, are thus equally desirable, implying that the “chaffe,” usually used to represent those qualities of man which are undesirable in God’s eyes, is in actuality useful and desirable. Because the axiom is given by Mercy in English and not in Latin, the audience members would be able to grasp fully the implications of Myscheffe’s misinterpretation. They would know that Mercy’s use of the scripture was not meant to teach them that all manner of men are equal but instead that the holy will be separated and adored while the impious will be left behind. The problem here is not only the misinterpretation of the text, but the misappropriation of Latinate authority by the demon character. Dillon rightly notes that: “The audience’s engagement is complicated by a reversal of the stereotyping which allows the base characters such expertise in Latin: the automatic association between Latin and authority is defamiliarized, and the definition of the vernacular against its Latin other becomes correspondingly problematic.” Thus, Myscheffe’s use of mock-Latin signifies the cultural concern that Latin (or any linguistic utterance which approximates the aural qualities of Latin) maybe misused in such a way that devout but illiterate men may be perverted by the assumed authority of the Latinate speaker.

The mock-Latin sections and the demonic appropriation of Latin throughout the Morality play suggest an concern about the potential abuse of Latin within an increasingly vernacular world. In the longest macaronic section of *Mankind*, the demon characters set up a mock court complete with a mock-Latin proclamation, in which they propose to readmit Mankind to their fold. To bring the court to order, Myscheffe reads the decree reportedly written by Nought. He begins by ridiculing the pretensions of the
Latinate court. Instead of reading the decree outright, Myscheffe begins stating,

“Blottybus in blottis, / Blottorum blottibus istis” (680-681). Even before the audience hears the Latinate terminology to come, they are reminded of the empty meaning of such a public statement. This opening line satirizes the authority of the Latin judicial system; it matters very little what the actual decree states, the Latinate “blottybus in blottis” carries with it the full authority of the court based on sheer linguistic principles not on judiciary ones.\(^{40}\)

The satire of the court continues in the following macaronic lines. Myscheffe reads:

\begin{quote}
Take hede, sers, yt stoude you on hande.

\textit{Carici tenta gernalis}

In a place ßer goode ale ys

\textit{Anno regni regitalis}

\textit{Edwardi nullateni}

On 3estern day in Feuerere— ße 3ere passyth fully,

As Nought hath wrytyn; here ys owr Tulli;

\textit{Anno regni regis nulli!} (687-693).
\end{quote}

The political satire here has been noted by Jessica Brantley and Thomas Fulton, who suggest that “what initially seems nonsense Latin interspersed with raucus vernacular jokes ultimately suggests a wide-ranging and allusive critique of royal authority.”\(^{41}\) They have noted the importance of the legalistic language in this passage and the play on the idea of ‘nothing’ found within it and they argue that “although it is difficult to parse these deliberately obfuscatory lines, it is clear that they emphasize links between kinship and
negation…All together, these nonsense lines work to associate Edward with inactivity, with absence, and with nothingness.”

While the importance of the idea of a powerless king in this section cannot be denied, given the opening lines, more important is the powerless nature of the language. Not only has the kingship been emptied of meaning, the language itself has no meaning. By equating an ineffectual government with an ineffectual language, *Mankind* thus dramatizes the concerns of an illiterate audience for whom Latinate judicial proclamations have little more meaning than Myscheffe’s “blottybus in blottis.” As Brantley and Fulton conclude, “These comic misappropriations point toward the culmination of political critiques in Nought’s legal gibberish: the fact that a real authority is conspicuously missing.”

*Mankind’s* desire for a meaningful and authoritative kingship mirrors its desire for a meaningful and authoritative language: the authoritative vernacular language of the burgeoning English nation and identity.

The Macro play *Mankind* contains what may be the most famous example of mock-Latin on the early English stage. However, this trope is also evident in a number of other early pageants and survives well into the sixteenth century. The mock-Latin in the Digby *Mary Magdalen* operates in a way that is significantly different from the mock-Latin in plays like *Mankind*, but even in its difference, it belies a cultural concern about the place of Latin and its usefulness in contemporary England. The scene containing the mock-Latin follows awkwardly after Christ reveals himself to the three Marys and Peter, having died on the Cross. Here, the King of Mercyille plans a sacrifice and his priest and servant boy prepare for the ritual. In this section, the boy repeatedly berates the priest. He speaks with disdain and comments on the priest’s portly figure, making a number of lewd and scatological references. In his contempt for the priest, his ritual, and
his language, the boy reveals anti-institutional impulses for both the pagan as well as the Christian church. The boy’s words to the priest exhibit a strong disregard for the authority of the established Church. After belittling the priest mercilessly, the boy moves on to make a mockery of the pagan rituals of sacrifice and the use of Latin. He states:

Now þan þe lesson I woll expresse,
Lyde as longytt for þe servyse of þis day:

*Leccyo mahowndys, viri fortissimi sarasenorum.*

*Glabriosum ad glvmandum glvumardinorum,*

*Gormondorum alocorum, stampatinantum cursorum,*

*Cownthys fulcatum, congrvryandum tersorum,*

*Mursum malgorum, mararazorum,*

*Skartum sialporum, fartum cardiculorum,*

*Slavndri strovmpum, corbolcorum,*

*Snyguer snagoer werwolfforum*

*Standgardum lamba beffettorum,*

*Strowtum stardy strangolcorum*

*Rygour dagour flapporum,*

*Castratum raty rybaldorum,*

Howndys and hoggys, in heggys and hellys,
Snakys and toddys mott be yower bellys!
Ragnell and Roffyn, and other in þe wavys,
Gravntt yow grace to dye on þe gallows.45 (1185-1201)
The mock Latin in this section is quite difficult to follow, but a few key themes are evident. In their edition of this text, Baker, Murphy and Hall describe this passage, noting that “The general theme would seem to be slippery, smooth-talking priests who fornicate with parishioner’s wives, mislead their flocks for their own gain, not caring whether their souls go ‘abackberyed’, [sic] as Chaucer’s Pardoner observed.”46 In addition to merely being a parody of church practices, this passage reemphasizes the performative nature of both the language and the ritual in its deconstruction of the Latin language.

In his mock-Latin sermon, the boy calls into question both the legitimacy of non-vernacular religious ceremony and the power of the language itself. Victor Scherb correctly identifies the linguistic concerns which occupy this passage, noting: “The ‘Leccyo mahowndys’ threatens to reduce language, especially ecclesiastical language, to mere sound, to ‘Synguer snagoer… Rygour, dagour, flapporum.’ As a parody of church practice, it constitutes an in-joke on garbled and incomprehensible ecclesiastical Latin, the ‘Fragmina verborum’ that Tutivillus collects in the Towneley Judgment play…”47 The reduction of Latin to meaningless sound eliminates the power of the speech act, effectively removing the institutional power inherent in the language in favor of vernacular power.48

RECLAIMING LATINATE AUTHORITY

The representation of Latin on the early English stage is not always one of animosity and distrust. As Janette Dillon notes, “English establishes its claim to legitimacy through the concept of nation and democracy, yet it allows the chimera of the
Latin other against which it defines itself to remain visible." Because these plays were primarily civic celebrations of religious doctrine, they necessarily acknowledge the authority of Latin used in correct contexts. In some of these plays, the authority of Latin is reclaimed near the end of the play. In the saint’s play *Mary Magdalen*, for example, the power of the speech act are dramatized as one way in which one can know the power and presence of God. Roughly three hundred lines after this mockery of the power of Latin, Mary uses Latin prayer to demonstrate the power of her God over the pagan god of the King of Mercyle. She prays: “*Dominus, illuminacio mea, quem timebo? / Dominus, protector vite mee, a quo trepedabo?*” (1552-1553). It is her prayer which causes the ground to shake and leads directly to the King’s conversion. Her speech also leads to the ‘sinking’ of the boy who so blatantly disregards the power of the Latin language in his earlier mock-Latin representation of the pagan ritual. Through Mary we can see that, in the right hands, the language itself still contains all of the power of the Church. *Mary Magdalen*, thus, offers a more hopeful interpretation of the conflict between English and Latin. It dramatizes the importance of the language in the correct contexts while still acknowledging the cultural concerns about illegitimate appropriations of Latin and the power which comes with it. Mary’s triumph over the pagan derivative speech acts denotes the possibility of a legitimate Latinate authority denied in the mock-Latin sections of the text.

Equally, *Mankind* offers some suggestion that the power and authority of the Latin language are not always corrupt and may, in specific instances, be the most expedient road to salvation. In his rejection and physical abuse of Naught, Nowadays, and New Gyse, Mankind makes reference to the Biblical tale of David and Goliath when
he recalls 1 Samuel 17:47. He states, “3yt þis instrument, souerens, ys not made to
defende. / David seyth, ‘Nec in hasta nec in gladio saluat Dominus.’(396-397). To this
Nought is only able to retort: “No, mary, I beschrew yow, yt ys in spadibus. / Therfore
Crystys curse com on your hedubus / To send yow less might!” (398-400). Having
defeated the demons with his spade, Mankind retains not only his spiritual authority, but
also his linguistic authority. The demonic use of mock-Latin after their first attempt at
Mankind’s temptation seem less like a cultural statement about the problems of Latinate
authority and more like a sad attempt to regain some semblance of authority after their
defeat.

Further, Mercy’s conversion of Mankind in the final scenes of the play suggests
an attempt to reclaim the authority of Latinate verse. Upon his return, Mercy searches for
Mankind, calling “Mankynde, ubi es?” (771). Recalling God’s search for Adam after the
fall, Mercy thus enacts the originary fall and thus the power of authority associated with
the voice of God. The following scenes depict not only Mercy’s triumph over Mankind’s
fallen soul, but also the triumph of legitimate Latinate authority over the usurpations of
the demonic other. Throughout what is most certainly a pained confession scene, Mercy
utilizes Latin scripture to convince Mankind that he is worthy of redemption. However,
even in his repetition of Latinate scripture, Mercy is careful to make clear the intention of
the quotation. Warning Mankind against sinning further and relying overmuch on the
redemptive power of confession, Mercy cautions:

    In hope when 3e syn 3e thynke to hawe mercy, be ware of Þat awenture.

    The good Lord seyd to Þe lecherus woman of Chanane,

    The holy gospel ys Þe awtorite, as we rede in scripture,
“Vade et jam amplius noli peccare.’
Cryst preserwyd Tis synfull woman takeyn in awowtry;
He seyde to here þeis wordys, ‘Go and syn no more.’ (847-852).

In addition to warning Mankind against sinning further, Mercy is also quick both to point out the authoritative nature of the scripture and to translate it for Mankind to eliminate any possibility of misunderstanding. His need to assert that the gospel scripture has “awtorite” exposes both Mercy’s understanding of the previous demonic embezzlement of scripture, as well as the overarching cultural suspicion of the authority of the Latin language. Mercy struggles to reclaim corruption of scriptural authority which has been enacted throughout the play.

The concluding scene contains further examples of Mercy’s insistence on the authority of the Latinate text. After quoting John 8:11, “Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile, ecce nunc dies salutis.” (866), Mercy is quick to point out the authority of his Latin phrase. He states, “All þe wertu in þe word yf 3e might comprehend” (867) and concludes, “Wyth mercy 3e may; I tell 3ow no fabyll, scripture prowe” (870). Mercy’s use of the scripture here counterbalances the misappropriations of it in the rest of the texts. As Forest-Hill concludes: “As Mankind offers an entertaining assessment of virtuous and sinful language, it also contributes to long-standing debates on the status of the vernacular, but resolves the tension between this and Latinate vocabulary by emphasizing effect, intention, context, and responsibility. These supralinguistic concerns are shown to be more significant than the simple form of the language used, which is open to abuse and misappropriation.”52 In this way, it is possible for the Latinate scripture to maintain its authority within the correct circumstances. Mercy’s use of scripture aids in
Mankind’s salvation and thus the power of God’s language and the Latinate speech act are recovered. This recovery, however, is necessarily transitory, as the demons Nought, New Guise, Nowadays and Tutivillus have escaped unscathed from Mercy’s wrath. Although Mankind’s spiritual and linguistic conversion offer a hopeful picture of redemption and Latinate linguistic authority, the conclusion also holds the promise of further temptation and the very real threat of relapse.

The recovery of the Latinate authority in these plays is always situated within the context of salvation. The power that is reestablished in the concluding scenes of these plays is the power of the word to redeem the soul. If these plays work to re-inscribe a Latinate authority, they do so with the knowledge that this authority will carry cultural weight only within the specific and well defined constraints of religious redemption. Both Mankind and Mary Magdalen acknowledge the authority of Latin when used within these severely limited confines, but their portrayal of mock-Latin and the misappropriation of Latin by demonic or malicious characters demonstrates a striking concern for the use of Latin as an authority outside of culturally sanctioned areas. These plays demonstrate a duality of purpose present in medieval linguistic theory wherein Latin remained the language of the Church, the courts, and of high culture, while its authority was simultaneously being cast in doubt by playwrights, authors, and the development of vernacular advocacy.
CONCLUSION

The social nature of early English drama, both in its presentation and in its authorship, offers us a unique view into the social structure of England at the time. The concern about the place of the English language and what it means to be an English speaker in the early formation of what would come to be called sixteenth-century English nationalism permeates these texts, suggesting a linguistic crisis of sorts. The presentation of demonic characters who are master manipulators of the language of the Church and the denial of such uses of the language by more pious characters clearly demonstrate the propensity for the misappropriation of Latin for malicious purposes. This anxiety is exacerbated by the trepidation of the less educated and secular communities concerning their own linguistic shortcomings and is expressed in terms of the potential abuse of Latin and manipulation of mock-Latin. The result of this tension is a cultural move away from Latinate authority and towards establishing a vernacular institutional authority.

To return for a moment to the Towneley cycle, this concern is demonstrated in the First Shepherds’ play when the second shepherd denounces the use of Latin by the first. After a lengthy section in which the three shepherds discuss the variety and validity of a number of early texts prophesying the birth of Christ, the first pastor states, “Virgill in his poetre / sayde in his verse, / Euen thus be gramere / As I shall reherse: / Iam noua progenies cele demittitur alto; / Iam rediet Virgo redeunt Saturnia regna” [Now a new progeny is sent down from heaven on high; now a virgin comes again, the reign of Saturn returns] (between 559 and 560). Stevens and Cawley note that these lines are from Virgil’s Fourth Eclogue but are neither word perfect nor in the correct order.53 The second Shepherd immediately responds to the recitation of the Latin, stating:
Weme! Tord! What speke ye
Here in my eeres?
Tell us no clerge!
I hold you of the freres;
Ye preche.
It semys by youre Laton
Ye haue lerd youre Caton (560-566).

The second shepherd’s vehement rejection of the Latin is a denial of scriptural as well as academic Latin. He equates the Latin lines first with the teaching of the friars and second with Cato’s distiches. While the second shepherd may also be responding to the fact that Virgil is not one of the thirteen prophets set forth in the *Sermo contra Judaeos*, which Stevens and Cawley identify as a possible source for these prophesies, the shepherd does not mention this as the reason for his outburst.54 Along these lines, John Purdon argues that it is the social stratification against which the shepherd rails. He argues that John’s reaction is “…a condemnation of the medium by which the figurative is conveyed- not on linguistic grounds as might be expected, but rather on those involving the sociopolitical decision to use language to maintain a hegemonic ideological exclusivity…”55 The second shepherd’s reaction is due entirely to the use of Latin in explicating the prophesies, signifying a cultural unease about the use of Latin (whether because of religious or sociopolitical objections) and the social stratification inherent in the use of the language. More than the implications relating to orthodoxy, what the shepherd responds to is the elitism of the language and the distrust he has for those who use the Latin instead of English; specifically, he holds friars as the bastion of such sins.
The first shepherd responds to this criticism by translating and explicating the passage under the guise of teaching. Although the lesson presented here differs from many other examples, in that it does not give an interlinear translation of the Latin, this rehearsal recreates the trope of teaching through translation carried out often in early dramatic representations of the misappropriation of Latin text. The first shepherd, instead, casts off his Latin in favor of English, having learned his own lesson about the reception of such teaching by the other shepherds, a move which would not necessarily have eased the mind of the second shepherd who re-inscribes this fear of language in his own play when he has Mak attempt to deceive the other shepherds by putting on a dialect. In this pageant, we get a glimpse of the common man’s reaction to and distrust for Latinate phrasing in vernacular discourse and the cultural impetus to relocate linguistic authority onto the vernacular.

To avoid this type of temptation and damnation, the country must establish its own vernacular language of authority. The use and abuse of the Latin language on the early English stage portrays a clear concern about those who would use the language for malicious purposes and an attempt to control these men by stripping the Latin language of its power and authority. The establishment of an English vernacular authority will necessarily eliminate the possibility of linguistic masking, and malicious misappropriation.

1 Janette Dillon, Language and Stage in Medieval and Renaissance England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Jill C. Havens, “‘As Englishe is comoun language to oure puple’: The Lollards and Their Imagined ‘English’ Community,” in Imagining a Medieval English Nation, ed. Kathy Lavezzo (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota

2 Dillon, 15.


4 Margaret Aston and Colin Richmond eds. *Lollardy and the Gentry in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997). This collection of essays examines the place of the knights and gentlemen to the Lollard movement. It rightly points out that the religious reformation during this time was necessarily dependent upon the support of the gentry for success. In their introduction, Aston and Richmond suggest that “the social conventions of the day discriminated between different kinds of vernacular readers as they discriminated about so much else. An English Bible, New Testament of gospel commentary in the hands of a glover or tailor or skinner, told quite a different tale from such text in the hands of a knight or gentlewoman. In one case subversion; heresy could almost be equated with vernacular religious reading. Not so for those whose literacy and loyalty could be depended on. The law for gentlemen was not the law for knaves” (20).

Interestingly, some critics, like John A. F. Thompson, argue that the survival of later Lollardy was dependant upon the lower craftsmen and guilds (as was drama). See John A. F. Thomson, *The Later Lollards: 1414-1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

5 Kemp, 234. She also includes an intriguing reading of the masculinization of Latin and the feminization of the mother tongue or the vernacular in the heresy transcripts. She
notes that the term “mother tongue” was introduced by Wycliff in the 1380 according to
the OED and ascribes the tensions between the Lollard vernacular and the Orthodox
Latin to “the contest for linguistic control of theological discourse” (241).

6 Dillon, 10.


8 Dillon, 11.

9 Dillon, 26.

10 Nisse, 30.

11 Hudsom, 393. In addition to Chaucer, Hudson examines a number of contemporary
authors, for example Lydgate and Gower, in her attempt to gauge the “reception of
Wycliffite thought in the period between the heresiarch’s own lifetime and the late
fifteenth century” (394).

12 Dillon, 50.


14 Rex, xv.

15 Rex, 76.

16 Thomson, 239.

17 Even some of the same problems are discussed cf. Chaucer’s Pardoner: “Radix
malorum est Cupiditas.”

18 *The Towneley Plays* ed. Martin Stevens and A.C. Cawley, Early English Text Society vols. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Stevens and Cawley cite a number of
incongruencies between this pageant and the description of the same scene in the
Towneley play of the Crucifixion as evidence that his play was entered into the cycle at a later date (583). See also Mendel G. Frampton, “The Processus Talentorum (Towneley XXIV),” *PMLA* 59:3 (1944): 646-654, for an in-depth description of the date and provenance of the pageant.


20 “Notice, you who stand [by’ / that I am of wondrous valour; / know this, / I will slay you unless you keep quiet. / Learn, all of you, / that I am a man of god-like nature / and majesty; / do not harm me by speaking, / thus I command. / [Be] neither talkative / nor garrulous, / demand peace / while I speak.” Translation provided in *The Towneley Plays*, 584 n. 1-13. All other line numbers given parenthetically.


23 Happé, *Cyclic Form and the English Mystery Plays*, 264.

24 We must remember that Pilate is about to cast dice for Christ’s coat.

Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*, 162. The Tutivillus demon is necessarily concerned with language issues and is often concerned with the vernacular. Cawsey notes that, “The Tutivillus tales display a deep-rooted concern with vernacularity, a concern attendant upon and intertwined with the anxiety about women’s community and heresy” (447).

Oscar Cargill, “The Authorship of the Secunda Pastorum,” *PMLA* 41:4 (1926): 810-831, notes that the term “lollor” might have been mistaken for “lollar.” He argues, “what he really says, it would seem to be, is that I have worked hard, been chief toll-taker and registrar of sins, and now I desire to be a lollar (one who lolls)—a master loafer” (812). Here the term simply means one who lounges, as exemplified by Langland’s use of the term in book X of *Piers Plowman*. Cawsey also discusses the use of the term “lollar.” She notes, “If Tutivillus is called a Lollard, then Lollards are implicitly figured as demonic. But the connection is more complex as well. Etymologically, the term Lollard means ‘mumbler’—Lollards, therefore, are implicitly the ‘momelers and foreskippers’ whose words the demon collects, and who will be sent to hell on Judgement Day” (446).

Cargill, 812.

Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles*, 165.

Annas and Cayphas also echo scriptural verse in the play of the Buffeting (Ins. 207-208 and 389-390). In the Crucifixion play, Pilate echoes John 19:22.


33 Cawsey notes that Mankind’s repeated prayer in the field may be reminiscent of Lollard heterodoxy. See 450ff.

34 See Psalm 132:1. Translation is mine.


36 In an odd twist, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, both terms come from Old French and are not immediately Latinate borrowings.

37 Dillon, 62.

38 Cawsey, 449.

39 Dillon, 63.

40 This section is not only a satire of judiciary authority, it also satirizes religious authority. Following this macaronic section is an oath taking ceremony which is very
reminiscent of the Christian baptismal promises. The demonic characters ask Mankind to swear to a series of vows to which he replies “I will” mimicking the renewal of the Baptismal promises which are a part of the Ash Wednesday ceremony and ask celebrants to reply “I do” to their promises.


42 Brantley and Fulton, 330.

43 Brantley and Fulton, 343.

44 This is the second appearance of the King of Marcyllle. The first occurs immediately following the raising of Lazarus and before a devil relates the story of the Harrowing of Hell. The Digby author eliminates the Passion sequence from the play entirely.


46 The Late Medieval Religious Plays, 211 n 1185-1201. The editors also note: “This passage would probably have been a little clearer in its punning if scribal variations had not interfered. Various phrases emerge dimly from the passage after the clear ‘Lessons of Mahound, the mightiest of the Saracens.’ Line 1189 is clearly obscene as is l. 1191; the Snyguer snagoer business of l. 1193 is found elsewhere (Skelton’s Magnificence, l. 1155) and the notion of werewolves standing guard over the lambs emerges from l. 1194, a common figure for the careless priest” (211, n. 1185-1201).
47 Victor I. Scherb, “Blasphemy and the Grotesque in the Digby Mary Magdalene”


48 Victor Scherb accurately points out that “at the same time, the very learnedness of the passage suggests that the writer was a product of the same Latin culture he parodies here and that the parody (especially displaced as it is there, to pagan clergy) may be humorous without satirizing the contemporary priesthood destructively” (237).

49 Dillon, 149.

50 Psalm 27:1. “The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom should I fear?”

51 Castle of Perseverance also has a reclaiming of Latin at the end.

52 Forest-Hill, Transgressive Language, 36.

53 The Towneley Plays, 491 n. 553.

54 The thirteen are Jesse, Isaiah, Sybyll, Nebuchennazer, Jeromy, Moses, Abuacuc, Ely, Elizabeth, Sachare, David, John the Baptiste and Daniel.

55 Liam O. Purdon, The Wakefield Master’s Dramatic Art: A Drama of Spiritual Understanding (Gainsvill, FL: University of Florida Press, 2003), 92.
Chapter Four:

The English ‘Other’: Rustic Speakers and Rustic Speech

If representations of foreign languages in early drama reflect a cultural concern about foreign relationships and strive to define the English language against a foreign “other,” representations of early modern English dialects reflect a cultural awareness of domestic problems and seek to define the language against itself. In her chapter on what she calls the “discovery of dialect” in the Renaissance, Paula Blank argues that the Renaissance interest in vernacular language was preceded by a new understanding of dialect and the difference of the English language as represented by the numerous dictionaries and glossaries of the time. While the dictionaries and grammars of the seventeenth century mark the pinnacle of the Renaissance debate over the need for a standard English language and the social problems inherent in a diverse, non-standardized language, the conversation has much earlier roots. This chapter will demonstrate that the dialect-speaking characters in medieval and early modern drama signify a growing cultural concern about the problems inherent in a disparate language system. Blank has argued, “The ‘broken English’ of Renaissance literature… was not always put forward in service of the King or his English, but rather in service of authors competing to prescribe the bounds of the native tongue.” But the first authors to do so were, in fact, playwrights who dramatized the tensions of a boundless language on the early English stage.

Drama is, in fact, uniquely suited to exploring the ways in which dialect can articulate the precise condition of being ‘an English speaker.’ This chapter will argue that
representations of dialect-speaking characters on the early modern stage make evident an unease about linguistic diversity and work in service of a growing movement calling for a more standardized language. While authors like Caxton, Mulcaster, and Puttenham are certainly the most well known proponents of defining a standard English language, medieval and early modern drama presents a wealth of examples concerning the place of the dialect speaker and what it means to speak English (the King’s or otherwise). I will also argue that early Humanist drama attempts to eliminate the problems of malapropism and miscommunication resultant from dialect speech through direct stigmatization of dialect speakers. For this reason, drama characterizes the dialect speaker as a fool and calls for the education of such Englishmen as represented by plays like *Damon and Pithias* and *Gammer Gurton’s Needle*. I will show that the manipulation of dialect in portrayals like the *Second Shepherd’s Play* and *Misogonus* reveals a popular disquiet about the performative nature of dialect speech and the propensity for this performance to be falsified. Finally, I will argue that these portrayals of dialect-speaking characters demonstrate the supremacy of standard-speaking English men and women, thus enticing all speakers to a more standardized English.

**THE PROBLEM OF THE PEASANTS**

Dialect speakers on the early modern stage are, almost always, English peasants. England had long struggled with social and class problems resulting in repeated uprisings of the Medieval and Early Modern peasantry. From the late fourteenth century on, the Commons periodically rose up against their social and economic constraints and, for this
reason, the English ruling class was acutely aware of the threat these local peoples posed to the unity of the burgeoning English nation. Long standing social tensions between the agrarian Commons and the aristocratic Lords of England intensified during the peasant uprising in 1381. While the December 1380 third poll-tax levied on every person over the age of 15 served as a catalyst for the uprising, tensions had mounted over the general state of the peasants prior to the taxation. A general unhappiness about the state of serfdom was increased by the agrarian expansion leading up to 1381. Some free men and hired hands were converted or forced into serfdom during this time. The advent of the plague also created additional strife for the peasants. The decline in population resultant from the plague put further strains on the work force. The unease of the peasants did not go unnoticed by the ruling classes, as evidenced by increased attempts to legislate the lives, wages and function of the laborers.

The 1351 Statute of Labourers, for example, “included a specific schedule of maximum wages for various occupations.” The Ordinance of Labourers, enacted in 1349, legislated not only that wages could not rise above those of 1347 but also that workers “should remain in the employment of the same master for at least a year” and “gave lords first claim on the labour other their bondmen.” The three consecutive poll-taxes were the final straw for the English peasantry. These injustices led to the Peasant’s Revolt of 1381. The rebellion, which was centered in the areas of Kent, Essex, and London, rapidly spread throughout the country. Although not much was gained in the long term by the uprising of 1381, the affair is important for a number of reasons. According to one critic, this was “the first time that the common people have appeared consciously as a national force in this history…Instead of accepting the initiatives of their
social superiors the common people made the decisions themselves.” This was the first
time the ruling class was forced to acknowledge the commons as a viable opponent and
marks the beginning of over a decade of periodic rebellion amongst the peasants.

The Peasant’s Revolt of 1381 was followed by nearly fifty years of agricultural
recession. From 1430 to 1470, peasants suffered through a number of occurrences of
plague as well as harvest failures and widespread disease in cattle and sheep. In
addition, the plague resulted in excessive over-production which led directly to swiftly
falling prices for all agrarian products. This period of recession was followed by an
intermittent period of economic growth from the late fifteenth century to the mid-
sixteenth century. During this time, domestic strife decreased as the population increased
and foreign trade and new economic markets opened up.

Nearly a century later, another uprising broke out in Kent and Middlesex. In May
of 1450, precipitated by the beheading of the Duke of Suffolk and the rumored threat of
royal retribution, a rebellion commonly referred to as Cade’s Rebellion broke out in Kent
and Middlesex. This rebellion differs from the 1381 revolt— as well as those of the 16th
century to be examined below— in that it seems to have stemmed largely from political
discontent with what Harvey describes as “years of cumulative mismanagement so
disastrous that the people of whole regions of England were finally provoked into a
demonstration of protest and hostility.” The revolts which took place leading up to and
including 1450 were politically charged and predominantly civil disruptions carried out
by the ruling classes and against the ruling classes. While these disturbances were not
specifically peasant uprisings, civil unrest was again in the air in southern England.
Around 1540 the English social unrest again shifted to rural and agrarian concerns. Sheep farming and the problem of land enclosure sparked conflict among the English commons. This was especially problematic in Norfolk where:

Lords of manors enjoyed substantial residual rights over all unallotted land under their jurisdiction. Legally they might enclose the waste, provided only that they left sufficient of it for the freehold tenants…Sometimes they or their farmers did indeed enclose it, to the detriment of the small tenants who thereby were put to sore straits to sustain their working beasts, and might perhaps even be driven to the point of being squeezed out.\(^{15}\)

The problem of enclosure, coupled with the growing unease of changing farming practices, led to a number of small disturbances across England at this time. Property pressures were also increased by the onset of outrageous inflation in 1545, which led to drastically increased unemployment levels, as well as a greater portion of the population suffering from poverty. The population growth which had resulted from the health and prosperity of the nation in the years leading up to 1540 also led to a rise in the demand for land which, resulted in increased rent levels.\(^{16}\)

The civil unrest of the 1540s culminated in two distinct yet intertwined uprisings in 1549.\(^{17}\) While the uprisings of 1549 were born out of political and religious tension, the social and economic problems of the preceding decade helped to ignite the fires of rebellion. The Western Rebellion began in Cornwall in a number of smaller uprisings beginning around 1548, the main complaint of which was perceived religious persecution of the largely Catholic constituency. These skirmishes came to a head near Easter of 1549
when rebel troops gathered in a camp on the edge of the city of Bodmin.\textsuperscript{18} Led by Humphrey Arundell and supported by the mayor of Bodmin and a few other men of rank, the rebels eventually overtook the coastal fortress of St. Michael’s Mount and imprisoned a number of loyal gentry.\textsuperscript{19} The rebellion in Cornwall rapidly spread eastward to Devon in the same year; rebels attempted to overtake Exeter in July and August of 1549.\textsuperscript{20} Although they were unsuccessful in their attempt to take control of the city, the western rebels, described by Beer as, “primitive rebels, simple farmers and artisans,” had succeeded in gaining control of most of the rural countryside. Their actions also raised popular interest in the concerns of the common people of the mid-sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{21}

In July and August of 1549, as the western peasants assaulted Exeter, a second peasant revolt occurred in Norfolk.\textsuperscript{22} Led by Robert Ket, a group of several thousand peasants gathered at Mousehold Heath and rose up against perceived social, economic and religious inequities. The protests in Norfolk were not solely concerned with rural issues. Beer notes, “although usually portrayed as an agrarian revolt, the Commotion in Norfolk united various threads of popular discontent, including urban unrest.”\textsuperscript{23} Norfolk rebels—numbering as many as 20,000 at one time—eventually overtook Norwich and captured the mayor of the city along with a number politically significant citizens. While Ket’s men successfully held Norwich, their attacks on the port of Great Yarmouth in August failed and ultimately signaled the end of the uprising. These two rebellions, while independently organized and carried out, signify the immediacy of the social, economic, and political tensions between the common men and the governing classes.

These types of social injustices are portrayed by a number of dialect-speaking characters on the early English stage who articulate the tensions which led to the
tumultuous atmosphere of the mid-sixteenth century. The dialect characters in plays like William Wager’s *Enough is as Good as a Feast* and Udall’s *Respublica* voice very real social and political concerns of the English commons. The rustic Old Tenant in *Enough is as Good as a Feast* bemoans his inability to pay his rent since his landlord Worldly Man, under the influence of Covetousness, has suddenly doubled his fee after thirty-six years. In his petition to Worldly Man, Tenant voices a number of concerns which universalize his situation. He complains, “O masters, is not this even a lamentable thing, / to zee how landlords their poor tenants do wring;”\(^{24}\) and that “Cham old and have many children and much charge” (1133). In this way Tenant ventriloquizes the concerns of the English peasants. Servant and Hireling also voice common concerns in this scene, although they do not speak in a southwestern dialect. Servant bemoans being kept like a slave and Hireling complains that he is not being paid for his work. All three characters voice common concerns of the English people which had led to great social unrest and rebellion in the past; however, the dialect speech of Tenant further emphasizes the immediacy of the problems for the English commons. These complaints are very similar to the complaints lodged in the 1540s by peasants which led to the widespread rebellions in 1549. While modern readers are apt to feel sympathy for such characters, the portrayals of peasant complaints during this tumultuous time are symptomatic not of early modern empathy for their plight, but instead of a growing worry about the possibility of rebellion stemming from these complaints.

The drastic increase the price of rent, dramatized in *Enough is as Good as a Feast*, is not only attributed to Worldly Man’s greed. Tenant also complains that the rent
has skyrocketed because it is now in more demand due to the influx of foreigners or “strangers.” He laments:

And especially strangers – yea a shameful zorte,

Are placed now in England and that in every port –

That we, our wives and children, no houses can get

Wherein we may live, such price on them is zet (985-988).

Tenant’s sentiments reveal a strong undercurrent of xenophobia in addition to the more common peasants’ complaints. The influx of foreign merchants and workers put added strain on the already thinly-stretched real estate market of the sixteenth century. Tenant’s concerns are also representative of a growing anxiety about the power of such peoples in the English political system and the pressures they put on the legitimately English peoples of the nation.

The English peasants had been and continued to be a serious threat to the ruling classes from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries. Periodic uprisings kept their social concerns in the public eye of the upper classes throughout these centuries. Because of their growing importance in the English political system, common people became an increasing problem in the later Middle Ages and early Renaissance. While the representations of these characters on the early English stage speak to many of the concerns which lead directly to the various peasant uprisings, they also dramatize a growing concern about the containment of this expanding socio-political group. The following sections will show how early modern playwrights reacted to these tensions by stigmatizing dialect speakers and their language use in an effort to contain the threat of the Commons. They will also argue that as a response to the growing ideology of an
English nation, early playwrights insisted on the need for a standardized language as one means by which the nation could be defined.

**RUSTICS AS ENGLISHMEN**

In the Tudor drama examined in this chapter, there is a distinct movement away from the universalizing allegory of medieval drama. While the early moralities were primarily focused on the ways in which the Christian experience could be understood in universal terms, the drama during the Tudor period began to portray individual experiences both secular and religious. As a result of this movement away from the largely allegorical morality plays, the individual Englishman began to take shape on the English stage. The process of individualization, which came to be fully realized in the later Renaissance, led the English peoples to begin to theorize the ways in which Englishness could be defined. Language became the medium through which this definitional question could be negotiated. Janette Dillon notes that “attitudes to alien languages are closely tied up with religious change and developing nationalism.” This growing nationalism first defined itself against a foreign other, as I have argued in the previous chapters. However, the growing urban and educated population also began to define themselves against a domestic other: the rural dialect speaker. It is through this binary that the boundaries of the English language are stabilized and the standard Englishman finally makes his presence known.

Michael Hattaway has argued that “literary texts… provide evidence not necessarily of the realities of the period nor of the opinions of their authors but rather of
the imaginative and ideological constructions, the *mentalités*, of a period." Indeed, early English drama allows us to identify the standardization of the English language as one of the most important ideological constructions shaping the nation at this time. There is throughout the corpus of early drama a growing understanding of the place and importance of language usage and the ways in which the English language can be defined against its own variances. Dialect-speaking characters are certainly the exception and not the rule on the early modern stage. Despite their marginalization, however, they often provide a uniquely English lens through which the main action can be viewed. Early drama simultaneously elevates the Englishness of the rustic and stigmatizes his rustic speech. The dialect speaker is both a mouthpiece for voicing ideologies of early English nationalism and also the means through which the importance of a standard language for that nation can be identified and defined.

In two types of early drama, dialect-speaking characters play a large role: university and court drama. While there are examples of the use of dialect in the interludes, moralities, and even the early cycle plays, the use of dialect as a marker of character occurs primarily in these two types of plays. University dramas were much indebted to the Humanist movement in the English university system. This movement meant not only the revival of classic and early Greek drama but also served as a catalyst for composition of a great number of English plays (translations of the classics as well original works). Boas lists over one hundred plays performed at either Oxford or Cambridge between 1520 and 1602/3. Of these, 76 have survived and a full 18 are written in English. This shows not only an interest in classical drama but also in the presentation of the dramatic form in English. Of the plays examined in this chapter,
Gammer Gurton’s Needle, Damon and Pithias, and Misogonus were probably played in the university while Horestes, Ralph Roister Doister, Wit and Science and Cambises are believed to have been played at court. The audiences for whom these plays were performed, therefore, had a vested interest in the unification of both the language and the nation. Because of their acute awareness of the problematic lower class and the importance of education, courtly and university playwrights manipulated the representation of dialect speech for their own linguistic purposes.

Within the corpus of early English drama, a number of linguistic features characterize the early modern dialect speaker. The most common feature of stage dialect is the use of the voiceless palato-alveolar fricative /tʃ/, orthographically represented as the [c] [h] elision, as the contraction of ‘Ich’ and a following vowel as in “chold” for “Ich would” or “chill” for “Ich will.” Dialect-speaking characters also frequently pronounce a /z/ for /s/ as in “zword” for “sword” and swap /v/ for /f/ as in “vayre” for “fayre.” In some texts dialect-speaking characters also pronounce a /b/ for /v/ as in /beri/ for /veri/ and use a general /ʒ/ sound represented orthographically by a yough or a [z] to denote a /g/, /ʒ/ or /s/ as represented by the use of “3entlemen.” There are also occasional uses of an elongated diphthong for words like “hayre” or “payne” and the use of [y-] or [i-] before verbs signifying an archaic hold over from the Old English preterite verbal constructions. Finally, the language of dialect-speaking characters is littered with random contractions of full words many of which seem merely a convention of convenience.

It is difficult to pinpoint a specific region from which these stage dialects are taken or of which they are representative. These dialects are usually described as southwestern, sometimes identified merely as rustic speech, and are occasionally, as in
**Enough is as Good as a Feast**, denoted as Cotswold speech. Marie Axton explains, “It is difficult to be more specific about these stage accents than to say they indicate a rural accent south of London.” The origin of individual stage dialects in early modern drama is difficult to pin down precisely and the technique quickly becomes generalized into the simple rustic dialects discussed above. Although these dialects, with perhaps the exception of Cotswold, are not explicitly tied to a specific locality, their presence in early drama is always tied to a nebulous idea of the English nation by way of the English countryside.

Two main types of characters on the medieval and early modern stage utilize dialect speech. The most prevalent is the stock rustic character. These characters are predominantly farmers or shepherds and are depicted as living outside of the city. They are often unwashed and poorly clothed and are regularly depicted as living in a kind of comfortable poverty. The second type of dialect speaker is the collier. This character is certainly a more urban cousin of the rustic. He is also unwashed and poorly dressed but his filth is the filth of the city. He is drunk more often and is more lascivious than his rustic counterparts. While the jokes of the rustic characters are often scatological in nature, the collier’s humor is frequently lecherous.

Regardless of their profession, all dialect-speaking characters are portrayed as uneducated and, as such, serve a comic function as secondary characters outside of the real action of the play. Their distance, however, allows them to amplify the underlying themes and social concerns of individual plays as they provide comic relief from the tensions of the interlude. Not the least of these concerns is the need for a more standardized English language. While they are commonly stigmatized for their social
status and lack of education, as we shall see, dialect-speaking characters also voice serious anxieties about the place of the English language, the need for a standardized language, and what it means to be an Englishman. In light of the social and political upheaval of the early Tudor age, dialect-speaking peasants represent a very real threat to the nation as a whole and this threat is one of the leading causes of the movement for standardization and for their stigmatization on stage.

In addition to the linguistic idiosyncrasies and social concerns used to identify the Englishness of dialect-speaking characters, the process of naming exhibited in these early plays also reinforces their national identities. For example, all of the secondary characters in *Misogonus* have English names, such as Jack, Melissa, Sir John, Alison and Madge Caro. These conventional English names are quite out of place among the Latinate characters the likes of Philogonus, Misogonus and Eugonus. Furthermore, the Latinate characters also have servants who also have strongly Latinate names: Orgalus, Oenophilus and Literugus. Conversely, the English characters are given specific tasks within the play such as courtesan, priest, clerk, midwife, and old woman. These positions are largely perfunctory and represent the commonness of these English working characters suggesting that the naming of the English characters in *Misogonus* is not primarily representational of class stratification so much as representative of those characters who are and are not English.

This type of naming system is evident in a number of other early interludes as well. The practice of naming a rustic character with some permutation of ‘Hodge’ is quite common. Not only are common English names like Madge and Hodge used to identity the dialect-speaking characters as wholly English, early playwrights were also careful to
make their regional nature obvious by having them refer to each other repeatedly as
neighbor. Both *Horestes* and *Cambises* repeatedly use the familiar term of “neighbor”
when referring to the dialect-speaking rustic characters. In addition to the repetition of the
rustic names, the dialect-speaking characters often reinforce the locality of their nature by
repeating the adjectival ‘neighbor’ before individual proper names. This can be seen, for example, in *Horestes* when Rusticus exclaims, “Nabor Hodge, be Goge, hatch none!”

It can also be seen in *Clyomon and Clamydes* where the shepherd Corin lusts after
“nabour Nychols daughter” and “nabour Hodges maide.” By repeatedly recalling the
community of the rustic characters, early playwrights make obvious their desire to
portray these speakers as local English men and women.

The practice of naming characters in such a way as to signal their status as
common Englishmen becomes so ingrained in the dramatic corpus that it is satirized by
Thomas Preston in *Cambises*. Preston’s rustics Hob and Lob over-use the title of
“neighbor” to great comic effect, at once satirizing the convention and reinforcing the
localization of the dialect-speaking characters. The term is repeated 20 times the span of
their short 70 line scene. Preston is so adamant that the characters be associated with
local rustics that he often has them address each other as “neighbor Hob” or “neighbor
Lob.” While the rustics are dialect-speaking characters, the first impression presented by
them is not one of dialect speech but one of a neighborly communalism. The entrance of
the rustics is littered with the idea of neighborliness: “God’s hat Naibor come away, its
time to market to go.” It is not until Lob speaks that their place as dialect characters is
revealed. He states:
Gods Vast Naybor zay ye zo?
The Clock hath striken vive ich think by laken:
Bum Vay vrom sleep cham not very wel waken.
But Naybor Hob, Naybor Hob, what have ye to zel? (755-758).

The comic repetition of the rustic names of Hob and Lob in conjunction with the overuse of the adjectival “neighbor” identifies these characters as outside of the world of Cambises’ tragedy even as their dialect usage marks them as a linguistic ‘other.’ There is a constant tension in this play as the dialect-speaking characters are pushed further outside of the classical action but are constantly pulled closer to the English rustic audience by their linguistic patterns and social concerns. The repetition of the names for common Englishmen and the term “neighbor” reinforces the local identity of both characters. Perhaps due to the brevity of their appearance on stage, Hob and Lob (and in some ways other rustic characters, for example, Hodge and Rusticus from Horestes) have no real character development. The whole of their character is contained within their status as dialect-speaking common people of the English countryside. Thus, Hob and Lob are defined only by their status as English rustics.

Through the conventional naming practices and representations of rural life, dialect speakers come to symbolize the vox populi of sixteenth-century England in early drama. The characters examined in this chapter are the same types of men and have the same concerns which had caused such political turmoil in the middle of the century. Their presence on the early stage denotes not only the social concerns triggered by the social unrest of the mid-sixteenth century, but also a growing apprehension about the multifarious nature of the English language and the English nation. Early modern
playwrights strove to drive home the Englishness of these characters in an attempt to examine the repercussions of a diversified nation and to advocate the importance of more unified and standardized language.

**DIALECT SPEAKERS AS FOOLS**

The problems associated with the dialect-speaking English commoners, coupled with the need for a more standardized English language, resulted in the frequent stigmatization of dialect speakers as fools in early drama. The appearance of Ignorancy in John Redford’s *Wit and Science* is, first and foremost, a comic aside which serves to make a fool of (both figuratively and literally) the dialect speaker. Redford presents Ignorancy as a sort of witless parrot who is easily manipulated and who becomes the butt of Idleness’ linguistic joke. Idleness asks Ignorancy to repeat answers to questions which, when strung together, reveal finally his name. Idleness begins the Socratic exercise by asking where Ignorancy was born. The reply, “chwas i-bore in England” provides Idleness with the first syllable [ign] which will eventually become the term: “Ignorance.”

Idleness continues to ask a serious of questions the answers to which provide the remaining syllables of “no,” “ran,” and “hiss.” While Idleness’ joke is certainly amusing, it also highlights the importance of education in counteracting the force of dialect in the English countryside. It calls attention to the need to be educated in both the naming of the English rustic Ignorancy and through the frame of the joke which begins when Idleness proclaims that he can “play the schoolmistress too” (152) and commands Ignorancy to “say thy lesson, fool!” (152). It is carried through as Idleness
teaches Ignorancy his lesson and concludes when Ignorancy is able to string the syllables together and admits that his name is, in fact, Ignorancy. The farcical vignette is brought to a close when Ignorancy declares triumphantly, “ich can my lesson.” (155). The dialogue between Idleness and Ignorancy is, therefore, primarily a comedic scene intended to poke fun at the witless dialect-speaking Ignorancy; yet even in mocking the dialect speaker, it call attention to the importance and superiority of an educated, and therefore standard speaking, man. While Redford’s play was probably designed for a boy’s troupe and therefore performed at court and not within the university system, the prolonged mocking of Ignorancy reminds even the royal audience of the superiority of the educated upper class Englishman. Masked by the comic vignette, Redford’s scathing critique of the uneducated English populace reveals a strong undercurrent in the aristocratic and royal consciousness which is at one and the same time disdainful of the commoners and wary of their propensity for social uprising. For these reasons, the unruly language of dialect speakers often caused their marginalization as fools on the early English stage.

The trope of stigmatizing the dialect-speaking character becomes so common on the early modern stage that rustic characters begin to react to their place as the fool as early playwrights explore the boundaries of the stock rustic characters. One such example is Richard Edwards’ shepherd Corin in Clyomon and Clamydes. Most critics thus far have focused their critical eye on the examination of the ways in which Clyomon and Clamydes is related to other plays, namely its French source Perceforest, the contemporary Common Condition, as well as later Renaissance plays, perhaps most importantly Shakespeare’s As You Like It and Cymbeline. These analyses have left little
room for close attention to the play itself and even less for the secondary characters like the dialect-speaking shepherd. In the wandering plot style typical of the romance genre, Corin seems, at first, to be yet another character instrumental in the final resolution of the play. However, Corin is the only named character on the title page that does not appear in the conclusion; overall, he plays very little part in bringing the wandering lovers together. His role, instead, is a linguistic one. Like many other rustic characters, Corin’s use of the southwestern dialect moves the idealized romance from the far off worlds of Bryan Sans Foy and Alexander the Great to the rural English countryside. He, thus, occupies a liminal position between the world of romance and the world of the English Commons. Corin’s station as a shepherd marks him as English (a topos made most famous by Spenser) and his dialect reflects both his Englishness and his low standing.

The shepherd Corin is greatly suspicious of Neronis when she shows up in disguise and offers him her services. He replies, “You courtnoll crackropes, wod be hangd, you do nothing now and then / But come up and downe the country, thus to flout poore men” (1310-1311). After repeatedly questioning her intentions, Corin finally agrees to keep her as a page. His hesitation to take on a page and suspicion that she is mocking his low social station suggest the daily prejudice with which low-class dialect-speaking rustics have to deal. Even after Neronis is taken into his service, she displays some of the snobbish thought patterns of her class. This is made most clear in her parting lines as she follows the shepherd off stage after having secured herself as a boy in his service. She remarks regreftully, “Alas poore simple Shepheard, by this Princes may see, / That like man, like talke, in every degree” (1334-1335). While she does not mock the
shepherd outright, Neronis’ sentiment belies her insistence that she is not making fun of Corin and reveals her own prejudices against dialect speakers.

By pitting the rustic Corin against the standard-speaking characters of the romance, Clyomon and Clamydes makes clear a strong hierarchy of language. Corin has been described by one critic as “a new creation, a rustic type whose abusive language, rambling idle gossip and lechery contrast strikingly with the asceticism of the hermit and with the idealized wise shepherd of the pastoral tradition in general.” Corin is, indeed, exactly the type of character against which the Prologue rails. The speaker of the prologue notes that “…our Author he, is prest to bide the brunt / of bablers tongues, to whom he thinks, as frustrate all his toile, / As peereles caste to filthy Swine, which in the mire doth moile” (p 15-17). These “bablers tongues” interrupt the current of romance the author strives to capture just as the rustic Corin interrupts the flow of the narrative. In this way, Corin is not simply a comic figure against whom the ‘right speaking’ characters, readers and audience members can measure their own language and status, but also as a stain on the fabric of the romance narrative; a constant reminder of the crudeness of English dialect speakers and dialect speech.

**DIALECT IN THE UNIVERSITY**

University dramas were even more scornful of the uneducated masses. In Richard Edwards’ Damon and Pithias the importance of education is examined further in scenes including the rustic speaking Grimme Collier. When Jacke and Wyll encounter Grimme pounding on the gates, they rightly assume that he will have intimate knowledge of the
sentence and imprisonment of Damon as well as the tyrannical doings of King Dionisius. Indeed, Grimme has a great deal of intimate information about what has been Happéning at court and he is easily plied, with a bit of wine, to impart all of the knowledge and secrets to these strangers. The extended scene that follows, in which the dialect-speaking collier is roughly shaved, dressed in foolish attire, and robbed by Wyll and Jacke, performs a tripartite function. It provides comic relief at the rustic’s expense, it calls attention to the stock characteristic of the rustic as a gullible fool, and it extols the virtues of education and serves as a foil against which the audience, especially a royal audience, should take warning.

In this scene, Wyll and Jacke engage in a battle of linguistic wits with Grimme. The collier is mocked mercilessly by Wyll and Jacke for his penchant for womanizing and his love of drink. In addition to these worldly sins they repeatedly refer to him as ‘Father Grimme’ and make a number of comments about his level of education and lack of scholarly expertise. Wyll taunts Grimme, noting that “when they come to your age, they wyll be wyse.”

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They continue:

Jacke: You are learned, are you not Father Grimme?

Grimme: Grimme is my name indeed, cham not learned, and yet the Kings colier,

This vortie winter cha bin to the Kinge a servitor,

Though I be not learned, yet cha mother witte enough whole and some.
Wyll: So it seems, you have so much mother wit, that you lacke your fathers

Wisdom (1115-1119).

Although his dialect is not mentioned specifically, Wyll and Jacke make much sport of his language and his intellect. In making a mockery of Grimme, the interlude shows that although he may be privy to the inside workings of the court, he is easily duped and therefore his information is not always to be trusted. The lack of education of the lower class workers thus poses a very serious problem for the ruling class. Without the proper training, these characters, many of whom are granted access to the inner workings of the aristocratic household, are vulnerable to the malicious deception of more learned men.

It is not only Grimme’s lack of education that is to blame for his relatively loose lips. Much of what Jacke and Wyll accomplish they accomplish through false flattery of Grimme: Were it not for his favorable reception of the flattery, he would not have been robbed and made a fool of. This scene sets up the concluding speech of Eubulus in which he cautions all royalty and courtiers against falling for just such flattery. According to Kramer, “the interlude of the shaving of Grimme the Collier, which bears no real relation to the main narrative flow, is, in fact, one of those neatly constructed and inserted scenes in Elizabethan drama that function purely as exemplum and analogy to amplify the important themes of the drama – a dramaturgical technique as old as the cycles, strictly English, and most powerfully employed by Shakespeare.” Even in this comic situation, where the gullible dialect speaker is made to play the part of the fool, an important bit of information is left for the audience to digest. Grimme himself notes, “friendship is dead in courte, Hipoctrisie doth reign” (1218). This scene shows that even in those vignettes
which seem to be simply providing comic effect, or playing into the stereotype about the rustic stock characters, playwrights are using these moments to make importance critiques of social and courtly customs and the English language. In addition to its clearly stated warnings against vice and drunkenness, the comic scene in *Damon and Pithias* serves as a warning for its university audience against ignorance, externalized by mean that include dialect speech.

The influence of the Humanist education program and the growing importance of standardized speaking often led to the marginalization of rustic characters in early modern drama. However, there are a few exceptions. The most famously dialect-centered early modern dramatic work is *Gammer Gurton’s Needle*. Indeed, *Gammer Gurton* is the only early play in which the main characters are all dialect speakers, making it unique in the early modern dramatic corpus. Beginning with Frederick S. Boas, critics have focused primarily on the ways in which the author, one Mr. S, is able to manipulate classical strategies and Humanist teaching in creating a vulgar play about English peasants. Cartwright argues that because this is a university play, the use of dialect and the representation of the country folk would recall just the sort of rural people and places that the young schoolboys would want to distance themselves from. This, he notes, is what makes *Gammer Gurton* not only extremely funny, but also a rather scathing satire. He argues that the play “satirizes the village life that mid-century students at Christ’s College might have known all too well and from which they might have wished to distance themselves.” Whether or not the comedy is enhanced by a familiarity with this type of rustic, the representation of dialect speakers in *Gammer Gurton’s Needle* works to
create a finite world which asks the audience to question not only the rustics themselves, but also the problems associated with dialect usage.

Dialect in *Gammer Gurton’s Needle* provides a dual function. It not only stigmatizates dialect speakers in a university setting but it also examines the problems inherent in the interaction between the dialect speakers of the household and the ‘standard’ English-speaking neighbors. These interactions reveal a strong concern about the miscommunication which can result from dialect usage. While the superficial, bawdy humor of *Gammer Gurton* masks the highly critical nature of satirizing dialect speakers, one should not be fooled by the rustic and comic antics of the main characters. *Gammer Gurton’s Needle*, while entertaining and quite humorous, exposes a number of early modern concerns about the possibility and problems of miscommunication with dialect speakers. On the linguistic viscosity of the play, Cartwright concludes:

> The play excels in the vernacular style, demonstrating its fertility, artfulness, and often its aptness; simultaneously, the language produces more confusion than could any inkorn Latinisms, quaint proverbs, blind allegories, or dark words.

The confusion noted by Cartwright is, I believe, indicative of the fear of miscommunication which becomes central to the representation of dialect speech. This fear is dramatized in the comic repartee between the two main characters of the play: Diccon and Hodge.

When Diccon first hears about Gammer’s misplaced property, he is at a loss as to the details of the apparent theft. Hodge’s repetition of ‘nee’le’ is taken by Diccon, quite
comically to mean ‘an eel.’ The more adamant Hodge becomes about the lost n’eele the greater Diccon’s confusion becomes:

**Diccon:** Her eel, Hodge? Who fished of late? That was a dainty dish!

**Hodge:** Tush, tush, her nee’le, her nee’le, her nee’le, man- ‘tis neither flesh nor fish!

A little thing with an hole in the end, as bright as any silver,

Small, long, sharp at the point, and straight as any pillar.

**Diccon:** I know not what devil thou meanst! Thou bringst me more in doubt.

**Hodge:** Knowest not with what Tom Tailor’s Man sits broaching through a clout?

A nee’le, a nee’le, a nee’le! My gammer’s nee’le is gone!

**Diccon:** Her nee’le, Hodge, now I smell thee! That was a chance alone!  

It is not until Hodge describes the physicality of the object and the manner of its use that Diccon is able to sniff out the meaning of Hodge’s dialect speech.

This miscommunication, while comic in its effect, is a prime representation of the ways in which the comic presentation of the rustic character dramatizes concerns about the communication problems inherent in using a ‘non-standard’ English on stage or in everyday life. The joke becomes strikingly somber when we consider that Diccon is Gammer’s neighbor and therefore should be familiar with the local dialect; if someone from the same area has trouble understanding dialect speakers, speakers from more distant counties or more urban areas could have even more difficulty understanding the rustic speech.  

The comic representation of confusion stemming from the use of a
dialect reveals a very real distress brought on by the problems associated with miscommunication and using non-standard English in early modern drama. In identifying the ways in which dialect speech can cause serious problems in communication, *Gammer Gurton’s Needle* calls for the primary audience of university students to throw off their dialect and embrace a more standard English language. The stigmatization of dialect speakers in the play encourages the audience of university students to model their language after the more standard-speaking, less comic characters in the play.

This is not to say that the use of dialect is always well-developed in lieu of character. Indeed, in a number of early interludes the representation of dialect speech is careless and, at times, haphazard. Dialect usage is much more careful and thorough when there are also standard speakers on stage. In *Gammer Gurton’s Needle*, for example, the playwright is much more precise in the voicing of dialect when there is a standard against which to measure that dialect. For example, when the members of Gammer’s household are alone together, there is much less putting-on of the dialect. The characters even use the more standard ‘I’ pronoun instead of the elided ‘ich’ when speaking amongst themselves. It is only when there is a more standard speech with which to contrast the dialect that the dialect becomes particularly important. The dialect usage in *Enough is as Good as a Feast* is also more carefully crafted when the standard speaking authority figures of Worldly Man and Covetousness appear onstage with the dialect speaker. Tenant’s dialect almost completely falls away when he discusses his monetary woes with the lower class Servant and Hireling. When the dialect speakers in early modern drama are portrayed speaking among themselves there is not as much need to highlight the linguistic differences which mar their speech. This authorial code-switching is indicative
of an awareness of the ‘otherness’ of dialect speech and ways in which it defines and is defined by representations of more standard early modern English.

Even when it is not fully developed, even the hint of dialect speech on the early English stage is cause for concern. Nicholas Udall’s *Ralph Roister Doister*, for example, employs a number of English characters but uses dialect only marginally and never consistently, making the dialect outbursts that are present all the more noticeable. Udall’s scant use of dialect is surprising in a play that Dillon has described as “perhaps the best-known English interlude in the style of classical New Comedy, displays this same emphatic Englishness and is noted for the vigor, inventiveness and variety of its vernacular speech-forms.” Despite claims of the very ‘Englishness’ of its characters, there are only two examples of dialect in the play; both are spoken by the rustic Madge. The first takes place when Roister Doister suddenly kisses Madge. She exclaims: “God yield you, sir! Chad not so much, ichot not when, / Ne’er since chwas bore, of such a gay gentleman!” After the kiss, Madge is silent for fifteen lines after which her speech patterns follow a more standard London dialect. The second instance takes place when Merrygreek and Roister Doister are advising Madge on all of Roister’s wealth and accomplishments (or what she should tell Custance they are). When Merrygreek brags that Roister Doister “killed the Blue Spider in Blanchpowder Land” (1.4.64), Madge responds, “Yea? Jesus! William! Zee Law! Did he zo? Law!” (1.4.65). By allowing the use of dialect to appear suddenly in moments of surprise or excitement, Udall demonstrates the latency of dialect speech. Even those characters (or university students) who have risen above the rustic dialect are in jeopardy of slipping back into it in moments of unconscious response. In this way, Udall shows the precarious position of
standard speakers and warns his university audience against the dangers of careless speech. The university students for whom much of early Tudor drama was written and performed are thus warned about the difficulty inherent in linguistic change while they are simultaneously encouraged to cast off their dialect speech in favor of a more standardized London dialect.

Miscommunication involving dialect-speaking characters is not necessarily an aural problem. Because of their lack of education, dialect speakers are also frequently represented as guilty of the sin of malapropism. The misuse of words—usually of those borrowed from French or Latin and new to the English language—is the impetus for a wealth of humor on the early stage. However, it is also used by early playwrights to examine the problems inherent in miscommunication brought on by the misunderstanding of lower class, often dialect-speaking, Englishmen. The problem of misspeaking is most specifically dealt with in the Thomas Lupton’s fragmentary All for Money. In this interlude printed in 1578, Old Mother Croate is the only dialect-speaking character in a string of common folk who petition the character of All for Money to help them out of various situations which they find unsatisfactory. While many of the petitioners are common men—with the exception of Sir Laurence—Mother Croates’ dialect provides a unique moment for Lupton to examine not only the main theme of the play, but also the problems of lower class malapropism. Mother Croate continually misspeaks and is repeatedly corrected by Sinne, creating a dramatic moment which, while humorous, reveals a genuine concern with the misuse of the English language and the misunderstanding which can result from uneducated malapropism.
Mother Croate begins by explaining the reason for her coming. She begins:

“Therefore chill conclare the cause of my comming hether.” Sinne quickly corrects her mistake noting, “Declare you should say mother, for that is the right speaking.” She misspeaks again immediately stating, ‘You can conclout the matter much better then I.” To which Sinn again replies, “You should saye conclude mother, but it is not much awry.” She dismisses her mistakes, claiming, “Chauye you may see be brought vp amongst swine and kye” and is subsequently careful to articulate, “Chill nowe declare the cause of my coming.” Unfortunately, her language is corrected only momentarily and she soon mistakes “peruenient” for “convenient” and “budenes” for “rudeness.” Both mistakes are accordingly corrected by Sinne. In All for Money, Miscommunication and malapropism dramatize the growing unease in England regarding the problems of a disparate language system. Representatives of misspeaking and the need for education on the early modern stage not only echo the concerns of more famous non-dramatic writers of the time but are also able to affect local change in unique ways. By showing the problems associated with dialect speech, the dangers of miscommunication and malapropism, and the superiority of education early modern playwrights encourage, perhaps demand, a standard, unified English national vernacular.

**DIALECT AS DISGUISE**

The use of dialect is not only threatening in sixteenth century because of the possibility of miscommunication, malapropism and a lack of education. Far more problematic for early modern playwrights is the threat of the manipulation of the dialect.
The earliest representation of this tension comes from one of the earliest extant English popular dramas: the “Second Shepherd’s Play” from the Towneley Corpus Christi cycle. In this play, the shepherd Mak famously puts on a southern dialect in an attempt to fool the three shepherds. Upon his entry Mak uses the familiar southern pronoun “ich” made famous by so many dialect speakers on the early English stage. In an early attempt to fool the other shepherds, Mak proclaims himself a yeoman of the king:

What! Ich be a yoman,
I tell you, of the kyng,
The self and the some,
Sond from a great lording,
And sich.
Fy on you! Goyth hence
Out of my presence!
I must haue reuerence.
Why, who be ich? (292-298)

The shepherds, however, are not so easily fooled. The first shepherd asks, “Why make ye it so qwaynt?” (299) and later demands: “Now take outt that Sothern to the, / And sett in a torde!” (311-312). Although his ruse is unsuccessful and he subsequently drops the use of the dialect, Mak is clearly trying to use language to put one over on his fellow shepherds; his later theft of the sheep shows his malicious intent from the start. If we assume that the Second Shepherds’ Play was part of Towneley’s early production history, Mak is the first character on the English stage to use dialect as a disguise in an attempt to skirt the social conventions of standard speakers. Interestingly, Mak uses the same
linguistic characteristics of dialect to simulate a lordly speech as is used in other plays to
demonstrate the rustic nature of the characters. This further suggests that the concerns of
early English playwrights were not with localizing proper and improper dialects, but
instead with demonstrating linguistic difference of any sort. Mak’s use of dialect is
nowhere near as well developed as some later characters; nevertheless, it demonstrates
the problems of non-standard language, the propensity for linguistic manipulation of
those differences and the need for one universal English language.

The anonymous Misogonus further confronts the problems associated with the
manipulation of dialect and the assumptions that are made about dialect speakers. Much
of the criticism to this point has centered on Misogonus as one of the earliest
developments of the prodigal son topos. Despite its fragmentary nature, Misogonus has
been described by Richard Southern as an “almost fully-formed play” (533) and by the
Revels History of Drama as a “fully developed English version of the prodigal son story”
(230). While the story of Misogonus and Eugonus makes up most of the action of the
play, the lesser characters discussed earlier and the vice character deserve a more
thorough consideration. The vice or trickster character Cacurgus appropriates the rustic
dialect of the secondary plot characters and utilizes it as a mask. This linguistic masking
enables him to gain inside information from Philogonus, the patriarch, which he reports
to the son Misogonus. In putting on this mask, the elder Philogonus reads Cacurgus as a
fool, a “simple thing.” In addition to being termed a fool, Cacurgus is referred
throughout the scene as “the silly soul” (1.1.194), “noddy” (1.1.196), and “Will Sumoner” (1.1.198). Through his use of dialect, Cacurgus is able to manipulate the
Philogonus into trusting him without question. Thus, Cacurgus is able to play on the
stereotypes ingrained in the social system which mark the dialect speaker as ‘simple’ in order to gain access to information to which he would not normally be privy. In this way *Misogonus* demonstrates that dialect can be feigned by characters.

Cacurgus enters in the guise and language of a fool but quickly casts off his disguise when left alone on stage in order to explicate his linguistic performance for the audience. Much in the vein of the medieval Vice character, Cacurgus boasts about the ways in which he has tricked the imprudent Philologus by acting the fool. He laughs heartily at his own falsified malapropism and congratulates himself on his ability to outwit Philologus. These actions, he proclaims, are made possible by Philologus’ misguided belief that “A fool… can neither lie nor flatter” (1.1.257). He is able to manipulate his dialect speech in order to mislead Philologus about the whereabouts and actions of Misogonus throughout the play.

Cacurgus’ putting on of the dialect suggests that this type of language can be performative and for that reason dialect speakers are not to be trusted. Because of accepted stereotypes and because dialect speakers are technically English speakers, dialect is in some ways more suspicious and more dangerous than strictly foreign languages. Dialect speakers are familiar and yet not part of the growing community of London standard speakers; they are geographically as well as linguistically distant but they are still English. Dialect, then, occupies a liminal position outside of a growing standard English but yet within the bounds of an English speaking populace. In this way, early modern playwrights like those responsible for *Misogonus* and the *Second Shepherd’s Play* argue that the elimination of dialect speech will, at least in part, eliminate the possibility of the manipulation of the language.
THE SUPERIOR STANDARD SPEAKER

While those plays loosely termed “university dramas” insist on the need for education and the importance and necessity of relinquishing of dialect of rustic life, dramatic interludes played at court during this time used dialect speech to marginalize the rustic character and to celebrate the superiority of the standard-speaking aristocracy. In a number of plays presented at court between 1550 and 1580, dialect speakers perform a complex function. First, they provide a secondary plot line through which the action of the play can be examined. They also ventriloquize the author in the way that many later fools—especially those made most famous by Shakespeare—are argued to have done. Although dialect speakers in court dramas are very rarely portrayed as having any ability to comprehend the implications of their actions, they serve primarily to telescope the underlying themes of the play and highlight the superiority of the educated upper class audience members. Rustics in early court dramas occupy a space of duality in that they both represent the general concerns of the English population and are marginalized and stigmatized as occupying a social position outside of the political nation itself. Dialect speakers in early court drama have very little personal accountability; however, their ignorance is, in some ways, their best asset. Through their ignorance they portray not only the ways in which political strife affects the whole of the English country, but also forces the courtly audience to acknowledge their own incompetence.

In her somewhat vague discussion of the particular Englishness of plays based on classical models such as Horestes, Gorboduc, and Cambises, Janette Dillon argues that
these plays work “to provide the model for [the] dramatization of problems relating to the English succession.” While succession is certainly one of the most important themes of these three plays, I believe early drama is used to analyze and critique a great variety of early modern English woes, not the least of which is the state of the disparate English language. Dillon concludes, “This kind of Englishness must be kept very separate from the Englishness of a play like Jack Juggler, with its teasing of a supposedly unwashed and uneducated audience. These plays voice English concerns which are intended for educated ears only, and would have been considered far too dangerous for a popular audience.” With this in mind, it becomes clear that the marginal position of dialect speakers in Early Modern society allows these characters to voice the concerns of the people in such a way as to be both minimally subversive and yet politically significant.

Due in large part to the Humanist movement, court drama at this time relied heavily on reinterpretations of classical stories. The rustic characters, therefore, necessarily occupy a space outside of the primary action or storylines. Their presence, however, provides early playwrights with a means of making obvious the present-day implications of the classical stories. Perhaps the most important early modern interlude to use the dialect-speaking, rustic characters to create a localized and distinctly English tie to a classical story is John Pickering’s 1567 *The Interlude of Vice (Horestes)*. Much of the criticism examining the contemporary importance of the classic story in Tudor England has centered on the apparent parallelism between the primary plot line of *Horestes* and the political scandal surrounding Mary Queen of Scots. Queen Clymonestra’s murder of her husband Agamemnon and her favor of Egistus had strong resonances with recent suspicion that Mary Queen of Scots had killed her husband in
order to marry the Earl of Boswell.\textsuperscript{63} These readings, while quite enlightening, have overshadowed closer readings of the aptly named Rusticus and Hodge who are a stark contrast to the classical, standard-speaking characters of the play.\textsuperscript{64} The revenge plot set forth by this pair of dialect-speaking characters stands in opposition to the classical revenge plot which constitutes the bulk of the play and exposes and uneasy relationship between the common man and the educated, classical, Humanist world.

*Horestes* opens with a short explication, presented by the vice character Revenge, which leads quickly to the introduction of the dialect-speaking characters Rusticus and Hodge. Pickering is careful to make the characters’ station as rustics clear. Some critics easily dismiss this opening scene, with one commenting that, “This first scene is like a dumb show; as in the whole play, revenge and dissention give way to amity.”\textsuperscript{65} However, this scene does much more than to simply present a concentrated version of the main theme of the play; it both reveals a growing concern with the place of the English speaker in the larger social and political world and forces the educated audience to examine their own complicity in the growing revenge tragedy of their own world.

Hodge and Rusticus open the play by bemoaning the effects that an impending war will have on their rural lives. Even before being introduced to the main characters of the play, the audience is forced to acknowledge ramifications of the political and martial mechanisms of classical tragedy. This war of revenge will have far-reaching consequences for the common Englishman. In his opening lines, Rusticus demonstrates a very real concern that Horestes will return to avenge the murder of his father, “wastinge our land with 3worde, and with vyare” (29). Hodge is more practical in his response and swears that he will not suffer should Horestes bring war to their land. He responds: “chyll
not be 3layne, chyll loue nothinge worse, / chyll neuer be bournt, for the mony in my
pourse, / Iche haue small rouddockes, and sodyers I kno, / Wyll robbe the riche chorles,
and let the poore knaves go’” (34-37). Hodge dismisses Rusticus’ concern that the war
will bring ruin to the countryside by noting that his poverty will shield him from the ills
of war. This comic sentiment, while establishing the characters as poor rustics, also
reminds the upper echelon audience members of their responsibility to the Commons as
well as of their own vulnerability to the ravages of war.\(^{66}\)

The revenge plot of the rustics is frivolous and makes clear the futility of revenge;
in this way, the principles of revenge are undone before the play even begins.\(^{67}\) After a
quick introduction to the rustics, Vice enters and begins to set in motion an argument
between the neighbors, revealing that Hobbe’s dog has recently killed Rusticus’ pig. Both
rustics demand compensation for their losses but neither is willing to accept blame. They
begin to fight upon Vice’s insistent urging and the dispute is resolved when the Vice
‘thwacks’ both and exits exclaiming: “Take this for a reward, now a waye I must wend”
(158). The opening scene presents the character of Vice as one who manipulates the
rustic characters into resorting to violence against each other. The dialect-speaking
rustics’ gullibility marks them as members of an obtuse peasantry, a representation only
enhanced by their use of dialect. Hodge and Rusticus are, therefore, extreme examples of
exactly the kinds of common people against which the aristocracy of early modern
England believed they could define themselves and their language. However, as the play
unfolds, it becomes clear that the classical characters fall victim to the same type of
manipulation the Vice used against the rustics. In this way, the rustic vignette in Horestes
also shows the fallibility of the classical characters, who too are manipulated by Vice.\(^{68}\)
The play is, in fact, bookended by the use of the southern dialect as represented by the elision of the first person pronoun “ich.” The interlude ends with a lengthy moralization by Truth and Dewty. These moralizing speeches are set off by the only use of dialect outside of the early rustic vignette. At line 1044 Revenge uses the rustic “chyll,” stating: “Eache knave, now a dayes, would make me his man, / But chyll master them, I, be his woundes, and I can!” (1043-1044). The Vice is here lamenting his fall from the good graces of the king and his new role as a beggar. This single slip into dialect speech not only signifies his newly acquired role as a beggar, but also the conclusion of the classical plotline and a return to the world of the rustic playgoers. It triggers the memory of the audience and recalls the rustics’ opening scene. Thus, the message of the opening scene – that of the frivolity and futility of revenge – is purposefully recalled at the end of the play. What audiences are left with is the futility of revenge and the need for amiable resolution to domestic disputes (be these the domestic disputes of the rural fools Rustic and Hodge or the disputes of historical Kings and Queens). Early court playwrights are, thus, able to manipulate the prejudices their audience held against the dialect-speaking English Commons in such a way as to examine simultaneously the problems of political revenge as well as demonstrate the excellence of those educated men able to comprehend fully the significance of both the rustic “dumb show’ and the classical tale within contemporary England.

Like Horestes, Thomas Preston’s Cambises examines the problems of the common man living in a politically charged environment; specifically it evaluates those problems associated with living under a tyrant. The tyranny and subjectivity evident in
the title character has been the subject of most scholarly criticism to date, eclipsing the importance of the marginalized rustic characters.\(^70\)

In fact, the rustic scene in *Cambises* is surprisingly similar to the rustic scene in *Horestes*. The similarities are so numerous as to suggest the scene in Cambises may have influenced the opening scene of Horestes, or at the very least that the use of rustics was in some ways standardized across early drama. Although the rustics do not appear in *Cambises* until nearly two thirds of the way into the play, the presentation and purpose of Hob and Lob are parallel to that of Rusticus and Hodge in *Horestes*. Both pairs of rustics encounter the Vice and are easily brought into an argument. Both scenes break into violence before the Vice exits the stage. The addition to *Cambises* of Marian May Be Good, who is able to fight off the Vice, differs from the sound beating Hodge and Rusticus receive from the Vice in *Horestes*; however, the majority of the action in these two scenes is strikingly similar. Given these similarities, it is not surprising that the rustics in *Cambises* function in a way which is quite similar to the dialect speakers in *Horestes*.

Preston’s rustics, Hob and Lob, demonstrate the problems of living under a tyrannous ruler although Preston must mask his critique of Elizabethan politics within the classical aspects of the play. The rustics thus provide a secondary, if cruder, lens through which to examine the classical plot line and its implications for the English audience. After a quick transition from the Vice character Ambidexter and a short discussion of the various goods each rustic has to sell at the market, Lob suddenly changes the subject from produce to the unstable nature of the king’s mental health. He explains:
Bum Vay Naybor, maister king is a zhrod lad.
Zo God help me and holidam, I think the vool be mad.
Zome zay he deale cruelly, his Brother he did kil:
And also a goodly yung lads hart blood he did spil. 71

Hob is quite surprised by this news and asks: “Vorbod of God naibor, has he plaied zuch a volish deed?” (774). They then react to the news of the King’s tyranny: Lob wishes, “It were a good deed zome body would breke his hed” (780) and Hob agrees, “Bum vay Naybor Lob, I chould he were dead” (781). These brief comments result in Ambidexter’s threatening to turn them in for treason, a crime which he promises will be punished by hanging and then drawing and quartering. This quick dispute, while comic, demonstrates a very real concern that the misdeeds of the ruler can filter down to even the lowliest rustic. Hob and Lob are fully convinced that Cambises will take action against them for their ‘treasonous’ conversation and their fears are representative of the fears of the entire country. It is one thing for an advisor to the king to be slain for speaking against the king; it is quite another to have common folk hanged for a casual conversation held in the farmland. In this way, the dialect-speaking characters in Cambises articulate one of the main themes identified by Bevington. He argues, “thus, while Preston eschews rebellion, he is deeply aware of the role of human agency in resisting tyranny.”72 The dialect speakers in this scene represent the English populace and it is their responsibility to demonstrate the injustices of tyranny and the importance of the popular voice. The dialect-speaking characters enact the inequality of English society; however, they show very little understanding of the continuity of these problems.
The rustics do not analyze the logic of this threat, they merely react to it. The obvious implication of this scene is an examination of the ways in which distrust and strife permeate the countryside under a tyrannical ruler and the rustics’ scene also compels the audience members to examine their own tendencies for reaction without examination. Throughout the play, the educated, standardized speakers also react without conscious analysis. In this way, the superiority of the standard speakers is called into question as their reactions are equated to the reactions of the uneducated masses. For the court audiences, the threat of the peasants becomes the threat of their own lack of critical attention to social responses. The dialect speakers represent universal English problems both political and social. These plays dramatize the importance of education by stigmatizing the dialect speaker and chastening any the standard speaking characters that perpetuate the linguistic mistakes of the lower class. The movement away from the dialect and rustic world calls for both the elevation of the English people, the English nation and the English language through education and standardization.


2 Blank, 32.

3 The only true speakers of dialect in these plays are English peasants. There are a number of examples of upper class peoples using dialect as a mask to be discussed later in this chapter.


5 The tensions between the Commons and the ruling class are various and complicated; historians such as Fryde, and Harrison, have outlined the historical tensions clearly. This topic has also been taken up literary critics. For example, many literary scholars interested in *Piers Plowman* and other representations of the plowman have offered far more intricate and nuanced readings of the problems leading up to the 1381 Rebellion. In service of this chapter, I have focused on only a portion of what was a complex issue..

6 Fryde, 33.

7 Fryde, 35.

8 Harrison, 107.

9 Harrison, 97.


13 Harvey, 52.

15 Cornwall, 14.


17 The following is certainly an oversimplification of an incredibly intricate social, religious and political affair. For more in depth studies see: Beer, Cornwall, and Frye.

18 Beer, 49.

19 Beer, 48-51.

20 Beer, 57-59. See also Cornwall, 98-113.


23 Beer, 97.

24 W. Wager, *The Longer Thou Livest and Enough is as Good as a Feast* ed. R. Mark Benbow (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1967) ll. 981-982. All subsequent citations given parenthetically.

25 Alistair Fox has a fascinating description on the ways in which Tudor drama differs from the early moralities and allegories which make up much of medieval drama. See his chapter on “The Political Role of Early Tudor Drama” in his *Politics and Literature in the Reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).


The seminal work on this topic is Frank S. Boas, *University Drama in the Tudor Age* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1914). More recently see Kent Cartwright, *Theatre and Humanism: English Drama in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Paul Whitfield White, “Playing Companies and the Drama of the

30 Boas, 385-390.

31 My argument here is based on the performatve uses of dialect and not on the regional dialect of an individual playwright or scribe. The dialect in question is distinct from the semi-standard speech used by other characters in these plays. I am not considering plays in which the local dialect is the dialect of the stage, but only those plays in which a distinct dialect is used to enhance the rustic nature or quality of a character.

32 Old Tenant is directed specifically to use “cotswold” speech. The Cotswold is a hilly region in central western England. Present day it stretches from Gloucester to Oxford and from Statford Upon Avon to Bath.


34 Although the designations for these tasks are written in Latin on the title page, their tasks are specifically those of the English common people. On stage, these characters appear only as English men and women. The Latin used on the surviving title page is more a product of convention and textual parallelism than a statement about the Englishness or Latinity of these speakers.

35 Madge Caro has a well defined stutter which enhances not only the basely comic aspects of the dialect speakers but also the representation of them as somehow marred (biologically, educationally and socially) in their speech patterns.

36 According to Thomas L. Berger, William C. Bradford and Sidney L. Sondergard, eds., An Index of Characters in Early Modern English Drama: Printed Plays 1500-1660
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), there are a total of 41 plays which include characters named Rusticus (or some variation thereof) on the early Modern stage. Seventeen plays include a character named Hodge or Hogg. According to Berger et al., *Horestes* is the earliest extant printed play to employ these naming practices.

37 John Pickeryng, “Horestes,” ll. 45. All subsequent citations given parenthetically.


40 Interestingly, the use of the term falls away during the brief dispute brought on by the accusations of Vice. In these passages the neighbors refer to each other simply by name or as “vartlet” (802) and “vooolish” (803). This may signify a breakdown not only of their friendship but also of the unity of the English countryside in the times of suspicion and unease that stem from living under a tyrant ruler.

41 John Redford, “The Play of Wit and Science” in *Recently Discovered ‘Lost’ Tudor Plays with Some Others* ed. John S. Farmer (London: Early English Drama Society, 1907), 152. No line numbers are provided. Subsequent page numbers provided parenthetically.


43 For more, see Littleton’s discussion of the divergence from the source and the invention of Corin, 45.


46 Gammer Gurton’s Needle is commonly attributed to William Stevenson and was entered in the stationer’s registry between 1562 and 1563. It was printed in 1575 by Thomas Colwell. It is commonly thought to be a university drama written for performance at Christ’s College in Cambridge. For more see also Norland, T.W. Craik, The Revels History of Drama in English 1500-1576 (New York: Metheun, 1980); and David Bevington, From Mankind to Marlowe.

47 Boas, 5-7. See also Kent Cartwright, Theatre and Humanism, 73-78.

48 Cartwright, 77.

49 These are the same concerns addressed nearly one hundred years earlier by Caxton in his Preface to Eneydos.

50 Norland notes that the role of the rustic Hodge is further made comic by the satiric representation of the boastful solidier. He states, “Hodge’s roles as a country fool appears to be taken from contemporary popular traditions, though qualities of the classical miles
gloriosus are demonstrated in his confrontations with Dame Chat. Even more cowardly than Roister Doister’s rout at the house of Christian Custance, Hodge’s fearful failure to come to Gammer’s aid makes his pretensions to bravery particularly ignominious as his comic role moves into the realm of satire” (286).

51 Cartwright, 99.


53 It is, of course, possible to portray Diccon as having no trouble understanding Hodge’s ‘n’eeel;’ in this case he becomes a further representation of the omnipotent medieval vice character. Diccon’s feigned confusion, then, creates a sense of distrust of language and serves as a warning for those who use dialect English that their language may be appropriated and misconstrued by the vice character.


56 Text available on EEBO. No line numbers available.


His speech also contains evidence of the type of malapropism and miscommunication discussed earlier. See lines 1.1.200ff.


Barber notes that Will Somoner was “the name of Henry VIII’s court jester” and that the name was often used by later playwrights to signify a fool (102 n. 199).

Dillon, 116.

Dillon, 117.


The tale of Clymonestra’s deceit is contained in both Lydgate’s *Troy Book* and Caxton’s *Historia*; for a debate concerning Pikerings’ source, see Karen Maxwell Merritt, "The Source of John Pickering's 'Horestes'" *Review of English Studies* 23 (1972): 255-266.

S. Knapp also refers to this opening scene as a “dumb show” in “Horestes: The Uses of Revenge.” *ELH* 40 (1973): 207.

66 *Horestes* was possibly presented at court between Christmas and Shrovetide 1567-1568 (Seltzer). See also n. 45 on the resonances of Mary.

67 Hodge and Rusticus disappear from the text after their 200 line opening scene. Cartwright notes that the actors who played these characters likely doubled as some of the lesser soldier characters later on, so they may not have entirely dropped out of the action for the audience.


70 Robert Carl Johnson examines the role of Cambises in terms of the Mirror for Magistrates genre in the Preston, 1-5. See also Happé, *English Drama Before Shakespeare*, 150-154; and Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, 156-163.
Johnson, *Cambises*, ll. 770-773. All subsequent citations are taken from Preston, *Cambises* and will be cited parenthetically.

Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, 160.
Epilogue

The opening of the professional theaters in London marks the end of this study. I have deliberately excluded those plays from my analysis because professional Elizabethan theater represents a re-imagination of the disquiet extant on the earlier stage due, in large part, to massive changes in the culture. The professionalization of the players and playwrights created new tensions in the genre and these tensions took some precedence over and altered the linguistic stakes of earlier plays: theories of vernacularization and standardization became tied up with a new view of print culture; the public theater reacted to the changing concerns about the place of the English language within an ever expanding colonial world; and professional players and playwrights began to approach language in terms of the economics of the new stage. These changing roles of language have been taken up by many modern scholars specializing in the literature of the Renaissance. Paula Blank, for example, has brilliantly addressed the question of linguistic difference in the Renaissance and argues for an active rhetoric of difference. She concludes that, “in recreating dialects for the stage, Renaissance authors were not primarily concerned with verisimilitude, but rather with making difference” and that the development and refinement of the vernacular in the Renaissance “was predicated on a process of dividing and conquering the national language.”¹ Her work, like the work of so many others, opens up a number of new questions about the ways in which the question of the vernacular was addressed in the Renaissance.
The interaction of French, Latin and dialect was dramatized in a number of professional Elizabethan plays. The problem of dialect is confronted by many Renaissance dramatists. Thomas Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*, for example, utilizes the trope of the linguistic disguise often seen in earlier plays. However, for Dekker, the problem of dialect or accent is no longer a problem that must be contained. Indeed, the linguistic mask is a comedic game in service of the romance resolution of the play. The tensions which arise from Lacy’s guise are less those of a desire for linguistic standardization and more a reflection on the growing social and economic problems of the merchant class. Lacy’s feigned Dutch, which allows him to infiltrate the workshop, marks him as both an insider and an outsider. As a Dutch cobbler, Lacy/Hans is accepted for his skills but he remains outside of the English national community. The Dutch accent, thus, represents another form of duality so prevalent in Dekker’s play. Marta Straznicky has commented on these issues in the *Shoemaker’s Holiday* and states, “they cement a potentially rebellious group solidarity at the same time as they reinforce communally defined boundaries of acceptable personal behavior and professional occupation. Dekker’s version…appropriates this very duality to inscribe moral boundaries between a variety of competing commercial practices, and, in so doing, to reinforce the collective identities of his audience.” These dualities and identities are similar to the linguistic concerns of earlier playwrights, but they are recast in the societal milieu of early modern England.

Shakespeare also takes up the problem of the dialect-speaking peasants in his humorous portrayal of Jack Cade in 2 Henry VI. Like his predecessors, Shakespeare ventriloquizes the problems of language through the guise of this rustic, but for
Shakespeare’s Cade, the problem is not that of standardization or the place of the vernacular. Instead the problems have shifted to concerns brought about by the rise of print culture. Cade rails against the printed word and charges Lord Say with treason merely on the basis of Say’s knowledge of French and his having erected grammar schools (at which we can presume Latin and perhaps even French would have been taught) across the country. Moreover, Cade demands: “Burn all the records of the realm. / My mouth shall be the Parliament of England”\(^3\) (4.6.10-11). This is clearly a reference to earlier plays like Respublica (1553) that called for the replacement of the Latinate records with the vernacular “mouth” of the realm, but within the contexts of Cade’s other social critiques, Cade’s diatribe has more to do with the rolls themselves than with their Latin. As Roger Charier has argued, “the portrayal of Cade is fundamentally shaped in Shakespeare's play (if not in the historical event) by the double condemnation of the power of writing and of the power over writing, defined by Armando Petrucci as the attempt by authorities to monopolize writing as an essential instrument for the governance and control of territories and populations.”\(^4\) However humorous his actions and proclamations, Shakespeare’s Cade nonetheless represents a re-imagination of the linguistic concerns of earlier drama. In some ways, he represents the next step in vernacular theory; he voices the concerns of the peasants who have seen their language standardized, stratified and now stamped onto the page of English history.

Much critical attention has also been paid to the relationship between the French and English languages in Shakespeare’s history plays. David Steinsaltz, for example, has examined the role of French in the second tetralogy. “He re-imagined old battles once fought with massed pikes and ranks of longbows upon the fields of France, as linguistic
battles fought simultaneously with words and lines of iambic pentameter upon the tongues of Frenchmen and Englishmen, Frenchwomen and Englishwomen."\(^5\)

Shakespeare’s *Henry V* contains what are probably the most frequently analyzed passages concerning the relationship between English and French on the professional Elizabethan stage. The translation scene which takes place between Katherine and Alice is often seen as representative of the conversion of both the French language and the French peoples. As Blank argues, “The “Englishing” of Katherine’s body is figured in an early scene in which the princess translates her own body, part by part, into the language of her conqueror.”\(^6\) Although Blank has argued that neither Katherine’s body nor her language is ever fully Anglicized and the wooing of Katherine is impeded by the linguistic difference between English and French, Shakespeare’s play offers a very positive view of the glories of the English language in the Renaissance. As Melvin Bragg has vividly argued, “In the thirty or forty years that bridged 1600, the English language could lay fair claim to being reborn, yet again, but with a self-conscious luxuriance and a world reach quite new. It is as if its appetite, far from being sated by the feast of French which it had digested and turned into English, was whetted and enlarged by it and it looked around greedily for more nourishment.”\(^7\) What we see in Shakespeare’s—and some of his contemporaries’—examination of these tensions is a shift in the cultural perception of the role of English. No longer is English a language striving to define itself against a more powerful French Other. Instead, it has become an imperial language growing ever stronger as its boundaries expand.

Not all professional playwrights had such an optimistic view of the ever expanding vocabulary of the seventeenth century. Thomas Kyd, for example, dramatizes
the complete breakdown of language and meaning at the end of *The Spanish Tragedy*, as a consequence, perhaps, of new openness of English in the Renaissance. At the apex of the play Hieronimo authors what he titles a tragedy to be played before the king and directs each of his actors to recite his or her lines in a different language: Latin, Greek, Italian, and French. The multilingual masque which ends this revenge tragedy and brings about its bloody resolution is more than simply a grotesque linguistic game. As Carla Mazzio argues, “Kyd stages a discursive war zone which conflates murder, contamination, and corruption with the uneasy juxtaposition of alien forms. In many important ways, Hieronimo's ultimate revenge is a revenge on language, on representation, on what he returns to in the end, "our vulgar tongue."” For Mazzio, Hieronimo’s dramatization of the apocalyptic fall of Babel resonates with a number of cultural concerns about the ever expanding English language. She notes that “the increasingly heterogeneous linguistic textures and forms of early modern English became a site for the articulation of anxieties about local and national forms of self-representation.” In this way, Kyd’s work voices the concerns of a culture that is, in a number of ways, no longer able to control or contain their national language and identity. The real threat of *The Spanish Tragedy* is, then, one of total linguistic breakdown. Kyd’s play differs from earlier works also concerned with the containment of the language in that he offers very little resolution; the solution for Hieronimo is an act of self mutilation in which he removes any and all linguistic ability. Kyd’s play leaves us with a bleak picture of the future of the English language, to be sure.

Early Modern scholars have often claimed a Renaissance discovery of linguistic difference. Blank, for example, has argued that “Renaissance writers, in a word, invented
the difference of English—not only by giving form to its dialects, but by systematically endowing those forms with cultural value and meaning—for the first time in the history of the language.”

Blank, in fact, includes a chapter in her work entitled, “The Renaissance Discovery of Dialect.” Further, Carla Mazzio identifies the scope of concerns often identified in early modern conversations about language and identity. She notes, “the range of metaphors invoked in early modern discussions about the English language constantly registers a sense of anxiety about a national identity that is at once constituted and threatened by difference, a difference that in the minds of many signaled internal alienation and political chaos.”

Although the Renaissance did see an explosion of linguistic theory, the advent of the dictionary and a wealth of plays dramatizing the form and function of the English language, this study hopes to have shown that these concerns were not only extant, but flourishing on the stage and within the culture centuries before the opening of the public theaters. As I have shown, medieval civic drama, morality and Tudor interlude authors were patently interested in the role of the English language.

Whether it was through the misappropriation of Latin, the dramatization of a fallen French morality, or the degradation of dialect speakers, early English dramatists set up a dichotomy—however false it may have been—wherein standard English stands as the only acceptable linguistic choice available to the English nation. The stigmatization of non-standard and non-English speaking characters on the early English stage effectively emptied meaning from any speech outside of the culturally sanctioned English norm in an attempt to establish a unified English national authoritative language. Through these portrayals, early English drama struggled to create a fiction of unified
ethnic Englishness in the face of a community that was, in reality, multilingual, multinational and multicultural


2 Marta Straznicky, “The End(s) of Discord in the *Shoemaker’s Holiday*,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 36 (1996): 358.


6 Blank, 166.


9 Mazzio, 213.

10 Kyd is quick to note that Hieronimo is still able to write. There is not time here to examine the juxtaposition of speech and text here.

11 Blank, 168.

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