IMAGINATIVE SPACE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF COMMUNITY:  
THE DRAMA OF AUGUSTINE’S TWO CITIES IN THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE

by

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Abstract

This thesis traces the development of Augustine’s paradigm of the two cities (the City of God and the earthly city) in the cultural poetics of the English Renaissance. Although scholars have studied the impact of Augustine’s model on theology, historical consciousness, and political theories in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, little attention has been paid to the genealogy of the more specifically “literary” aspects of the idea of the two cities. My line of inquiry is the relationship between Augustine’s model of the two cities and the idea of drama. More specifically, this project explores the ways in which the idea of the two cities spoke to various communities—of readers, of worshippers, and ultimately, of playgoers.

Augustine’s view of drama is divided; on the one hand, he speaks at length about the evil influence of Roman spectacles, but on the other hand, he acknowledges that the world itself is a theatre for God’s cosmic drama. However, this employment of drama is limited in Augustine’s writing, because his greater commitment is to the idea of Scripture. This interplay between drama and Scripture, I suggest, is an integral part of the two-cities model that is related to his theology of history.

The tension between the idea of drama and the idea of the book is evident in English Reformation appropriations of Augustine’s model, such as those of John Bale and John Foxe, who changed the terminology to “the two churches.” The second section of my thesis shows how these Reformers contained their own “dramatic” adaptations of the two cities within an even narrower theatre than Augustine’s—a theatre constituted and contained by the Word.

Shifting the focus to secular drama, the final section concerns Shakespeare’s use of some facets of the two-cities model in his Jacobean plays, and examines the effects of removing this construct from its religious context. The result, I argue, is a theatre that celebrates its own aesthetic power and flaunts its sheer physicality, resisting the presumed stability of the written word.
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To my father,
who taught me to climb mountains
INTRODUCTION

In 1522, the Spanish humanist Juan Louis Vivès dedicated his Latin edition of Augustine's *City of God*, complete with extensive commentary, to King Henry VIII of England. Vivès' dedication makes it clear that, in terms of the continuous struggle between Rome and Babylon that Augustine had depicted, the emerging Reformation is a product of Babylon; therefore, Vivès calls on Henry to use Augustine's "treasury of ancient learning" to help him defeat Luther. One hundred years later, Protestantism had won the battle of religion in England, and the country was faced with the threat of a division not between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, but between two types of Protestantism. Despite the change in circumstances, the *City of God* still spoke to religious controversialists. In the preface to the 1620 reprint of the first English translation of the *City of God*¹ the Puritan divine William Crashawe wrote:

> As a Man amongst creatures, and the Church amongst men, and the Fathers in the Church, and S. Augustine amongst the Fathers, so amongst the many precious volumes, and in the rich store-house of his workes, his booke on the City of God haue a speciall preheminence.²

In the century between Vivès' edition during the reign of Henry VIII and this English edition during the reign of James I, the *City of God* became a part of English religious and national consciousness.

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¹ The original translation was by John Healey in 1610, and was printed by George Eld, who also printed Shakespeare's sonnets.

This dissertation traces the development of Augustine's model of the two cities (the City of God and the earthly city) in the cultural poetics of the English Renaissance. Although scholars have studied the impact of Augustine's model on theology, historical consciousness, and political theories in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, little attention has been paid to the genealogy of the more specifically "literary" aspects of the idea of the two cities. This project explores the ways in which Augustine's language and his theology of history in the City of God are related to drama, and argues that this component of Augustine's writing was an integral aspect of the literary influence the City of God in the English Renaissance.

Augustine's complex relationship to drama—his vehement anti-theatricality on the one hand, and his willingness to employ dramatic elements throughout his narrative on the other—is, I shall argue, an important part of the model of the two cities. The "drama" of the City of God does not involve actual stage performance, of course, nor does it even involve the employment of extensive theatrical metaphors. Instead, what I am speaking of can be more accurately called, in Kenneth Burke's terms, "dramatism"—a word he uses to refer to ideas, themes, and metaphors that are integral to drama as a concept and as a genre, but which often occur separately in (non-dramatic) written works. Burke suggests that his method is properly called "dramatism" because it is "a perspective that, being developed from the analysis of drama, treats language and thought primarily as modes of action." Similarly, I would like to suggest that Augustine's

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3 Stephen Greenblatt defines "cultural poetics" as an exploration of "The 'life' that literary works seem to possess long after both the death of the author and the death of the culture for which the author wrote," or of "how collective beliefs and experiences were shaped, moved from one medium to another, concentrated in manageable aesthetic form, offered for consumption." Stephen Greenblatt, Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988) 6, 5.


5 Burke xxii.
emphasis upon conflict, upon history as directed by Providence, and upon spectacle and performance within this history, are all "dramatistic" elements of his thought, because they are drawn from concepts that are related to drama as a genre.

While Augustine's project insists upon the primacy of the Word—both the words of Scripture and the words of his own book—his need to speak to the community of pilgrims in this life necessitated a language that would draw them into not just an understanding of, but a sense of participation in, history as directed by Providence. This active language, I will argue, is the root of Augustine's dramatism in the City of God, and this interplay between the book and drama is also an important feature of English Renaissance appropriations (both religious and secular) of Augustine's model.

Throughout this thesis, my focus for the examination of Augustine's model of the two cities and its influence in the English Renaissance will be the complex relationship between word, community, and drama. Before providing a more detailed summary of the four chapters of this work, I will discuss how these three elements are at work, and integrally related to one another, in the City of God.

The Word: Scripture and the Book

Augustine introduces his book with the following words:

Here, my dear Marcellinus, is the fulfilment of my promise, a book in which I have taken upon myself the task of defending the glorious City of God against those who prefer their own gods to the Founder of that City. I treat of it both as it exists in this world of time, a stranger among the ungodly, living by faith, and as it stands in the secularity of its everlasting seat. (1.Pref; 5)
From the beginning, it is evident that the “City of God” is a community that is divided into two groups: those who are pilgrims on earth, and those who are citizens at rest in heaven. But the City of God is not only a community; it is also a book—a work of enormous scope that explains all of history from the Fall to the apocalypse as a struggle between two societies. But exactly what kind of a book is it? Can it be classified as apologetics, exegesis, theology, history, political theory, or epic, and if a combination of some or all of these, upon what foundation is it able to combine these elements? Some critics have tried to emphasize its apologetic nature, but, as G.J.P. O’Daly notes,

The extent and detail of its presentation of Christian views cannot be explained in apologetic terms alone: the importance of [the City of God] resides in the fact that its scope covers questions of cosmology, history, and eschatology, presupposing and utilizing the full range of [Augustinian] doctrines.7

If the City of God contains all of these elements, it is because of the ambitious scope of Augustine’s project and the complexity of his historical situation. The fall of Rome in 410 was the central event that Augustine was responding to in the City of God, but the range of issues he was addressing went far beyond this immediate occasion.8 By 413, when Augustine began this work, he was a prominent member of the Catholic church in Africa and was increasingly known throughout the Latin-reading half of the Roman world by his writings. He had written the story of his own life, several works of exegesis, and many letters, sermons, and anti-heretical tracts. In the City of God, he attempted to draw all modes of discourse, genres, adversaries, and allies together in a literary space of

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8 The place of Rome, especially of its aristocracy and religion, was an important topic for Christians who needed to define themselves as a separate group, but found themselves part of the Roman people, values, and governmental systems. In addition to concerning himself with the relationship between Christianity and the outside world, Augustine needed to consider the relationship between various groups that existed within Christianity itself. The threat of heresy from the Donatists and the Manichees, as well as the sociological implications of the radical asceticism of some Christians, were issues that Augustine had to address.
unprecedented ambition. The *City of God* can thus be seen as an example of what Averil Cameron calls a "totalizing discourse," defined as a "totalizing interpretation in which secular discourse could be subsumed and brought within the universal Christian interpretative field." As a "totalizing discourse," the *City of God* was one of the cornerstones of Christian self-definition in the West. It accounted for each individual's place in God's great plan, and gave humans a part to play in a providential scheme, thereby infusing history (both individual and communal) with meaning.

At the conclusion of the *City of God*, Augustine announces that he has completed "this huge work" (22.30; 1091), clearly cognizant of its metaphorical (and literal) size and weight. This book which is called the *City of God* gains authority partly, we may conjecture, because of the importance of the idea of the book in early Christianity. For Augustine, the ultimate book is the Scripture—God's Word. In the *Confessions*, he writes that God "established the authority of [his] book between those above, who would be obedient to [him], and those beneath, who would be made subject to them" (13.34; 345). God's book, in a sense, stands between the two portions of the *City of God*, revealing the way for the pilgrims on earth to become citizens of heaven. The importance of the book as a symbol of eternity is perhaps most evident in John's Apocalypse—a book that insists upon its own totality and threatens those who would dare alter it in any way (Rev. 22:18-19). "Revelation, which epitomizes the Bible," argues Frank Kermode, "puts our fate into a book, and calls it the book of life, which is the holy city." In this sense, the book and the city are synonymous—both symbolize the ultimate glory of

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9 Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1991) 57-58. The *City of God* is not just an example, but the perfect example of a totalizing discourse, for it subsumes a range of secular discourses and brings them within a newly fashioned Christian interpretive field.

10 Or, in practice, collection of books (*bibliotheca*).

eternity. Augustine's own book, which takes its name from this city, must necessarily fall short of the glory of Scripture and the book of life, but it nonetheless asserts an authority that is connected to God's books. Mark Vessey observes that for Augustine "the ideal plenitude and unity of the book, even of Scripture itself, was strictly transcient, capable of being imaged but never of being contemplated by those dwelling among litterae: sequential units of articulate sound, texts, literatures. In this sense, Augustine's Book is the model of his City." In other words, like the City of God, the idea of the book contains two components. God's book, like the portion of the City which is at rest, is complete, changeless, eternal. Augustine's book, like the City of God on earth, is flawed, time-bound, and only an imperfect image of the other part of the book/city. Yet even as an image, this book has a vital role to fill as it helps to create a sense of community among the pilgrims on earth.

Community: Imaginative Space and the Pilgrims of the mean time

The word Augustine uses for "city" is civitas, which is not equivalent to our sense of a city as a geographical location. Instead, a civitas is a collection of people sharing the same beliefs and values. The defining features of Augustine's civitas dei on earth are its belief in God and its habitation of the temporal world. When Christianity formed as a religion, its adherents did not expect the world to last much longer; Jesus' promise to the disciples in Matthew 24:34 that their generation would not pass away until the end of the world had taken place gave the apostolic message a pronounced apocalyptic urgency. Because of the prevalent belief in the apocaplyse—an imminent end to history as

13 The Latin word for this would be urbs.
predicted by prophetic books such as Revelation—early Christian writings put an emphasis upon the present as a "time-between":

For Paul: between resurrection of Christ and His expected Parousia at the end of the world. For John: between the glorification of Jesus through his crucifixion (which is at the same time his exaltation) and the end of the earthly life of the individual believer. But for both of them this "between" has not only chronological, but also essential, meaning. It is the dialectical "between" which characterises the Christian existence as between "no longer" and "not yet."14

The longer the present world continued, the more significance this "in-between" time gained in Christianity. Although he lived several centuries after the death of Christ, Augustine also believed that the time between the Incarnation and the Parousia had no essential significance because history accomplished its decisive turning point at the Incarnation, and sacred history was essentially already complete. However, Augustine the bishop understood that one of the primary functions of the church was to teach Christians how to be Christians in the interstitial space of here and now; hence, there is a major component of his writing devoted to the concerns of the individual Christian life, and especially to the community of Christian believers. Augustine's *City of God*, though ostensibly directed "against the pagans," has more to say to his fellow Christians, providing them with an explanation of the course of history—a philosophy of history that has an essential bearing on their lives. Thus, although Augustine’s thought remains decidedly eschatological (dependent upon a belief in the end of the world and of humanity as the culmination of history), he often emphasizes the importance of life in the present. As "the Church [was] changed from a community of the saved into an institution

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of salvation,” Christian literature such as the *City of God* spoke to the spiritual needs of people living in the “in-between” time.

Reflecting upon the relationship between teleology and literature, Frank Kermode remarks that “Men, like poets, rush ‘into the middest,’ *in medias res*, when they are born; they also die *in mediis rebus*, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems.” The gap between the Incarnation and the Parousia in early Christian theology comprises a significant part of the age that Augustine calls the *saeculum*, the time/space which all people inhabit during life on earth. This particular span of time is largely elided in the “sacred history” of the Bible, for the only clues that Scripture provides about the period are hidden in the mysterious prophecies of the End Times. Augustine must therefore attempt to fill this hermeneutical gap with writing that can make sense of the *saeculum* to those presently dwelling in it. The *City of God* simultaneously creates this gap through its theology, and fills it with what we may refer to as a narrative of the “secular imagination”—secular not in the modern sense of pertaining to the world outside the religious sphere, but in the sense that it belongs, by definition, to this time “in-between” which we inhabit, an age that takes its reference point from an eschatological view of history.

Through his exegesis of Scripture, and of the world in terms of Scripture, Augustine creates a text that bridges the gap between pilgrim and citizen; he provides his

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15 Bultmann 53.
16 Kermode 7.
18 This interstitial space is what T.S. Eliot describes in “Ash Wednesday” as a condition of “Wavering between the profit and the loss / In this brief transit where the dreams cross / The dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying.”
readers with an imaginative space that allows them to feel part of a community called the City of God. For Augustine, participation in God is both the primary activity in heaven and the only true enjoyment on earth. In lieu of the direct participation in God that is possible in heaven, the resident aliens on earth can participate in the community of believers that is dedicated to him. Augustine offers his own text as a medium for this type of communal understanding, as he interprets the Bible and creates a community around this system of exegesis. A group of people who share interpretive assumptions is often called an “interpretive community,” but when this group is united around the interpretation of a central text, it is called, in Brian Stock’s terms, a “textual community.” In these communities, the Bible may be the central text, but it is the exegetical works such as the City of God that create the shared interpretive experience necessary for the cohesion of this community.

Drama: The Theatre of this World

The formation of a textual community involves a complex interplay between script and performance. Stock shows that simple theories about a community’s evolution from an “oral” to a “literate” culture do not hold true in the case of textual communities, where performance flows into and out of an interaction with a text. The performative quality

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20 Because of Stock’s concern for the written versus the oral mode of text, he constantly uses dramatic metaphors in order to describe processes at work in the community. He suggests that in a textual community a “reorientation of belief [is] played out as a drama in which the oral confront[s] the written” (Listening 157), furthermore, he “typif[ies] these groups as combinations of narratives, in which the actor’s role is much like the dramatic performance of a script” (Listening 152). At another point, he defines a textual community as “a group in which there is both a script and a spoken enactment and in which social cohesion and meaning result from the interaction of the two” (Listening 100).
of Christianity is manifested in the way that the script of the Bible has a vital effect on people's lives—it changes the way they act. Max Harris argues that if "the Christian concept of God's mode of self-revelation is theatrical, then the sensitive reader of script and Scripture alike will need to engage in a form of theatrical hermeneutics that both animates and interprets text." Because performance is encoded in the text of the Bible, there is an integral relationship between the actions of believers and the performance of a dramatic script. The Bible itself contains a sort of dramatic plot, for it tells the story of a group of people chosen by God to play the central role in his drama of history.

The dramatistic elements of the Bible were apparent to Augustine; one of the metaphors that he found in the Scripture was the idea of the world as a theatre. In his discussion of the apostle Paul in Book 14 of the City of God, Augustine echoes Paul's assertion in 1 Corinthians 4:9 that the apostles are a spectacle before God and man by saying that Paul lived "in theatro huius mundi" (in the theatre of this world). This phrase is not merely a convenient way to reflect upon Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: the idea that God's chosen people are part of a grand plan directed by Providence surfaces again and again in Augustine. I will argue that, despite his opposition to Roman theatre and spectacle, Augustine retains a keen sense of the aesthetic and imaginative value of drama in his account of the cosmic scope of history.

This idea of history as a drama did not originate with Christianity; Ernst Robert Curtius explains that as early as Plato we see "the world as a stage upon which men play

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22 As Northrop Frye points out, "the myth of Christianity is also a divine comedy which contains a tragedy, and thinks of that tragedy as an episode within a larger comic structure." Northrop Frye, The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1976) 92. The tragic course of history from the Fall until the end of the world is contained within a comic superstructure, with the apocalypse bringing about the "happy ending" for Christians.
their parts, their motions directed by God.”23 Because he was trained in classical rhetoric, it is no surprise that Augustine was well-versed in the dramatic metaphors of late Roman society.24 At times, Augustine relates drama to the emptiness and futility of life, as he does in his commentary on the Psalms: “Here on earth it is as if children should say to their parents: Come! think of departing hence; we too would play our comedy! For nought but a comedy of the race of man is all this life, which leads from temptation to temptation.”25 Indeed, he associates the pagan drama with “false play” and emptiness—part of a pageantry controlled by demons. By contrast, the City of God is the story of two opposing communities that struggle against one another throughout a history that is controlled by God. The depraved pagan theatre is completely overshadowed by this inherently dramatistic picture of providential history.

The most important strength of these dramatistic ideas in Christianity, as in Augustine’s book, is their ability to transform readers from audience members into actors. Shadi Bartsch explains that “As a descriptive model, ‘theatricality’ makes actors out of human beings placed in situations in which they feel themselves watched, in which their performance is subject to the evaluation of a superior who must be watched in turn to gauge his reactions.”26 This is the sort of arena that the City of God creates—it builds a stage and uses it to tell the story of the two cities, imitating the structure of what

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24 This use of dramatism is evident in non-Christian writers as well; see Andrew Feldherr, Spectacle and Society in Livy’s History (Berkeley: U of California P, 1998), especially Chapter 5, “The Alternative of Drama.”
25 Quoted by Curtius, 140. (Quotation from Enarrationes in Psalmos 127).
Augustine takes to be God’s plan itself. As Augustine reads his hermeneutical theories into and out of the world at large, he creates his own “theatre of the world.” But even though he speaks of the theatre of the world and uses dramatistic ideas throughout the *City of God*, his own sense of theatricality is always subsumed by the superstructure of his book, contained by the (presumed) stability of the written word.

Within the stable framework that Augustine attempts to create in a book called the *City of God*, he acknowledges a history of change, instability, and unrest—all of which are consequences of the Fall. This is also the province of drama, which is characterized by discord and conflict. The combination between symbols of stasis (book) and action (drama) is reflected in Augustine’s theory that the members of the City of God are divided between those who are at rest in heaven, and those who are pilgrims on earth. This specific relationship between the written word and the idea of drama is crucial to Augustine’s literary imagination as a whole and becomes even more pronounced when other writers appropriate Augustine’s scheme for their own purposes.

**The Drama of Augustine’s Two Cities in the English Renaissance**

The purpose of this dissertation is to show how three English Renaissance writers—John Bale, John Foxe, and William Shakespeare—were influenced not just by Augustine’s model of the two cities, but by the complex relationship between word, drama, and community that is an integral part of it.

Augustine’s “theatre of the world” is the subject of the first section of this study. Chapter 1 elucidates the dramatistic aspects of the *City of God* in order to set up the subsequent discussion of the imaginative uses of this model in the English Renaissance. In particular, I concentrate on the ways in which Augustine’s construction of history, exegesis, narrative, and eschatology are all part of this dramatistic expression of the two-
cities model. However, my analysis also shows that Augustine’s dramatism in the *City of God* is always strictly contained within the insistent scripturalism of his text, for the community of the City of God is a textual one.

Just as the word was the symbol of absolute authority in early Christianity, so the Protestant Reformers also cultivated an acute interest in the authority of the written word—both the Scripture and the works of the Church fathers. Whether Protestant writers characterized the community of believers as a small ecclesia, as an international church, or as a nation, the idea of a community called the City of God could be a useful model. Chapters 2 and 3 deal with two of the most prominent of the early English Reformers—John Bale and John Foxe. The title of this section, “The English Reformers: A Theatre of the Word,” sets the stage for a discussion of the Reformers’ appropriation of Augustine’s model. Because Bale and Foxe were more historically specific about the apocalypse than Augustine, they needed to find other ways to control the theatrical presentation of the two-cities model. Their solution was to focus all of their dramatistic elements upon the word itself, putting the book at the centre of the model of the two churches. Even more so than Augustine, Bale and Foxe work to contain all dramatic events and people within an all-encompassing and pre-existent Word.

Bale is particularly important for this discussion because he wrote Protestant plays during Henry VIII’s reign and subsequently developed a two-church model in *The Image of Both Churches*, the first English commentary on the book of Revelation. Thus Bale engaged in the clearest transposition of the *City of God* for English Reformation purposes—a transposition that has a deep connection to his own understanding of the power of drama. Naturally Bale’s model of the two churches differs in part from Augustine’s model of the two cities, but by examining the way that Bale adopts the
general model of the two cities, yet builds into it a decidedly apocalyptic view of history. Chapter 2 establishes the nature of the interpretive community that he creates for his readers in first a literal, and then an exegetical, theatre of the word.

John Foxe followed the lead of his friend and mentor John Bale, but reached a much greater degree of fame when he published the hugely influential *Acts and Monuments*. Also a close reader of Augustine, Foxe followed the two-church model in the structure of the *Acts and Monuments*, which builds upon Bale’s views of church history, martyrdom, apocalypticism, and the place of England within this scheme. My discussion of Foxe shows how he creates a community of readers through a narrative of martyrdom, and in the process gives the English nation a more prominent place in God’s providential drama. Chapters 2 and 3 take us from the beginnings of the Reformation under Henry VIII, through its further developments under Edward VI, the persecution under Mary, and the seeming triumph of the Elizabethan settlement. Through this eventful period of English history, Bale and Foxe found in Augustine a model that could help speak to the religion, nation, and language of England and its people.

Chapter 4 continues the chronicle of English monarchs by focusing on the reign of James I, but it leaves the genealogy of Protestant writers to concentrate instead upon Shakespeare’s secular drama. My point is not that Shakespeare necessarily read the *City of God*, but that the idea of the two cities had become so prevalent in English thought in the wake of the Reformation that it was one of the many religious ideas which found their way onto Shakespeare’s stage. The metaphors, allusions, and construction of history and community offered by the *City of God*, combined with the emphasis upon apocalypticism, martyrdom, and nationalism added by Bale and Foxe, provided a rich storehouse of dramatic material for Shakespeare.
Just as Bale and Foxe freely altered Augustine’s model to suit their own religious purposes, so Shakespeare altered (and questioned) many of the aspects of this model in order to suit the needs of the commercial theatre. Northrop Frye points out that “when beliefs are presented within literature, the impact on the reader is purely imaginative, and it is unnecessary for him to share or even sympathize with these beliefs to respond appropriately. Imaginative response transcends belief of all kinds.” This study of Shakespeare is intended to explore exactly this phenomenon—what happens when religious beliefs are “emptied out” of literary forms? What remains? In Shakespeare’s theatre, what remains is the aesthetic quality that unites a community of readers/audience members. Instead of creating a “theatre of the word,” Shakespeare creates a “theatre of the body” that insists upon the physical theatre itself as the ultimate arena of representation. In the playgoing public of Shakespeare’s London, we see one of the faintest, and most interesting, reflections of the community of pilgrims that Augustine once imagined.

27 Frye, Secular 171.
28 Here I am borrowing Stephen Greenblatt’s idea that by evacuating everything it represents “the theater makes for itself the hollow round space within which it survives,” the result of which is “to make us love the theater, to seek out its satisfactions, to serve its interests, to confer on it a place of its own, to grant it life by permitting it to reproduce itself over generations.” Greenblatt emphasizes that “This complex, limited institutional independence, this marginal and impure autonomy, arises not out of an inherent, formal self-reflexiveness but out of the ideological matrix in which Shakespeare’s theater is created and re-created” (127).
PART ONE

Augustine’s Two Cities
CHAPTER 1

A Theatre of the World

In 1633, an English anti-theatrical polemicist wrote the following words:

Saint Augustine brands all stage plays with this stigmaticall Impresse. That they are the spectacles of filthiness, The overturners of goodnesse and honesty, The chasers away of all modesty and chastity.... The invitation to lewdnesse, by which the Devill useth to gaine innumerable companies of evill men unto himselfe. Hence hee stiles Theatres: The cages of uncleanesse, the public professions of wickednesse...and Stage-playes the most petulant, the most impure, impudent, wicked, uncleane, the most shamefull and detestable attonements of filthy Devil-gods, which to true Religion are most execrable.¹

Throughout this passage, which is from the gigantic tract entitled Histrio-Mastix, William Prynne identifies where these opinions of Augustine can be located and quotes them at length. In Histrio-Mastix, he repeatedly refers the reader to places in Books 1, 2, 4, 6, and 8 of the City of God where Augustine makes his attitude toward the theatre clear: according to Augustine, the Roman theatre is a plague of the soul and an arena for idolatry controlled by demons. During the anti-theatrical debates in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Augustine became a major source for the anti-theatricalists, who could cite him as an authority with whom no one would argue. The City of God itself seemed to become a lexicon of anti-theatrical language.

At first glance, Augustine does seem to be unmistakably anti-theatrical. The lure of the pagan theatres and gladiatorial shows that he relates in the story of Alypius in the

Confessions, or even in the experiences of his own youth\textsuperscript{2} continue to be a subject of his vehemence in the City of God. Typical of his angry rhetoric is this passage from Book 1:

Listen to me, if your minds allow you to think sensibly, after they have been drunk so long on the liquor of nonsense! The gods ordered theatrical shows to be put on in their honour to allay a plague which attacked the body, while the pontiff stopped the erection of a theatre to prevent a plague which would infect the soul…. For this disease attacks not the body but the character. It has blinded the minds of the sufferers with such darkness, and has so deformed and degraded them, that quite recently, when Rome was sacked, those who were infected with this plague, and who managed to reach Carthage as refugees, attend the theatres every day as raving supporters of the rival actors! I wonder if posterity will be able to believe this, when they hear of it! (1.32; 43-44)

Especially during the first half of the City of God, Augustine repeatedly attacks the theatre because it is part of the Roman ceremonies dedicated to the gods whom Augustine labels as demons.

But although Augustine declares his opposition to classical theatre, condemning the licentiousness of players and playgoers alike, the idea of drama is not consistently negative in the City of God. In fact, the City of God is, in some respects, much closer to the spirit of drama than his polemical attacks in the first half of the work suggest. It is commonplace for Augustine's critics to speak of the "cosmic drama" of the City of God, or to call the dualistic struggle between the City of God and the earthly city a "drama."\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{2} Augustine describes his interest in the theatre as a young man: "For I liked to score a fine win at sport or to have my ears tickled by the make-believe of the stage, which only made them itch more. As time went on my eyes shone more and more with the same eager curiosity, because I wanted to see the shows and sports which grown-ups enjoyed" (Confessions 1.10; 31). Quotations from the Confessions are taken from Saint Augustine: Confessions, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961). References include the book and chapter number, followed by the page number from Pine-Coffin's translation.

\textsuperscript{3} See Bultmann 54; Markus, Saeculum 5; Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo (Berkeley: U of California P, 1967) 306; and Peter Brown, The World of Late Antiquity AD 150-750 (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971) 54. Harry O. Maier argues that "Most of the City of God is the record of Augustine's patient unveiling of the deeper significance of the course of historical events and their actors and the cosmic powers warring through them." "The End of the City and the City Without End: The City of God as Revelation," Augustinian Studies 30.2 (1999): 154.
One of the primary reasons for this language is probably the association of drama with an “interesting or intense conflict of forces.”\textsuperscript{4} The radical opposition between the two cities, the dividing of all people into two camps, with time and history itself as the contested space, sets the stage in the \textit{City of God} for a conflict that cannot be anything other than dramatic in nature. Markus notes that “Augustine saw the whole course of history, past, present, and future, as a dramatic conflict of the two cities, that is to say, in terms of a tension of forces which will only appear in their naked reality beyond temporal history.”\textsuperscript{5} What is particularly “dramatic” about Augustine’s arrangement is that, throughout the \textit{City of God}, everything depends on this opposition. He contrasts every facet of the cities, from their beliefs to their histories to their ultimate ends, playing with this radical opposition and trying to underline the contrast between the cities precisely because they are intermingled and cannot be properly distinguished in “temporal history.” But the dramatistic tendencies of the \textit{City of God} go beyond the overriding emphasis on dualistic conflict. Augustine’s insistence upon a providential history as a spectacle that is prescribed by God gives the \textit{City of God} a dramatistic dimension—people become players within a larger plot that is directed by God. Furthermore, Augustine’s narrative involves an interplay not only between writer (God) and actors (people), but also turns to audience members (readers) and asks them to become part of the dramatic course of history, as vital players in God’s plan.

How can we account for the presence of these dramatistic elements in a work that is also decidedly anti-theatrical? When we discern the nature of the drama that Augustine employs as compared to the nature of the drama that he condemns, the paradox seems less puzzling. He condemns the theatrical shows which excite lust, disorder, and the

\textsuperscript{4} Webster’s definition for “drama” n3: “a state, situation, or series of events involving interesting or intense conflict of forces.”
\textsuperscript{5} Markus, \textit{Saeculum} 62-63.
worship of demons—a theatre that exists for its own sake. By contrast, the drama that he
does allow is either intended to describe God's grand design of history or else serves an
educational purpose. In Book 2 of the *City of God*, Augustine acknowledges that

> There are more acceptable dramatic compositions, namely the comedies and
> tragedies—poetical fictions designed for production in public shows. Their
> subject matter is often immoral, as far as action goes; but, unlike many other
> compositions, they are at least free from verbal obscenities, and the older
> generation compel the young to read and learn them as part of what is called “a
> liberal education for gentlemen.” (2.8; 56)

However, Augustine remains suspicious of this type of “liberal education,” and he is
never interested in this kind of drama. Nonetheless, his willingness to admit that drama
_can_ be useful follows the crucial differentiation he makes between “use” and
“enjoyment” in *On Christian Teaching*.6

Because of its inherent sense of conflict, opposition, and instability, drama is
necessarily a product of the fallen world; it can be _used_ for a good purpose but can never
be good in and of itself. Thus, drama is useful in part because it is an essential
component of the division between the two cities throughout history—a division that the
citizens of the City of God must understand. Drama creates a world of contrast that
makes things clearer by setting them in opposition with one another; this method helps to
draw people together as a community that associates itself with the City of God. Insofar
as drama can help people to unite and to fix their eyes upon the heavenly city, Augustine
is willing to exploit the provocative power of this form.

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6 “To enjoy something is to hold fast to it in love for its own sake. To use something is to apply whatever it
may be to the purpose of obtaining what you love—if indeed it is something that ought to be loved” (1.4;
9). All quotations from this work taken from R.P.H. Green, trans., *St. Augustine: On Christian Teaching*
He becomes anti-theatrical when drama begins to distract people from this ultimate goal. His fear is that people will not use drama, but enjoy it for its own sake (just as Augustine and Alypius once did). Augustine fights this type of theatre by replacing it with a cosmic drama which has a plot that was "written" by God and that can be read, at least in part, in the Scriptures. God's spectacle of history, especially the promise of its apocalyptic ending, overshadows the best of the Roman shows, and includes Christians in a shared sense of triumph as both actors and audience members in God's cosmic playhouse.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: first, to give an overview of the elements of the City of God which became important in English Renaissance appropriations of this text; second, to elucidate the nature of, and discern the limits of, the dramatistic tendencies of the City of God. Thus I will examine the dramatistic elements of Augustine's model of the two cities, but also the parallel tendency for his rhetoric to emphasize the written word over the drama he asserts. I begin with an exploration of the model itself and the tropes that Augustine uses to express it, concentrating upon the literary elements of the model and showing how Augustine "sets the stage" for the dramatic conflict that is the subject of this work. Section two of the chapter then looks more closely at Augustine's exegesis, as he teaches his readers to interpret not just the Scriptures, but the phenomenal world. By expanding his arena beyond the words of the Bible, I shall argue, Augustine creates a theatre of the world that is nonetheless circumscribed by the words of the Scriptures.

Having examined the nature of Augustine's model and the hermeneutical theories behind it, my discussion of the City of God goes on to focus upon its historiography and
narratology—Augustine’s method of explaining the “plot” of God’s providential drama. His use of exemplary stories within the plot structure teaches his readers how to read the Scripture and the world, thus showing them how to act based on this reading, as they move from being observers of to actors in God’s drama.

The final section of the chapter shows how all tropes, plots, and narratives are drawn together as Augustine interprets and imagines the apocalypse. What emerges from this analysis of the City of God is Augustine’s primary interest in his audience; he creates a picture of the dramatic final conflict between the City of God and the earthly city at the end of time in order to educate his readers and to offer them a sense of hope as they walk as aliens in this world while they look forward to a time when they may rest in the next. During the final books, when Augustine discusses the expected bliss of the heavenly city, his most “dramatic” moments are descriptions of earthly events, not heavenly ones. Again, drama seems the province of the world in time and in history; his insistence upon the changelessness of the condition of eternal bliss once again moves his language away from drama, toward the more stable realm of the book.

While emphasizing the dramatistic elements of Augustine’s model of the two cities, this chapter acknowledges Augustine’s anti-theatricality, and his consequent tendency to give supremacy to the role of the Scripture/book over the dramatic. Even as he allows for the presence of his own theatrical flourishes, Augustine consistently attempts to re-inscribe his dramatistic narrative within the confines of the text. An examination of this interplay between drama and the written word can help us to understand the nature of Augustine’s seemingly paradoxical attitude toward drama, and also to see more clearly how Augustine’s model of the two cities was able to inspire both anti-theatricalists and dramatists in the English Renaissance.
I. Setting the Stage: The Model and Its Tropes

In choosing to predicate his *magnum opus* on the idea of two cities, Augustine was establishing an imaginative structure that would determine the entire thrust of his book. The idea of the City of God comes, as Augustine himself states, from the Scriptures (primarily Psalms 87, 46, and 48). He writes in Book 11:

> in this Scripture we find these words, "Glorious things have been said of you, City of God".... From such testimonies as these—and it would take too long to quote them all—we have learnt that there is a City of God: and we have longed to become citizens of that City, with a love inspired by its founder. (11.1; 429)

Augustine’s claim that biblical precedent is the origin of the title and premise of his work gives him authority and identifies his project as an extended work of biblical exegesis. However, some critics have noted that the mere mention of the City of God in these Psalms cannot be the origin of the “doctrine of the two cities.” After a long and detailed survey of the possible influences on Augustine’s model, Johannes van Oort concludes that

Augustine, rather than obtaining his concept of the two antithetical cities through an independent exegesis of the Bible, actually read into the Scriptures his already existing concept by means of “eisegesis”. It is possible that Tyconius’ commentary on the Apocalypse exerted some influence; Origen and Ambrose may have too. At any rate it is certain that Augustine was acquainted with the metaphor of the two antithetical cities, Jerusalem and Babylon, and that he saw it repeatedly in the Scriptures.7

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Van Oort’s equivocation on the subject of Augustine’s sources is perhaps inevitable, given the complexity of the issue. It does seem clear, in any case, that Augustine was drawing on a wide variety of authors for his idea, weaving them together in order to create his own model. Instead of tracing the ways in which Augustine used his material, however, the present discussion will focus on how the model works.

The following section explains the historical occasion for Augustine’s composition of the *City of God* and illustrates how his model works to envision the citizens of the City of God as a textual community, united around a shared understanding of the Scripture. By using the antithesis between the two cities and employing powerful symbols such as Rome or the Church, Augustine creates a sense of shared experience among individuals that links them to a wider community. His presentation of this model is dramatistic both in its concentration upon the conflict between the two cities, and in its tendency to encourage the readers to become part of the predestined plot of history, as members of the City of God. The stage that Augustine sets for this kind of drama, however, is entirely based upon the script of the Bible.

**The Impetus for the *City of God***

In order to understand more precisely the nature of Augustine’s metaphorical usage of the “two cities,” it is necessary first to comprehend the reasons he decided to write the *City of God* and why he chose the term *civitas* itself. When he began to work on the *City of God* in 412 or 413, Augustine was answering, at least in part, those critics of Christianity who suggested that this religion was the cause of Rome’s fall in 410. He needed to explain

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8 It is not my concern here to build upon or to argue against scholars such as van Oort, who have studied the sources and influence of Augustine’s model of the two cities. However, I would like to point out that I would give the Scriptural sources of the idea of the City of God more prominence than van Oort is prepared to.

9 For the composition date of the *City of God*, see O’Daly 972.
how Rome, which had been the powerful centre of the known world for so long, could have fallen. Much of the blame for this was aimed at Christianity, for not much time had passed since the Roman empire had first become officially a “Christian” state. Yet Augustine’s tactic of choosing the imaginative structure of the two cities did not arise exclusively from the fall of Rome. Robert Markus suggests that Augustine had begun to formulate this idea some years before 410, because “his reflection on history had already led him to withhold from the Empire—and from any secular institution since Christ, any ultimate, sacred significance.”

The de-valuation of earthly empires seemed especially appropriate after the fall of Rome, and was a natural part of Augustine’s response to certain critics of Christianity who had fled to Africa during the invasion of Italy. James O’Donnell argues that these refugees were, in fact, Augustine’s inspiration, not only as pagan opponents to whom he was responding in the City of God, but also as ironic metaphors, because “the situation of these cultured refugees was precisely analogous, in legal terms, to the kind of behavior which he wanted to preach as most suitable for Christians living in the earthly city.” This ideal of detachment became Augustine’s way of describing the citizens of the City of God who are for a time sojourners on earth.

Just as Augustine uses the predicament of his pagan opponents to develop a theory about how Christians should live in this world, so he often appropriates from pagan culture whatever metaphors or rhetorical devices he finds useful. It is Augustine’s habit to hold imagined conversations with pagans such as Varro and Porphyry, often using them as source material, and sometimes arguing with them as representatives of erroneous pagan views. O’Donnell points out that by making his work contra paganos, Augustine opened it up to a wider audience than would have been possible in an anti-

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10 Markus, Saeculum 158.
heretical work. In this way, he was able to use polemics against the pagans who were blaming Christians for the fall of Rome, and to benefit a large variety of potential audiences, including "pagans with an open mind, Christians themselves at least somewhat disturbed by pagan criticisms of Christianity...and Christians of an heretically narrow view of the separation of good men from evil ones in this life." In many ways the City of God is a conversation with a variety of opponents and allies, all posing difficult questions, so Augustine had to stretch his model and rhetoric in order to address them all. He absorbed as well as defeated his pagan opponents in this "totalizing discourse."

The uniting word and concept of this totalizing text is civitas, which is different from an urbs, and more closely equivalent to a city-state than a city; it is not a purely political organization, but an abstract idea of a community. O'Daly notes that "ciuitas has a range of meanings extending beyond those of a specific physical city or geographical territory to citizen body and citizenship." Augustine exploits this range of meanings for the full spectrum of his requirements in writing the City of God. While van Oort and others have emphasized the similarity between the idea of the polis and that of the civitas, it is more precise to understand Augustine’s civitas as a community bound by human norms and laws, following Cicero’s use of the term. Augustine transfers the notion of a community bound by human law into that of a community bound by divine

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12 O'Donnell, "Inspiration" 78.
14 O'Daly 970.
15 Van Oort argues that a civitas "is not just a group of people living together, but a community with its own religion, legal standards, culture and moral values. Therefore, when Augustine uses the word civitas, we should above all think of the ancient concept polis, the city-state. Here the elements of community, politics and religion are inseparable" (104).
16 Cicero, Republic 6.13: "gatherings of human beings bound together by law, [these are] what are called civitates.” See also The Laws 1.7.23 and Stoic Paradoxes 4.27-28.
law. James Dougherty adds the distinction that when Augustine “deals directly with the Christian’s temporal life, his civitas conveys not a physical entity closely linked to urbs, but rather a spiritual community, not grouped around a walled shrine but oriented toward a faraway city visible only in the imagination of faith.” But from the beginning of the City of God (despite the title and the precedent from the Psalms), Augustine makes it clear that in order to talk about one city, he must talk also about its opposite. The tropological significance of the civitas depends upon an antithetical relationship between the two cities. It is this dualistic city structure that involves a complex inter-weaving of various sources and gives Augustine’s metaphor its rhetorical power.

**Dualistic Cities**

The antithesis between the two cities gives the City of God its pronounced sense of dramatic conflict. The dualism between these cities is ultimately an eschatological dualism, for Augustine makes it clear that the two cities are intermingled in this world, and separated only at the end of time. However, it is important to note that Augustine is not advocating a Manichean dualism in the City of God. The struggle between the two cities is not a struggle between two substantive forces (good and evil, or God and the Devil), but between those who follow the will of God and those who do not. Yet the model is certainly “dualistic” in the sense that it outlines the two—and the only two—ends for humanity.

In the preface, Augustine makes a sort of apology for even discussing the earthly city: “I cannot refrain from speaking about the city of this world, a city which aims at

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17 A polis is the classical Greek “city-state,” but it refers to a physical entity localized in time and space. By contrast, a civitas is a more abstract notion (coming from the collective noun for citizens, cives), and is not limited by temporal or geographical boundaries. A.N. Sherwin-White makes an important distinction between the polis and the civitas in The Roman Citizenship, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973) 5.

dominion, which holds nations in enslavement, but is itself dominated by that very lust of
domination. I must consider this city as far as the scheme of this work demands and as
occasion serves” (1.Preface; 5-6). In this passage, as in many other places, Augustine
seems to be opposing the earthly city directly with the City of God, setting up a basic
“us/them” dichotomy. This radical opposition is useful to Augustine when he wants to
stress the absolute difference between the two cities, and the differences between those
who are members of each city. Many recurring ideas travel along with this opposition;
for instance, there is a difference in standards of living, producing “one city of men who
choose to live by the standard of the flesh, another of those who choose to live by the
standard of the spirit” (14.1; 547). Most importantly, the two cities have different objects
of love: “the earthly city was created by self-love reaching the point of contempt for God,
the Heavenly City by the love of God carried as far as contempt of self. In fact, the
earthly city glories in itself, the Heavenly City glories in the Lord” (14.28; 593).

This dualism becomes an integral part of Augustine’s structure. As he says in the
Retractations, he defends the Christian faith against “false [pagan] beliefs” in the first
half of the City of God, but “lest anyone charge that we have only argued against the
beliefs of others, and have not stated our own, it is just this that the second part of this
work, which consists of twelve books, accomplishes” (69.2; 210).¹⁹ Thus, in the first half
of the City of God, he uses the opposition between the Christian faith and pagan
religion/philosophy, creating an apologetic which defends Christianity against its
enemies. In the second half, though in a different way, Augustine also maintains a strict
dualism by systematically outlining the parallel development and eventual separation of
the two cities—no longer an apologetic, but a narrative dualism. Even as he moves from

¹⁹ Quotations from the Retractations are taken from Saint Augustine: The Retractations, trans. Mary Inez
the apologetic to the narrative portions of the *City of God*, he is still dependent upon the earthly city as a reference point against which to define the heavenly city.

However, the fact that he admits that the two cities are "intermingled" here on earth and cannot be easily distinguished from one another puts his supposed dualism into perspective. The two cities are indeed radically opposed, but, as van Oort explains, "If Augustine's theology is to be characterized as dualistic, on no account should it be seen as ontologically dualistic." The dualism that van Oort sees in Augustine's work is "a religious dualism" common to the theology of John and Paul, who use tropes of rhetorical dualism such as light and darkness, truth and falsehood, above and below, flesh and spirit, outer and inner man, and man under the power of sin and in the state of grace. Even if Augustine's own phraseology may have been in part influenced by Manichean dualism or Neoplatonism, he situates it in a Christian context in the mode of John and Paul. This technique allows him rhetorical power against his opponents, but the intermingling of the two cities in this age (saeculum) gives the model an ambiguity that makes an exact institutional identification of either city impossible.

Rome and the Earthly City

As many critics have noted, the "earthly city" is a difficult concept to understand. One of the clearest indications of this problem is the fact that it has no single name equivalent to the City of God; at various times it is called the "earthly city," the "city of man," and the "city of the devil." In its most unproblematic usage, the earthly city is the direct opposite of the City of God. At other times, however, the earthly city seems to have a much more neutral connotation, and even one bordering on the positive. Whatever characteristics the

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20 "the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly, the cities which we find, as I have said, interwoven, as it were, in this present transitory world, and mingled with one another" (11.1; 430).
21 van Oort 226.
earthly city may have, however, Augustine persistently identifies it with Rome. “In the years following 411,” notes Markus, “above all in the early books of the *City of God*, Rome becomes the concrete historical representative of Babylon, the embodiment of the earthly city. The new emphasis is revealing: Rome itself has now moved to the centre of the stage.”

It is fairly clear that for Augustine the earthly city=Babylon=Rome, but this equation does not solve the ambiguity surrounding the nature of this city. On one hand, the traditional Judeo-Christian view of Babylon is extremely negative. Van Oort sees some of this usage of Babylon in the *City of God*:

> It is significant in itself that in Book XVIII Augustine calls Babylon the first Rome and Rome the first Babylon. Here he uses an old apocalyptic designation for Rome. For Augustine the pagan Roman Empire, although smaller than the society of the wicked of all the ages, is in the end the earthly city. Rome is described as the oppressor of the small and the weak, the imperious and haughty one. He continually makes the sharp contrast between we – they: we, the citizens of the city of God, they, the enemies (*inimici*); our Scripture, their writers; our Christ, their fate; our martyrs, their heroes.

This is the view of Rome so often expressed in the first ten books of the *City of God*, where Augustine is intent on contrasting the Roman gods with the Christian God, by outlining the atrocities of the gods whom the Romans insist upon worshipping. Yet, for the most part, Augustine’s view of Rome is more positive than this simple apocalyptic designation would suggest.

The prevailing Christian attitude toward Rome during Augustine’s lifetime, in fact, was largely positive. Since the first articulation of Christian “history” by Eusebius of Caesarea (written during the reign of Constantine), the identification between Rome

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22 Markus, *Saeculum* 46.
23 van Oort 158-9.
and Christianity had become commonplace. In order to emphasize the union between the
Roman empire and the Christian religion, Eusebius exploited the historical link between
Christ’s birth and the reign of Augustus. Augustine’s phrase for this union, especially
during the reign of Theodosius, was the tempora christiana, for Augustine had held a
positive valuation of Rome for some time toward the end of the fourth century. However, by the beginning of the fifth century, and especially after the fall of Rome,
Augustine needed to change his view of Rome so that Christians would not place undue
emphasis on the glory of the earthly empire, which could cause them to be forgetful of
the heavenly kingdom. Augustine makes it clear throughout the City of God that he is not
supporting a notion of the tempora christiana. O’Daly even suggests that in the City of
God the Eusebian view of the significance of the Christianization of the Empire is
repudiated by [Augustine], though without express reference to Eusebius.

Thus Augustine’s view of Rome, the earthly city, must find a compromise
between these two extreme views—the negative (apocalyptic) and the triumphalist.
Augustine does not simply reject both of these views and look for a more moderate
“middle road” between them. Instead, he chooses to retain elements of both views, and
as a result, suggests William Mallard, “The empire was Babylon in two ways, reflecting

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25 See Markus, Saeculum 32-35.
26 O’Daly 1002.
27 Van Oort observes that “in his attitude toward Rome and the imperium, Augustine is not an apocalyptic. He does not share the optimism of Eusebius and others, but he does not take a completely opposite position either” (159). Markus also explains that “The ambivalence of Augustine’s attitude to Rome is a logical consequence of his repudiation of both the current Christian interpretations of Roman history. He could accept neither the hostility and opposition to Rome inculcated by the apocalyptic view, nor the near-identification of Christianity and the Roman Empire involved in the Eusebian view. This is the source of the ambivalence which has often misled Augustine’s readers and caused scholars to give one-sided evaluations of his position” (Saeculum 56).
the two-sided position of the state: The empire was the whore of Babylon, the City of Earth, the vast projection of tangled, sinful loves. The true, spiritual progress of the City of God on earth could never be enhanced by the state's coercion.” On the other hand, "the empire was the saeculum, the secular world of necessary human business, constraining, keeping order, cooperating with the church."28

When emphasizing the latter view, Augustine says that Rome can be a vehicle for the Christian pilgrims, as long as everyone understands that the place of Rome in history was part of God's plan:

the city of Rome was founded to be a kind of second Babylon, the daughter, as it were, of the former Babylon. It was God's design to conquer the world through her, to unite the world into the single community of the Roman commonwealth and the Roman laws, and so to impose peace throughout its length and breadth. (18.22; 787)

The key terms in this less dualistic distinction between the two cities—terms which Augustine had elucidated in Book 1 of On Christian Teaching, are “use” and "enjoyment" (1.4). He employs a dialectic between these two concepts in the City of God, admitting that it is perfectly acceptable for the citizens of the City of God to “use” the earthly city, as long as they do not “enjoy” it; as Augustine says, “so long as the two cities are intermingled we also make use of the peace of Babylon—although the People of God is by faith set free from Babylon, so that in the meantime they are only pilgrims in the midst of her” (19.26; 892, my emphasis). Augustine’s distinction between use and enjoyment helps us to understand why the earthly city, while in one sense diametrically opposed to the City of God, is in another sense a more “neutral” territory that can be used by God’s people. According to Markus, Rome is “suspended, so to speak, between the

two ‘cities’, that of the righteous and that of the unjust,” and as a result there is a “radical indeterminateness of human achievement, and especially of human achievement in society.” 29 Van Oort argues that “Markus goes too far when he asserts that ultimately Rome is seen as neutral by Augustine,” 30 apparently objecting to this statement in light of Augustine’s occasional use of the apocalyptic designation for Rome. Following Markus, I would contend that, while it is true that Augustine’s view toward Rome is variable, the situation of the earthly city in the “in-between” time in which Christians must live is indeed neutral, and these “possibilities of Rome[’s] being assimilated to either the one [city] or the other” 31 are also left open for the individuals who must be pilgrims in the earthly city.

The primary reason that Rome does not have a consistent designation in the City of God is that Augustine employs it as a symbol, and as a symbol it can shift between various referents. By employing the powerful symbol of Rome, Augustine is tapping into a significant tradition of historians and poets (most notably Virgil) who employed the idea of Rome as a literary expression of the ultimate earthly power. Occasionally Augustine grants Rome this earthly power, while simultaneously subverting the glory of such a comparison by suggesting that all earthly powers are ultimately illusory. The best that Rome can be, therefore, is a shadow or a dim reflection of the glory of the kingdom of God to come. Dougherty explains that this rhetorical move is effective because Augustine “reduces the deeds of Rome to the provisional reality of figures written by God in secular history, the ‘shadows’ of a true, heavenly reality.” 32 The problem, of course, was that Rome had fallen, and any power that the city retained had to be on the

29 Markus, Saeculum 58.
30 van Oort 152.
31 Markus, Saeculum 58.
32 Dougherty 85.
symbolic level (and indeed it was the symbol of the invasion of Rome more than the material circumstances that seems to have been the most upsetting for Jerome and others). Mallard argues that in the *City of God* Augustine realized that

The hope for staggered Rome lay in transforming her old vision of universality into the new Christian universality. Her breadth of dominance, ultimately doomed in itself, could pass over into instrumenting the breadth of the new reign of Christ. Thus Rome’s conquests would turn out to be a providential shadow of the true Rome of Christ’s reign. Rome in her errors and failures would ironically find fulfillment in God’s divine society.

The idea of a shadow, both as a negative example and as a foreshadowing of what will come, is the best way to understand Augustine’s view of Rome throughout the *City of God*. Rome is merely a symbol—at its worst it is the embodiment of evil, and at its best it is a dim reflection of the Heavenly City. Thus Augustine manages to take away any vital significance from the earthly city, emphasizing that Rome is a shadow, lacking in any real substance the same way that evil is.

**The City of God: Pilgrimage and Citizenship**

Although Augustine’s explanation of the City of God is in some ways less complex than his explanation of the earthly city, the *civitas dei* also has ambiguous usages which shift

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33 Jerome’s Letter 107, to Pacatula (413 CE) includes his lament for the fall of Rome: “Unspeakable! The civilized world has fallen into ruins, but sinful acts do not depart from us. The renowned city and pinnacle of the Roman empire has been consumed in one conflagration. There is no region which does not hold the city’s refugees. Churches once sacred have fallen into ashes and embers, but yet we dedicate ourselves to greed...these are the times into which you, Pacatula, have been born” (107.5).

Also of note is Jerome’s *Commentary on Ezekiel* (411-414 CE): “after the most brilliant light of the entire world was extinguished or, rather, the pinnacle of the Roman empire decapitated and, in truth, the entire world perished with one city” (Preface to Book 1). See also the Preface to Book 3. Translations by Paul B. Harvey, Jr.

34 Mallard 197.

35 For an examination of the political context that in part explains the weakness of Augustine’s own attachments to Rome’s earthly glory, see Neil McLynn, “Augustine’s Roman Empire,” *Augustinian Studies* 30.2 (1999): 29-44.
according to his focus. One of the most important characteristics of the City of God is that its membership is split—some members are already dwelling in the heavenly city, while others are pilgrims on earth. Augustine explicitly states that the City of God consists of both these populations, working together: "Part of this City, the part which consists of us, is on pilgrimage; part of it, the part which consists of the angels, helps us on our way" (10.7; 381). The dual nature of the City of God, with its members split between the Citizens of Heaven and the "resident aliens" on earth, is one of the most consistent and important tropes in the City of God. The concept of pilgrimage (peregrinatio) is not incidental, but fundamental to the City of God. As M.A. Claussen explains,

The peregrinatio imagery...is quite complex in the City of God. It is teleological, transcendent, eschatological. It was informed by Augustine’s concern for the contemporary political situation, his ecclesiology, and his ideas about reform. It is both individual and corporate, relevant to ethical divisions and part of a larger hope for that peace which Augustine believes is the ultimate human good. It is the unifying metaphor of the entire work.\(^{36}\)

Robert J. O’Connell has examined the peregrinatio metaphor in the Confessions, where Augustine adopts the idea of foreign travel as the most apt way to describe his own wandering soul and his gradual journey back toward God. The example of Aeneas provides Augustine with a literary motif of a hero whose existence is characterized by his wanderings. Yet, as O’Connell notes, Augustine modifies the Virgilian and Neoplatonic elements of this metaphor in favour of one based more clearly on Scripture, for "Augustine also finds our peregrinatio most unmistakably symbolized by the stories of the Israelites as exiled captives in an alien city, Babylon, or, more frequently, as

\(^{36}\) M.A. Claussen, "'Peregrinatio' and 'Peregrini' in Augustine’s 'City of God,'" Traditio 46 (1991): 47.
departing from Egypt to wander in the desert for those forty years." It is the biblical peregrini who capture Augustine's attention in the City of God, exemplified in characters such as Abel, Abraham, Moses, and the Prodigal Son.

The nature of Augustine's use of individuals—whether biblical persons or his own contemporaries—as examples throughout the City of God becomes clear in light of his statement that "the individual man is, like a single letter in a statement, an element, as it were, out of which a community or a realm is built up, however vast its territorial possessions" (4.3; 138). This focus on the individual soul and the psychological quality of Augustine's theology has led several critics to suggest that the model of the two cities is partially a metaphor for the individual soul. While this is, in part, true, Augustine's ultimate concern in the City of God is with the Christian community; the story of one man's journey in the Confessions becomes the story of an entire community's journey in the City of God. Rather than emphasizing the condition of the individual soul, Augustine concentrates on the membership of the citizens, who may all be "resident aliens," but nonetheless belong together. As Claussen points out, "for Augustine, peregrinatio is a social, not an individual, event." Furthermore, "The city ultimately attains its goal only because its members act in a communal fashion...it is the city as a whole that peregrinates, not the individuals of the city." The community of angels above provides the heavenly template for the pilgrims, who strive to help one another journey toward the heavenly goal. This image of a group of pilgrims is an integral part of the idea of the

38 For an example of this view, see Patricia L. MacKinnon, "Augustine's City of God: The Divided Self/The Divided Civitas," The City of God: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Dorothy F. Donnelly (New York: Peter Lang, 1995): 319-52. MacKinnon writes: "In an analogical perspective the Adamic inheritance of the individual and the history of the civitas terrena are formally homologous. Both are characterized by division, conflict, and war" (330). See also Bultmann 61; Dougherty 86; and John O'Meara, Charter of Christendom: The Significance of The City of God (New York: Macmillan, 1961) 113.
39 Claussen 43.
City of God. To define themselves as citizens of this city, believers must also define themselves as pilgrims, wanderers like Augustine, but united in a common purpose on their journey. It is the idea of *participation* in God and his plan that helps to unite Christians who are pilgrims, *in* the world, but not *of* it.

The dialectic that is connected to the combined states of pilgrimage and citizenship in the City of God is that of *change* and *rest*. Augustine says that

Part of this community [the City of God], which is an assembly formed of mortal [people] destined to be united with the immortal angels, is now on pilgrimage on earth, under the condition of change, or else is at rest, in the persons of those who have passed from this life, in the secret resting-places of the souls of the departed. (12.9; 483)

The pilgrims are journeying on earth, in a constant world of change. Yet they set their eyes on an unchanging and unchangeable God, directing their sight toward the portion of the city that is at rest. The ultimate goal—to be at rest—becomes meaningful precisely because of the absence of rest in this life. This combination of change and rest gives the community in this *saeculum* a dynamic way to measure its progress in relation to the soul’s ascension toward God.

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40 George Herbert’s “The Pulley” is a poetic expression of this idea. The poet imagines why God decided to deprive his people of “rest” during their lifetimes on earth:

For if I should (said he)
Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore my gifts instead of me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:  
So both should losers be.

Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness:  
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness 
May toss him to my breast.
True felicity comes from participating in God, for, as Augustine insists, “participation in him brings happiness to all who are happy in truth and not in illusion” (5.11; 196). This participatory emphasis becomes a recurring motif in the City of God, because, as Dougherty explains,

Augustine’s City of God did not symbolize just a life of personal virtue and of purely interior religious devotion. It was as axiomatic to him as it had been to Saint Paul that persons are not saved individually but as part of the body of Christian believers. The city metaphor, like the temple built up of many stones, is an image of corporate religious identity. Christianity is a faith stabilized by a community and a tradition of doctrine, and so distinguished not only from paganism but from heretical Christian belief as well.  

How closely is this model connected to the Catholic Church? In some places, Augustine speaks of the city and the church as synonymous: “the City of God, that is to say, God’s Church” (13.16; 524), and many critics have emphasized this point, insisting that Augustine’s model is ecclesial. The much stronger statement throughout the City of God, however, is that the church on earth is a mixed institution—a view expressed most clearly in Book 18, Chapter 49. Van Oort argues that “Augustine’s designation of the empirical congregation by the names ecclesia or the city of God implies an appeal, an eschatological summons. The historical congregation (or Church) is the city of God on earth, at present in exile, in the end at home in the heavenly Jerusalem.” This is not to say, however, that the physical, visible church on earth is the same as the City of God. Augustine makes it abundantly clear that not all who are members of the church now will ultimately be saved. It is, in fact, upon what is ultimate that Augustine focuses his

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41 Dougherty 86-87.
42 van Oort 127.
43 O’Donnell explains that in this common “misreading of Augustine’s work, it became possible to identify official, ecclesiastical Christianity—the church in this world and even a Christian state—with the heavenly City itself and to indulge in a kind of Christian imperialism which thought that an earthly society could become that which was in Augustine’s view really only possible in heaven” (“Inspiration” 79).
attention. Dougherty explains that in the City of God "the Church is an allegorical shadow prefiguring an eschatological reality, the immortal Jerusalem which is to come." Thus, when Augustine differentiates between the two cities, he says that "one exist[s] in actuality, in this world, the other exist[s] in hope, which rests on God" (15.21; 635). In the same way, the Church of this world cannot be the same as the Church or City of God that exists only in imagined eschatology.

By allowing his idea of the city to overlap at least partially with the Church, however, Augustine makes room for another of his main objectives: a pastoral one. "The Church as ciuitas dei has an undeniable eschatological dimension," contends O'Daly, "But it is also a sacramental institution, the corpus Christi defined by its liturgical life, even if that definition is not elaborated by [Augustine]." The eschatological summons and the call for participation is a plea for Christians everywhere to examine their own lives and to be on their guard. Just as Paul does in his epistles, Augustine directs his rhetoric in the City of God toward a hortatory objective. He attempts to reach actual members of Christian congregations with this all-encompassing model that asks them to be part of a universal community of Christian believers.

The City of God as a Textual Community

Augustine asserts that the City of God is a predestined community of believers, controlled, like everything, by God:

-he gives in accordance with the order of events in history, an order completely hidden from us, but perfectly known to God himself. Yet God is not bound in subjection to this order of events; he is himself in control, as the master of events, and arranges the order of things as a governor. (4.33; 176)

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*Dougherty 88.*

*O'Daly 970.*
This method of control is contrasted with the demons and deceptive rulers who “taught men as true, under the name of religion, things they knew to be false” in order to bind people “tighter, as it were, to the citizen community, so that they might bring them under control and keep them there by the same technique” (4.32; 176). Again, Augustine presents the two cities dualistically, but this time in terms of their differing use of signs. He explains that God’s signs have been his way of communicating to His people, for “The mystery of eternal life has been made known by the ministry of angels from the very beginning of the human race. It was revealed to those who were fit to receive the knowledge by means of signs and symbols appropriate to the times” (7.32; 293).

Augustine notes that God’s will has been revealed through various symbols, including “the ceremonies, the priesthhoods, the tabernacle or the temple, the altars, the sacrifices, the sacred rites, the festal days, and everything which is concerned with the homage due to God” (7.32; 293). God has placed his people in a theatre of the world, and this world can be read, like the Scriptures, for evidence of his existence and his will.46

The prophetic words of Scripture give rise to this sense of community, which began

among a small number of men, where they could find a hearing, among men who enjoyed the favour of God, and in particular among the Hebrew people, whose political community was in a manner consecrated for the purposes of prophesying and announcing the City of God which was to be assembled out of all nations. (11.4; 432)

Augustine mentions several times47 that the Jews were spread all over the world in order to disseminate these words, for “In the course of time, this people was scattered among

46 See below, section II.D.
47 Augustine’s discussions of the Jews usually occur at the end of individual books in the City of God. For example, the end of Book 4 reads, “If today [the Jews] are dispersed over almost all the world, amongst almost all the nations, this is part of the providence of the one true God” (4.34; 178).
the nations to bear witness to the Scriptures, which foretold the coming salvation in Christ” (7.32; 293). Augustine takes Christ’s fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies as the greatest testimony to the truth of Christian belief. By failing to understand Christ as the fulfillment of their own prophecies, the Jews lost their position as God’s chosen people, but Augustine takes this as a natural step in the progression of Christianity as a religion which must ultimately be not for one nation but for all people.  

This message transcends national and historical boundaries, for

This way has never been withheld from mankind, either when those events were foretold as destined in the future, or when the news was brought of their accomplishment. And apart from this way no one has been set free, no one is being set free, no one will be set free. (10.32; 424)

This structure of Augustine’s own language to explain past, present, and future revelation is identical to what he used in Book 7 when discussing the same subject: “we believe that [the prophecies of Scripture] have been fulfilled; we observe that they are being fulfilled; we are convinced that they will go on being fulfilled” (7.32; 293).

This insistence on the absolute authority of Scripture in all temporal realms prepares him to enter the second half of the City of God, which is a detailed look at the origin, development, and destined ends of the two cities based on scriptural authority. Augustine returns his attention to the written word and its role in forming a community in Book 18, when he contrasts the incompatible beliefs of the pagan philosophers with the harmony of the Scripture, for the authors of Scripture “do not disagree with one another in any way.” He insists that “This agreement justifies the belief that when they wrote

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48 That is, for “all people” in the sense that the saved come from all nations. Augustine is certainly not, however, preaching universal salvation.

49 Augustine believes (at least rhetorically) that he has proven the authority of Scripture, and that “all those who do not believe in [Scripture], and therefore fail to understand it, may attack it; they cannot overthrow it” (10.32, 425).
these books God was speaking to them, or perhaps we should say through them” (18.41; 816). Augustine contrasts the variety of pagan beliefs with a single-minded community of believers: “that nation, that people, that city, that commonwealth, those Israelites, to whom the utterances of God were entrusted” (18.41; 818). The use of a variety of terms to describe God’s people only reinforces the notion that the community itself is formed by a shared understanding of God’s textual dispensation. This dispensation and harmony, Augustine points out, did not end with the writing of Scripture, for first there was the formation of the canon, then the continuity of translations. The divine harmony of Scripture itself is repeated in the harmony of the Septuagint because 70 men separately produced a copy of the Scripture in which “There was such a unity in their translation that it was as if there had been one translator” (18.42, 820). Although the gospel continues to be spread all over the world, Augustine finds the hand of God in the miraculous harmony of this message, which can unite these diverse peoples under a common belief system.

Augustine’s sense of community bears much similarity to what Benedict Anderson calls an imagined community, which is based upon a sense of shared experience among individuals that links them to a wider community. This imagined community is essentially written into existence by Augustine in the course of the City of God. Anderson says that “Communities are to be distinguished... by the style in which they are imagined.” The imaginative concepts that Augustine develops, such as the peregrinatio metaphor and the dramatic contrast between the two cities, allows his readers to unite around a common understanding of these symbols. Basing his ideas on Scripture and transmitting them through writing, Augustine conceives the City of God as

50 See, for example, Book 18, chapter 41.
a textual community. Significantly, for Stock it is not the text itself (i.e. the Scripture) that forms the basis of a community's beliefs, but the system of interpretation that is developed around it. I wish to argue that the *City of God* itself provides a model and an interpretive methodology that attempts to enable people to imagine themselves as part of this community. In Augustine's textual community, it is both the Word of God and Augustine's own words *on the City of God* which enable Christians to understand the relationship between the two cities, and to define themselves as members of a body of believers called the City of God. The intermingling and the doubt that are characteristic of this life can be relieved only by uncovering the prophecies of Scripture. Thus Augustine struggles throughout the *City of God* with interpretive strategies that will help to clarify and illuminate the mysteries inherent in the Scripture.

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52 See *Implications* 522 and *Listening* 150.
II. The Interpretive Arena

Throughout the *City of God*, Augustine asserts that all answers lie in the Scriptures—not just the answers to explain the past, but also the present and the future:

All this was foretold and promised in the Scriptures. We see the fulfilment of so many of these promises that we look for the fulfilment of the rest with the confidence of a devotion rightly directed. This is the right road which leads to the vision of God and to eternal union with him; it is proclaimed and asserted in the truth of the holy Scriptures. (10.32; 425)

However, as he explores the language of the Scripture in order to discern the “right road,” Augustine is faced with a range of problems relating to obscure passages, terminological ambiguities, historical uncertainties, differences of translation, and indeterminate meanings. He had been trying to develop a hermeneutical system ever since he was made a priest in 391 and immediately asked for a “leave of absence” to study the Scriptures.53 One of the eventual fruits of this labour, *On Christian Teaching*, was designed to provide Christian teachers with rules on how to interpret the Bible.54

In the *City of God*, Augustine put these theories into practice, constructing an interpretive structure for his readers that goes beyond what might be expected on the basis of *On Christian Teaching*. Although he saw interpretive uncertainty as a negative consequence of the Fall, Augustine believed that God had still provided his people with enough “clues” to reach proper understanding. Thus Augustine systematizes his exegesis and presents the readers of the *City of God* with a sort of hermeneutical arena that establishes the framework within which interpretive acts may take place. Because his

54 *On Christian Teaching* dates from 396/7, though it was not finished until 427.
exegetical theory in the *City of God* is built upon an allegorical and typological understanding of the Bible, Augustine pays special attention to the relationship between the flesh and the spirit. This allows his hermeneutics to extend beyond the words of Scripture to the phenomenal realm of the body, the natural world, and images. This section shows how, by creating a hermeneutical arena that is built upon the foundation of the idea of the two cities, Augustine turns his readers into a community that witnesses the word and world of God’s drama.

**Exegesis: Theory and Practice**

Augustine has been credited with inaugurating “the semiological consciousness of the Christian West.”⁵⁵ Undoubtedly his concern with sign systems was enormously influential, but how systematically did these ideas fit into an exegetical theory? Eric Jager notes that “Augustine saw reflected in Scripture what has been called a ‘single symbolic system’ of meaning and interpretation, although Augustinian exegesis actually comprised several distinct (and separately originating) modes of reading that were not really codified as a ‘system’ until the scholastic era.”⁵⁶ Yet we may see, both in Augustine’s theories of exegesis in *On Christian Teaching* and in his exegetical practice in the *Confessions*, general patterns that became fundamental to the interpretive strategies of the *City of God*.

Augustine first outlined a systematic method of Biblical exegesis in *On Christian Teaching*. In doing so, he went further than previous exegetes and became, in the words of Brian Stock, “the first to have proposed a relationship between the sender, the receiver,

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and the sign (normally a word), which subsequently becomes a standard feature of medieval and modern theories of language.”

Augustine’s basic rule for Biblical exegesis is that

the passage being read should be studied with careful consideration until its interpretation can be connected with the realm of love. If this point is made literally, then no kind of figurative expression need be considered. If the expression is a prescriptive one, and either forbids wickedness or wrongdoing, or enjoins self-interest or kindness, it is not figurative. But if it appears to enjoin wickedness or wrongdoing or to forbid self-interest or kindness, it is figurative. 

(On Christian Teaching 3.14; 80)

Augustine’s emphasis on charity controls the potential dangers of “exegetical free-wheeling.” As Markus explains, “The exegete’s freedom—whatever may be its limits—must not be arbitrary, but subject to rules,” and therefore he insists that, for Augustine, “any individual text presupposes some kind of grasp of the overall meaning of the biblical revelation. Charity—our love of God and neighbour—is what it is, in the end, all about: the meaning of any part cannot contradict the meaning of the whole.”

To address the difficulties inherent in interpreting Scriptures, Augustine presents an ethical system (derived from the Bible) from which all exegetical acts must begin.

Augustine stopped writing On Christian Teaching in the midst of Book 3, and began the Confessions, which is not only an autobiography, but also, in Books 11-13, an exegesis of the first few verses of Genesis that employs the theories with which he had been working in On Christian Teaching. Many critics have noticed the central place that Augustine gives to theories of language in the Confessions, especially involving signs,

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58 Markus, Signs 21.
59 Markus, Signs 16.
60 Markus, Signs 18.
texts, and interpretation. For instance, Jager sees Augustine's conversion story as an account of a progression through hermeneutics: "the Fall in the Garden of Eden represents for Augustine the beginning of hermeneutics, and his conversion in the garden in Milan a middle phase based on an earthly hermeneutical ideal made possible by Christ's redemptive agony in another garden." Seen from this perspective, the hermeneutics of the Confessions becomes more important than the self-narration that we habitually associate with this book. This is exactly the opinion of Vance, who argues that "The Confessions may be seen as a sequence not only of events, but of discursive acts which carry us beyond the narrative to the philosophical, and beyond the philosophical to the exegetical." Vance's conclusion is that the Confessions passes "from the narrative to the exegetical, from narratio to enarratio." Privileging the last four books over the first nine is a useful way to understand the centrality of exegesis in the Confessions, but whether we can see the entire work (or any of Augustine's works) as a calculated movement away from narrative towards exegesis is a question to which we must return later.

Exegetical Principles in the City of God

The question of how language signifies truths that a Christian must know continued to be at the centre of Augustine's attention in the City of God, which is in many ways (and certainly in Books 11-22) a work of biblical exegesis. Significantly, Augustine did not

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62 Jager 96.
63 Vance 28.
64 Vance 6.
65 See below, section E: "Exegesis as the Paideia of the Christian Community."
complete the unfinished portion of *On Christian Teaching* until 427, when he was also putting the finishing touches on the *City of God*.

Typology is the governing exegetical principle in the *City of God*. The very idea of the two cities, explains O’Daly, is a typological one: “The employment of Jerusalem and Babylon as symbols of the two opposing cities reflects typological elements in the New Testament, where Jerusalem is the [polis].” Just as he directed his exegesis in *On Christian Teaching* toward the principle of *caritas*, here Augustine directs his exegesis toward his main subject by suggesting that all of Scripture in one way or another refers to the two cities:

> These hidden meanings of inspired Scripture we track down as best we can, with varying degrees of success; and yet we all hold confidently to the firm belief that these historical events and the narrative of them have always some foreshadowing of things to come, and are always to be interpreted with reference to Christ and his Church, which is the City of God. (16.2; 652)

Augustine maintains that the Old Testament Scriptures are “more concerned—or at least not less concerned—with foretelling the future than with recording the past” and that they “refer in so many cases to Christ and the kingdom of heaven, which is the City of God, that merely to broach the subject would entail a more elaborate disquisition than the scope of this work demands” (17.1; 712). This principle that all passages in the Bible refer in one way or another to the City of God required a more exacting theory of exegesis; indeed, Augustine had to justify the exegesis that had led him to this point.

One of the most prominent of Augustine’s exegetical principles is the cross-referencing of all biblical passages with other biblical passages, thus illustrating that all of Scripture is a harmonious whole that can be read properly only when it is read entirely,

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66 O’Daly 969.
and each word understood with reference to all of the other words. When his (imagined) critics offer interpretations that do not take into account other biblical passages, Augustine refers to them as "these people, who are ready to hold forth about Scripture without observing the linguistic usages of Scripture" and advises them "to listen to, or to read, this [other] passage in Scripture" (13.24; 545). When dealing with obscure passages that cannot always be explained with certainty, Augustine will allow a degree of latitude in interpretation, but only within reason, "For even if it is impossible to make sure of the meaning of the author of the book, we have at least not departed from the Rule of Faith, which is well enough known to the faithful by reason of other passages which convey the same authority of Scripture" (11.33; 469). Elsewhere Augustine refers to this "Rule of Faith" as the "standard of the harmonious unity of the Catholic faith" (15.26; 645). Thus, as long as interpretation remains within the bounds of certain clear norms that are expressed in Scripture (and which he identifies with the accepted orthodoxy of the Church), Augustine is content to let some things remain conjectural. He even sees a purpose behind obscurities, for "There is something to be gained from the obscurity of the inspired discourses of Scripture." Furthermore, "Sometimes the variety of suggestions leads to the discovery of the meaning of the writer; sometimes this meaning remains obscure, but the discussion of the difficulties is the occasion for the statement of some other truths" (11.19; 450). He even goes so far as to use different translations together in order to determine the most accurate meaning of a passage.67

In his interpretation of the Old Testament in the *City of God*, Augustine is most concerned with developing a theory about the relationship between the historical and the spiritual significance of the Scripture. His treatment of the relationship between history

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67 As he does, for example, in Book 20: "Thus it is not by following one translation only but by joining together both translations, by reading 'pierced' as well as 'gloated', that we recognize here in greater detail the reality of the Lord's passion" (20.30; 961).
and allegory, like the model of the two cities, is a complex and versatile system that can be used in a variety of ways. Augustine was more willing than (for example) Origen to support historical meanings of Scripture. In fact, Markus calls the development of Augustine’s hermeneutics “a steady retreat from allegory” because he emphasized the literal significance of Scripture more and more as the years passed. This is the issue that concerns him when he interprets Genesis in the City of God and proclaims that his “present duty...is to defend the historical truth of the scriptural account” (15.8; 607). But an event is almost never merely historical for Augustine, because he sees most of Scripture as a combination of history and allegory: “Historical events, these, but events with prophetic meaning! Events on earth, but directed from heaven! The actions of men, but the operation of God!” (16.37; 701). Somewhat more systematically, Augustine says that “we must believe that the writing of this historical record had a wise purpose, that the events are historical, that they have a symbolic meaning, and that this meaning gives a prophetic picture of the Church” (15.27; 648). In these passages, Augustine directs the exegetical ascent from the historical to the symbolic meaning toward a specific goal—illumination about the Church (or City of God).

Because of his interest in typology and in the relationship between historical and allegorical significance, Augustine shows particular attention to the relationship between flesh and spirit. His theological view is that flesh and spirit were not originally opposed, but became so as a result of the Fall. It is true that Augustine privileges spirit over flesh, but he does see them, both before the Fall and after the last judgement, as working

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69 This is a much different attitude than Augustine had when interpreting the opening verses of Genesis in Books 11-13 of the Confessions, where his exegesis of the creation story is very allegorical.
together in perfect concord, with the flesh naturally deferring to the desires of the will/spirit. He describes this perfection in heaven: "For just as the spirit is quite appropriately called carnal when it is the servant of the flesh, the flesh will with equal propriety be called spiritual, when it serves the spirit" (13.20; 533). Similarly, he bases his principles of biblical exegesis on the idea that any passage may have both historical/literal meaning and allegorical/figurative meaning. Although both meanings exist, the spiritual meaning is primary in the same way that the New Testament is more important than the Old Testament (even though the Old was necessary to herald the New). Thus Augustine is able to endow the flesh (and the Old Testament) with spiritual significance that points to unseen and eternal truths. He ties this hierarchy of meanings, where one exists to serve the other, together with his idea that the earthly city may be used by the members of the City of God here on earth. Because Augustine sees prophetic insights nearly everywhere he looks in the Old Testament, at times he becomes confident enough to remove the veils and to provide an interpretive ladder that leads easily from the bodies of Old Testament characters to the larger entities they represent.  

By moving the flesh and spirit into a less antithetical relationship with one another, Augustine avoids the more basic Pauline dichotomy between the two, and cleanses the flesh itself of its often negative connotations by differentiating between the corrupted body of the post-lapsarian condition and the uncorrupted body of the Edenic condition. Arguing against the Manichees, Augustine posits that the flesh cannot be evil in itself because it is created by God and is therefore by definition good: "And so we are weighed down by the corruptible body; and yet we know that the cause of our being weighed down is not the true nature and substance of our body but its corruption; and

70 See, for example, the story of Noah and his sons, 16.2.
therefore we do not wish to be stripped of it, but to be clothed with the immortality of the body." In the perfection of the afterlife there will be incorruptible bodies, because "it was not the corruptible flesh that made the soul sinful; it was the sinful soul that made the flesh corruptible" (14.3; 550-1). When Augustine wants to emphasize the resulting discord between the flesh and spirit, he will characterize the two cities according to how they live: "two cities, different and mutually opposed, owe their existence to the fact that some men live by the standard of the flesh, others by the standard of the spirit" (14.4; 553). Yet when he wants to emphasize the original goodness of the body, he points to the possibility of living purely in one's body, like Abraham, \(^\text{71}\) or to the purity of Christ. Augustine uses the Incarnation as proof that the flesh is not intrinsically evil, because God himself put on mortal flesh. But if Christ was both God and man, he was also the Word, and Augustine saw that the Incarnation offered not just the possibility of redemption for God's people, but for their language as well.

**The Fall of Language and the Redemption of the Word**

The difficulty inherent in interpretive acts was viewed, by Augustine and many of his contemporaries and predecessors, as a consequence of the Fall. "In making Genesis 3 central to Christian theology," explains Jager, "patristic authorities such as Augustine turned the Fall into...a kind of primal scene for language, a garden of signs having far-reaching significance for discourse in the church and society."\(^\text{72}\) Augustine's exegesis of Genesis explains the need for the very interpretation in which he is engaging because the Fall was "a paradigm for the art of interpretation" and also "the genesis of scriptural

\(^{71}\) Augustine insists that Abraham was able to have relations with his women without experiencing lust, and remarks: "What a true man he was, treating women like a true man, treating his wife temperately, her maid obediently, treating no woman intemperately" (16.25; 684).

\(^{72}\) Jager 1. See also Colish, Ch. 1, "Augustine: The Expression of the Word" on the relationship between language and the Fall.
hermeneutics itself, having made necessary a written supplement to God's original spoken word, as well as the veiling of God's truth in scriptural allegory." Augustine believed that before the Fall humans had access to unmediated speech with the Creator, and one of the punishments for original sin is the hermeneutic labour involved in attempting to understand the words of Scripture. In the post-Edenic world, signs inevitably fall short, leaving stable meaning an unattainable goal:

signs could never be adequate to the knowledge, either sensory or intellectual, that they purported to signify. Furthermore, signs were merely traces or vestiges of absent subjects, human or divine, and as such they could represent at best only a diminished—and at worst merely an illusory—presence.

In addition to creating exegetical difficulty, this fallen state of signs causes a sense of doubt about the worth of language and writing itself. Jacques Derrida has argued that this interpretation of Genesis was the beginning of a suspicion of all language (especially written) in which "The sign is always a sign of the Fall." This leads many to assume that Augustine's view of language is essentially negative and endlessly deferential. However, central to Augustine's theology is the conviction that there is indeed one sign that is able to redeem the word as well as the world—the Incarnate Christ.

In the City of God, as elsewhere, Augustine insists upon the Incarnation as the focal point of Christian theology. The path to salvation is available to people in a fallen

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73 Jager 3.
74 Jager 57. Furthermore, Pollmann notes that "A[ugustine] describes the bible as a text, i.e. an accumulation of human words, which are to be defined as signs, whose whole and only purpose is to point to a reality beyond themselves. However, they can never represent the things signified in their completeness and there is a gap between the sense of a sign/proposition and the reality of that to which the sign/proposition refers."
world only through the mediation of Christ: “there is one road, and one only...and this road is provided by one who is himself both God and man. As God, he is the goal; as man, he is the way” (11.2; 431). Just as Augustine sees the Fall as a fall into a world of signs and hidden meaning, he sees the Incarnation as the recovery of that meaning. Colish explains that “Rightly ordered speech, according to Augustine, is a consequence of the Incarnation. The key to the linguistic epistemology which he posits is Christ, whom he sees as the verbal and actual reconciliation of God and man.”

By viewing Christ as the fulfillment of Hebrew prophecies, Augustine found a key that enabled him to understand obscure Old Testament passages in a way that could not have been possible before the coming of Christ. As a result, most of Augustine’s exegesis is typological. Markus explains that, by focusing on both the literal significance of the sign and the “something else” to which it refers, Augustine made a clearer distinction between “‘typological’ and other kinds of ‘figurative’ or allegorical senses” than other exegetes had done.

If the Incarnation makes typology the redemptive mode of Christian hermeneutics, it also allows a place for the redemptive possibilities of Christian discourse itself. As Colish explains,

Once joined to God in Christ, human nature is restored in mind and body, and man’s faculty of speech is empowered to carry on the work of Incarnation in expressing the Word to the world.... Christian eloquence becomes, both literally and figuratively, a vessel of the Spirit, bearing the Word to mankind, incorporating men into the new covenant of Christ and preparing them through its mediation for the face-to-face knowledge of God in the beatific vision.
Despite the distrust that Augustine came to feel for the "sinful eloquence" of his days as a rhetorician, as a preacher and a Christian writer he still had to use signs in order to help others unlock the mysteries of the word. Not until the final resurrection will semiotic difference vanish,\(^{80}\) so in the *mean time*, Christians have to be acutely aware of the importance of signs. This heightened awareness about the importance of signs in this life did not result in a sense of comfort surrounding Christian hermeneutics. On the contrary,

the very idea that Christ was a unique and perfect sign—one where signifier and signified, Son and Father, were consubstantial and without difference, and wholly adequate one to the other—only intensified medieval anxiety about the infiniteness, the arbitrariness, and the mutability of the conventional verbal signs of fallen, speaking man.\(^{81}\)

In summary, Augustine's exegetical theories are based on two competing conditions: a doubt about the effectiveness of signs in a fallen world and a faith that the Incarnation of the *logos* in Christ provides a redemptive window, not just for individuals, but for language itself. Grasping the possibility of a redeemed language, Augustine uses his own discourse as a tool to help his readers to come closer to a "right understanding" of God's word.

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\(^{80}\) Jager explains that "Augustine held that Christ's redemptive work on the Cross had partially restored the vision of God lost by Adam in the shadow of the Tree, and that humans would ultimately abandon signs altogether at the Resurrection, when the elect would regain Paradise and also the original unmediated vision of God. Here all semiotic difference would vanish, and God, the ultimate Signified, would become present to humans without any mediating signifiers. Until then, however, humans possessed only traces of God in the form of signs that are inextricably part of the temporal and corporeal order of Creation itself" (61).

\(^{81}\) Vance x.
Reading the World

If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
If the unheard, unspoken
Word is unspoken, unheard;
Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
The Word without a word, the Word within
The world and for the world;
And the light shone in darkness and
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
About the centre of the silent Word.

-T.S. Eliot, "Ash Wednesday"

The dream that language can transcend the level of signs and ultimately speak the unmediated speech of the heavens is a dream that sees the entire universe as a book that can be read without hermeneutic difficulty. Augustine and Monica catch a fleeting glimpse of this condition at Ostia, but for the most part the universe, like books, is opaque to human readers. Despite the hermeneutic labour, however, Augustine does consistently assert that the world, like the Scripture, can provide us with clues and hints which, when read properly, bring us closer to the Creator. As Colish explains, "For Augustine, created things of all kinds, various signs and symbols, are spoken media through which men may know God in this life." Joseph Mazzeo adds that, for Augustine, "The whole created world is a set of symbols of the divine, a sublime poem whose words are things, whose silent voice is the voice of its creator." The idea that it is possible to comprehend the creator by looking at his creation is nothing less than a miracle for Augustine:

It is a great achievement, and no everyday matter, that man in his speculation should go beyond the created universe, having examined it, both in its material and immaterial aspects, and found it mutable, and arrive at the immutable being of God, and then should learn from him that everything which exists, apart from God himself, is the creation of God, and of him alone. (11.2; 430)

82 Colish 34.
Like the world of verbal signs, the world of sensory signs provides an imperfect and fallen, yet partially discernible, vision of the glory of God. Markus' argument is that “habits of reading the biblical text had profound repercussions on the way Augustine read his world,” and that “The theory of signs and meanings [Augustine] elaborated in his *De Doctrina Christiana* and the principles of scriptural hermeneutics elaborated there with its aid spills over into something like a general theory of understanding: a hermeneutics of human experience.”

Thus, it is not just that Augustine reads the Scriptures in light of his experience, but he reads the world in light of his understanding of Scripture. This “hermeneutics of human experience” or “universal hermeneutics” is key to understanding the relationship between the physical and the spiritual dimensions of the *City of God*. As Augustine turns the world around him into a text that can be deciphered, he takes a special interest in bodies and images—physical realities which, he asserts, can be “read” as signifiers of spiritual truths.

Throughout the *City of God*, Augustine pays particular attention to the human body as a sign. Brian Stock notes that Augustine “combines the ambivalence toward the body that is typical of patristic exegesis (notably Origen) with the idea that anyone’s body can in principle become a ‘text’ on which the story of the incarnation is written.”

Peter Brown’s influential work, *The Body and Society*, examines practices of sexual renunciation in terms of a developing Christian attitude toward the significance of the body. Brown argues that

Where second-century pagans differed most profoundly from the views that had already begun to circulate in Christian circles was in their estimate of the horizons

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85 Pollmann calls Augustine’s a “universal hermeneutics” which “aims at integrating everything.”
86 Stock, *Augustine* 70.
of the possible for the body itself....Through the Incarnation of Christ, the Highest God had reached down to make even the body capable of transformation.\textsuperscript{87}

Through acts of sexual renunciation or martyrdom, early Christians seized the signifying power of their own bodies. Judith Perkins explains that those who were martyred "offered their bodies as texts for their neighbors to read as proof for the reality of another world."\textsuperscript{88} Although the persecutions had ended in the fourth century and there was little opportunity for Christian martyrdom in Augustine's time, there was a new type of Christian with the same hallmark of physical suffering: the ascetic.\textsuperscript{89} Patricia Cox Miller argues that asceticism "attempts to reimagine how the body can be read, and what it can say."\textsuperscript{90} Thus, in many ways, writing the text of Christian bodies had become, by Augustine's time, a primary objective for Christian authors; however, Augustine's way of writing about bodies was markedly different from that of his predecessors.

While he did not by any means ignore the older tradition of martyr acts or the newer one of hagiography, Augustine was also concerned with moving the emphasis on the body away from the individual back to the level of the community. His sustained concentration on the City of God and its members made the metaphor of the communal body quite appropriate. As Patricia Wilson-Kastner explains, "[Christ] is the head and we are his members and through being joined in communion with him we are admitted to communion with God.... Only the one who is admitted to the Church, and shares in its

\textsuperscript{89} As Cameron notes, "After Constantine, extreme asceticism filled the void left by the denial of martyrdom" \textit{(Christianity 70)}. See also R.A. Markus, \textit{The End of Ancient Christianity} (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 34-43.
\textsuperscript{90} Patricia Cox Miller, "Desert Asceticism and 'the Body from Nowhere,' " \textit{Journal of Early Christian Studies} 2.2 (1994): 141.
sacramental life, can 'rejoice in participation in the Creator.'” From his description of the early Israelite people to his association of the beast of Revelation with the body of unbelievers, Augustine is careful to place the focus on the meaning of the communal body. Even when allowing signifying power to the martyrs remembered here on earth, or even to their scars in heaven, he still subordinates them to the larger body. The marks on a literal body, like the marks written on a page, signify the fallen condition. Both our bodies and the cryptic language of prophecy are products of the fallen condition, but both of these “signs” have the capacity to point to a “higher truth.”

Just as Augustine had moved away from the duality of Paul's view toward the flesh, so he also offered a different view of art. Peter Auksi explains that “Augustine’s incarnational justification of art, as opposed to Paul’s ascetic-eschatological perspective, involves a more apparent positive valuation of the sensible universe and less emphasis on the hostility of the flesh and the world to spirit.” Augustine often expresses his view of the world in artistic terms that seek the aesthetic in all of creation:

A picture may be beautiful when it has touches of black in appropriate places: in the same way the whole universe is beautiful, if one could see it as a whole, even with its sinners, though their ugliness is disgusting when they are viewed in themselves. (11.23; 455-56)

This interest in the visual arts extended to other creative media. “Augustine was sensitive to drama, just as he was sensitive to physical beauty and to the power of music,” observes Markus, who adds that Augustine “had valued the rhythms of dance and music: they

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92 *City of God* 22.9-10.
93 *City of God* 22.19.
attuned the human mind to the universal rhythm and cosmic harmony implanted by God in His creations."\textsuperscript{95} This aesthetic model of creation captured Augustine's imagination, and indeed most probably the imagination of his congregation.

In the centuries following Augustine, the use of images to re-create this aesthetic model became increasingly common. Averil Cameron notes that

\begin{quote}
if Christianity could not be adequately expressed by logical means, resort must be had to image, and where words failed, to the visual image. Thus the religious image, justified in the early stages as a way of educating the ignorant and illiterate, became the staple of Christian society and attracted its own sophisticated theology of representation. Religious images—icons—stand at the logical end of Christian representation.\textsuperscript{96}
\end{quote}

The growing use of the image as a tool for biblical exegesis was fully implemented by the sixth century because, as Peter Brown writes, "The visual image, the stylized portrait, was a concentrated and potent symbol that spoke directly to the man in the street. For the average man had lost touch with the erudite, literary symbolism that had encrusted the public life of the empire." By contrast, "The upper-class culture of the Late Antique world had been exclusively literary. The book and the spoken word were the only forms of culture that interested the educated man."\textsuperscript{97} Augustine was true to his class and his era in his special concern with words. Even his analogy of the picture with "touches of black" betrays a lack of specific attention to the visual (i.e., what is it a picture of?). Thus, his attention to the sensual world is strikingly non-visual. He uses bodies and images insofar as they can parallel the evolution from a physical to a spiritual existence that is essential to the structure of the City of God. This progress leaves the world of time-bound physicality for that of an eternal (and more abstract) bliss that is best

\begin{footnotes}
\item[95] Markus, \textit{End} 111.
\item[96] Cameron, \textit{Christianity} 226.
\item[97] Brown, \textit{World} 181.
\end{footnotes}
symbolized by the book. Augustine’s reading of the world is exactly that—a reading—circumscribed by text and directed toward the community.

Exegesis as the *Paideia* of the Christian Community

The proper reading of God’s text, whether it be the world or the Scripture, is something that must be learned gradually, both by the individual and by the larger community:

> There is a process of education, through the epochs of a people’s history, as through the successive stages of a man’s life, designed to raise them from the temporal and the visible to an apprehension of the eternal and the invisible. (10.14; 392)

Augustine explains that this process of education was designed by God, who, through the ministry of the angels, gave the law in a series of stages that helped humans to understand it and to learn gradually. Furthermore, “in those edicts the person of God himself became manifest by unmistakable signs, through the medium of created things in subjection to the Creator” (10.15; 393). As “ministers and messengers,” the angels are able to aid in the education of humans because these angels are lesser creatures than God, but closer to him, for they “hear his language in its purity, with the ear of the mind, not of the body” (10.15; 393). Yet angels are not the only ministers of God’s word. In the opening of the *Confessions*, Augustine notes that we are only able to believe in God “because we have had preachers to tell us about [him]” (1.1; 21). At the end of the *Confessions*, Augustine is more explicit about the role of human ministers in God’s educative process. He calls them “voices to carry your message according to the firmament of [God’s] book” and says that they are “needed for the perfection of the faithful in this life” because they help to “provide [the faithful] with what they need for temporal use” (13.34; 245). This was
also Augustine’s intention in directing *On Christian Teaching* to the subject of how one can be an effective Christian teacher.

The value of *paideia* was never in doubt for educated Christians such as Augustine—*paideia* was, without question, of utmost importance.98 The problem became one of definition: what constitutes *paideia*? Brown explains that “pagans and Christians fought so virulently throughout the fourth century as to whether literature or Christianity was the true *paideia*, the true Education: for both sides expected to be saved by education.”99 Throughout the *City of God*, Augustine, as a minister, attempts to aid his readers in this educative process, contributing to and defining a Christian *paideia*. In fact, in the *City of God*, written during Augustine’s long hiatus from the completion of *On Christian Teaching*, he enacts this ideal of Christian *paideia*—now not pagan literature, but biblical exegesis in the service of a Christian community.

Just as Augustine’s use of body metaphors moves constantly toward the corporate body, so does his exegesis. “From the very start of his clerical career,” observes Markus, “what exercised Augustine’s mind was not so much the question how the biblical text was to be understood, but how it was to be expounded in the believing community.”100 As Christ is the mediator for Christians, so are Christian writings the mediators in the struggle over interpretation. Thus, as Augustine performs his exegesis, he also directs his readers toward a specific goal. At the end of the previous section, I explained how

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98 H.I. Marrou explains that in Hellenistic thought *paideia*, which originally was the word for education, gained a more complex meaning. It was “no longer the technique by which the child is equipped and made ready early in life for the job of becoming a man;” instead, it was “made to denote the results of this educational effort, pursued beyond the years of schooling and lasting throughout the whole of life, to realize ever more perfectly the human ideal.” H.I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. George Lamb (London: Sheed and Ward, 1956) 98.


100 Markus, *Signs* 14. Pollmann points out that in *On Christian Teaching*, Book 4, Augustine includes a discussion of “how to perform the results of scriptural exegesis (either orally or in written form), which is unique in the history of hermeneutics.”
Augustine's vision of the *City of God* is that of a textual community "organized around the common understanding of a script" (in Stock's terms). Now, having looked more closely at Augustine's theories of exegesis, we are in a better position to understand how this community becomes a textual community, or what Markus (also using Stock) calls an "interpretative community, with its own special mode of access to the figurative meanings of the Old Testament." Markus' expansion of this idea beyond the realm of texts to the larger world of sense experience is helpful as a way of understanding Augustine's method in the *City of God*.

Similarly, Cameron argues that the Christian preacher "could claim that true wisdom lay in the Christian message, even if it needed elucidation," and as a result "the correct interpretation of that message would become a matter of authority." As a bishop and a well-known Christian writer, Augustine could claim this authority, and was thus in an ideal position to "achieve a totalizing interpretation in which secular discourse could be subsumed and brought within the universal Christian interpretative field."

There are important differences in the ways Augustine employs his exegesis in his various writings. For instance, in the *Confessions*, he maintains a narrative that eventually becomes an exegesis, but the focus is concentrated upon one person. In *On Christian Teaching*, the focus is definitely the Christian community, and the subject exegesis, but there is no narrative. Only in the *City of God* do we find Augustine combining exegesis and narrative in a way that consistently directs these forces toward the development and self-definition of the Christian community. As mentioned earlier, Vance argues that the structure of the *Confessions* is a deliberate move away from *narratio* and toward *enarratio*, as if narration were only a step on the way to the preferred

102 Cameron, *Christianity* 57-58.
activity of exegesis. However, for Augustine, especially in the *City of God* (but in the *Confessions* as well, I would argue), this division does not hold true. As Augustine reads the texts and the world around him, he constantly engages in hermeneutical pursuits, but his narrative impulses flow out of as well as into his engagement with interpretive issues. Augustine's practice of a theory of exegesis in the *City of God* marks boundaries which govern the space of interpretation. When his readers enter this hermeneutical arena, they are given tools that enable them to share an understanding of the significance of the unfolding drama that Augustine presents.

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103 See above, section A: "Exegesis: Theory and Practice."
III. History and Narratology: The Plot of God’s Cosmic Drama

Augustine explains in the preface to the City of God that his intention is to discuss the rise, development, and destined ends of the two cities—in essence, to narrate the plot of providential history. After defending Christianity against rival pagan views in the first half of the work, Augustine proceeds in the second half to show how the story of God’s city ultimately overshadows and subsumes that of the earthly city. Discussing the horrors of Roman theatre, Augustine asks whether “we are really prepared to ask or hope for eternal life from the gods of poetry and the theatre, the gods of the games and the plays?” He answers, predictably, “A thousand times, no! The God of truth forbids that we should entertain such monstrous, blasphemous insanity” (6.6; 237). Instead, he presents his God of felicity in the second part of the work, carefully explaining why it is that this God is the only one who can provide eternal life, because what he stands for is truth and true enjoyment, not false theatre, games, and play. In comparison with God’s ultimate plan, the pagan drama seems small and insignificant, completely overshadowed by God’s greater drama. Thus, Augustine’s narrative in the City of God wrestles with the interplay between sacred and secular history, but he shows how the plot of God’s play subsumes all pagan plays, just as the second half of the City of God is intended to subsume the first.

Augustine’s dramatistic narrative has two important functions: to show people their place in history, and to teach them how to live in the mean time. His narration of history throughout the City of God, and his use of exemplary stories, teach his audience how to read the words of the Bible, the world around them, and how to act as a vital part of God’s cosmic drama.
Sacred versus Secular History

"What was being fought over by pagans and Christians in the fourth century," contends Averil Cameron, "was the right to interpret the past."\(^{104}\) This struggle over the past, to claim the rights to the story of history, is a characteristic feature of the writing of Augustine's time.\(^{105}\) Following the example of Christian chronographers (Africanus\(^{106}\)/Eusebius/Jerome), Augustine's writing of history in the *City of God* "made it possible to trace the contours of the biblical landscape on a historical map familiar to educated Romans."\(^{107}\) Augustine's attitude toward history is rather complex. In Book 2 of *On Christian Teaching*, he admits that history is useful because it "is of the greatest assistance in interpreting the holy books, even if learnt outside the church as part of primary education" (2.28; 55). In the *City of God*, however, Augustine's intention does not seem, at first glance, to be the writing of history. O'Daly says that in the *City of God* Augustine "neither intends to provide, nor provides, a global interpretation of history"\(^{108}\) and Jaroslav Pelikan goes so far as to say that "In the *City of God* [Augustine] explicitly disqualified himself from being a 'writer of history.'"\(^{109}\) Augustine himself makes it clear that he does not intend to be "just another chronicler" of Roman history (3.18; 116).

The existence of history in any form, Markus explains, is (like hermeneutics) a result of sin: "History in general, the troubled careers of men, societies and their

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\(^{104}\) Cameron, *Christianity* 138.

\(^{105}\) Peter Brown says of this phenomenon: "The believer was poised, also, between two cultures, even between two historical epochs—between the growing Christian culture of the Catholic Church, with its own theology and its own distinctive habits of speech and worship, and a profane world whose roots reached back in time into the rich soil of a past once ruled by *dei buggardi*. It was a past whose darkened majesty would be conjured up with memorable circumstantiality, for all future Latin readers, in the pages of Augustine's *City of God*." Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 24-25.

\(^{106}\) Though the direct influence of Africanus is doubted by O'Daly, 1002.

\(^{107}\) Markus, *Saeculum* 3.

\(^{108}\) O'Daly 994.

institutions, as well as sacred history, the unfolding of God’s plan for healing man’s fallen condition, both arise from this primordial strain in the human situation.”

Nonetheless, historical narrative, Augustine explains in *On Christian Teaching*, is not a human institution, but a divine one: “For what has already gone into the past and cannot be undone must be considered part of the history of time, whose creator and controller is God” (2.29; 56). This may help to explain why Augustine’s historical project in the *City of God* is so closely connected to his exegetical one: his writing is an attempt to reveal the patterns of God’s creation, whether in words or events.

Markus uses the term *sacred history* “to distinguish the biblical narratives from other, ‘secular’, historical narratives” and posits that the “distinction is thoroughly Augustinian, even though the expression ‘secular history’ does not form part of his vocabulary.” Sacred history is the “privileged strand of history in which Augustine could not, as a Christian, fail to take an interest. This was the biblical narrative of God’s saving work among his chosen people, the promise and preparation in the Old Testament and the fulfilment in the New.” Secular history, for Augustine, does not have the sustained narrative unity that sacred history has.

In the first half of the *City of God*, in addition to providing arguments against Roman religions and Greek philosophy, Augustine refigures Roman history, making it part of a secular history that is characterized by disarray and disorder. He takes the great moments of the empire which Roman authors had portrayed and presents an alternative view of the histories of Varro, Sallust, Livy, and others. He systematically “reduces the deeds of Rome to the provisional reality of figures written by God in secular history, the

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110 Markus, *Saeculum* 10. It is important to note that, in this sense, “history” refers to the practice (science) of historiography, rather than to the occurrence of events. Augustine makes it clear that the Fall was not a fall into time, but a fall into a time ruled by discord.

'shadows' of a true, heavenly reality.” Augustine even relegates the famous origin of Rome with Romulus and Remus to a case study of “the division of the earthly city against itself” (15.5; 601). When he most fully covers secular history in Book 18, Dougherty notes, Augustine “subverts more absolutely the history of all the pagan world, recounting it as a sequence of wars and divinized kings lacking all prophetic significance and so having not even that provisional reality.”

More than any of the historians, however, it is Virgil and his epic about the glory of the Roman Empire that Augustine must answer. O'Daly observes that “Virgil is perceived by [Augustine] as a repository of the pagan Roman culture which he was combating.” Virgil’s objective was nothing less than to relate the story of the founding of the Roman people. This epic, with its authoritative quality and expansive scope, gave the Roman people a sense of shared identity by explaining their place in the larger plot of history. In one sense, Augustine argues directly with Virgil’s vision of Rome, especially in the first half of the City of God; but in another sense he found Virgil’s idea of Rome attractive (and dangerous) enough to warrant an alternative Christian epic construction. In this epic narrative Augustine tells the story of both cities at once: he must account for the rise, the development, and the destined ends not just of the City of God, but of the earthly city, too (which he “cannot refrain” from speaking about [1.Pref.; 5]). Virgil’s epic becomes part of the story of one of these cities only—the lesser one. An important effect of this tactic is that it works with a dialectic that can relativize the power of Rome, excising its history as part of the grander narrative of God’s plan, and

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112 Dougherty 85.
113 Dougherty 85.
115 O’Daly 998.
116 “So hard and huge / A task it was to found the Roman people” (“Romanum condere gestem”) Aeneid 1.48-49.
leaving all else to be lost in the disorder and meaninglessness of the history of the earthly city.

In the second half of the *City of God*, Augustine strives to show the unified and harmonious story of sacred history against the disordered mess of secular history. At the beginning of Book 18, he apologizes for having departed from his promised narrative of the earthly city in order to trace the rise of the City of God. The implication, of course, is that the narrative unity of sacred history can scarcely allow time or space for the parallel development of the earthly city. What matters in Augustine’s scheme of sacred history is the six epochs that he outlines at the end of Book 22. Augustine believes that, because we are in the sixth epoch, the most meaningful (or more intelligible) years of history have already elapsed. The reason for this lack of significance in the sixth epoch is that the appearance of Christ is “a decisive caesura in the history of the city of God.”

Markus explains that, for Augustine, this is the old age of the world, and therefore “there is no other decisive phase to look forward to, no turning-point to fear or to hope for; only the end… There is no sacred history of the last age: there is only a gap for it in the sacred history.”

If he had intended to be a historian of the church, Augustine could have followed the model of Eusebius. Before Eusebius there was no church history in narrative form—just in the form of a chronicle. Eusebius’ historical enterprise, to gather primary documents and weave them together in order to provide a sustained narrative of Church history, was an enormously influential one. “In the simplicity of its structure and in the

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117 van Oort 100.
118 Markus, *Saeculum* 23. While this certainly reflects Augustine’s views in the *City of God*, it is also important to note, with van Oort, that “The Church has existed since the beginning of mankind; long before the birth of Christ there was the earthly history of the city of God” (100), and therefore although the Incarnation is central, there is still a history that exists before and after it.
119 Eusebius’ *Church History* would have been available to Augustine in Rufinus’ Latin translation.
matter of its documentation,” writes Arnaldo Momigliano, “the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius was one of the most authoritative prototypes ever created by ancient thought.” In a move of literary self-consciousness, Eusebius used the invention of a new genre as a formidable weapon in this struggle over the past. But Augustine’s “sacred history” is not synonymous with Church History, nor with the mood of Eusebian or even Theodosian tempora Christiana. Instead of allying the glory of the Roman empire with that of the City of God, Augustine continually focuses his historical narrative on the Bible, and pays little attention to events since the Incarnation, except when he can use them for polemical purposes. Thus Augustine’s narration of history is always more dependent than Eusebius’ upon an overall hermeneutical framework; rather than merely assembling material as Eusebius does, Augustine interprets it.

The method that becomes most useful to him for that purpose is typology. He asks, “For what is the Old Testament but a concealed form of the new? And what is the New Testament but the revelation of the old?” (16.26; 687). Like the relationship between flesh and spirit, this relationship between the Old and New Testaments points toward the essential difference between the two cities. While providing a historical narrative of events in the Old Testament, Augustine persistently reads these events in light of the New Testament, making the record of history more complex, but also more unified, than a single chronological narrative of a text as multi-faceted as the Bible would

121 Markus notes that, although the idea of tempora christiana did at one time appeal to Augustine, by the end of the fourth century it has lost its appeal because “The legal, institutional enforcement of Christianity has now lost its importance; what is needed is spiritual regeneration” (Saeculum 39).
122 Anthony Kemp explains this distinction: “Eusebius’ task is to assemble his sources into a coherent whole; Augustine’s is to perform a work of structural-literary analysis on his sources, to make explicit the structures implicit within them.... Augustine’s history is a hermeneutical exercise, a literary interpretation of texts.” Anthony Kemp, The Estrangement of the Past: A Study in the Origins of Modern Historical Consciousness (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991) 22-23.
123 See above, section II.B: “Exegetical Principles in the City of God.”
otherwise allow. This method of exegesis allows the Scripture to resonate with levels of meaning at every turn. Thus, rather than providing a narrative (largely consisting of primary documents) about the church, its bishops, and its writers (as Eusebius does), Augustine lays down the template for sacred history as being derived from the (imagined) narrative unity of the Bible, and leaves events since then unfocused, as part of the “last age,” which does not deserve the kind of narrative treatment that the earlier ages do.

Furthermore, Augustine’s project is different from Eusebius’ in ways that go beyond the differences between church history and sacred history. Anthony Kemp argues that just as “Eusebius became almost the sole arbiter of ecclesiastical history of the Middle Ages, so Augustine became the arbiter of universal history.” As he tells the story of both cities, Augustine’s account reaches to a universal level that encompasses both sacred and secular history, whereas Eusebius’ stays merely with the universal church. In other words, Eusebius confines himself to the story of one city/church rather than attempting to narrate, as Augustine does, the story of both.

Markus explains that, for Augustine, “The landmarks of the sacred history are the fixed points in universal history; universal history is articulated in a meaningful structure in so far as its course is projected on to a map defined by the co-ordinates of the sacred history.” Because he does not treat the events in the church since the time of the apostles very extensively at all, Augustine leaves much room open for conjecture about secular history. If secular history encompasses all that is left over “when we subtract from history the strand singled out as ‘sacred,’” then it is a large area that is left in question. Since the citizens of Jerusalem may use Babylon, may they not also use its history?

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124 Kemp 18.
125 Markus, Saeculum 17.
126 Markus, Saeculum 11.
Secular history has a distinct purpose for Augustine. As it is narrated in the Bible, a story of the earthly city “may show up to advantage, may be thrown into relief, by contrast with its opposite” (16.2; 652-53). This use of antithesis in the presentation of history is something that Augustine sees as part of God’s order, for, as Vance explains, “Man labors…in a poem of history that he cannot read as a whole. Nevertheless, God has disposed the logos of history as a set of rhetorical oppositions based on the opposition of good and evil.” Yet the stories of the earthly city are not always intended for antithetical value, nor even symbolic value, because sometimes “those which have no symbolism are interwoven in the story for the sake of those which have [a] further significance” (16.2; 652). Augustine offers a series of analogies that explain why certain Scriptural passages seem to contain no prophetic significance:

For it is only the share of the plough that cuts through the earth; but the other parts of the plough are essential to make this operation possible. It is only the strings of the lyre, and of other similar musical instruments, that are designed to produce the music; but to effect the result the other components are included in the framework of the instruments. These parts are not struck by the player, but the parts which resonate when struck are connected with them. Similarly, in the prophetic history some things are recorded which have no prophetic significance in themselves; but they are there for the significant events to be attached to them, moored to them, as we might say. (16.2, 652-3)

These extra parts to which significant matters may be attached are pieces of history that are narratologically “neutral” or even offer potentially positive value (like Rome). The entire purpose of history, as Augustine says in On Christian Teaching, is that “the whole temporal dispensation was set up by divine providence for our salvation” (1.25; 27), and this is echoed all throughout the City of God. Thus there is a point to life in the sixth age,

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127 Vance 47.
and (despite his views on Grace) Augustine consistently emphasizes the process of education that people as a whole must undergo.\textsuperscript{128}

**Exemplary Stories**

Even when a narrative is cosmic in its scale, as Augustine’s is, it must include particular subjects in order to be complete. Specific events or individuals can help fill gaps within a historical framework, and also can serve an exemplary function. The exemplary stories that Augustine tells throughout the *City of God* provide his readers with models of how to live or not to live, but these stories also work to redefine Christian subjectivity itself. In Augustine’s hands, the Christian subject becomes a reader and interpreter of God’s word, and thereby a participant in his divine plan.

Augustine had already used exemplary stories in his earlier works; the story of Alypius embedded in Book 6 of the *Confessions*, for instance, shows Augustine’s complex interweaving of exegesis and narrative. Stock argues that Augustine included this story of Alypius partially because he had agreed to undertake the biography of his friend “not as an exemplary Life, like that of Anthony, but as *historia*, a narrative of past events in which care was taken to distinguish between what could and could not be recalled.”\textsuperscript{129} Stock’s analysis of this “history” shows the complexity involved in Augustine’s interweaving of his own story with that of Alypius, for, as O’Donnell comments, “It is precisely attending to the relative roles of the written and spoken words in that story that enables Stock to show more clearly than anyone before how Alypius’ story anticipates and implicitly comments on Augustine’s own word-driven conversion narrative in Book 8.”\textsuperscript{130} Rather than providing an exemplary story that shows Christians

\textsuperscript{128} See previous section II.E: “Exegesis as the *Paideia* of the Christian Community.”

\textsuperscript{129} Stock, *Augustine* 77.

\textsuperscript{130} James J. O’Donnell, Rev. of Brian Stock’s *Augustine the Reader*, Bryn Mawr Classical Reviews
how to live in a moral way, Augustine uses his stories to comment on how Christians should read, for the act of reading has become central to Augustine’s notion of a Christian subject.

Many of the exemplary stories in the *City of God* teach a lesson about how to read various texts, both pagan and biblical. Augustine’s story of Numa Pompilius in 7.34 is not “exemplary” in the sense that it tells people how or how not to live. What it does do, however, is use the story that one pagan (Varro) tells about another (Numa) to show that both men seemed to doubt the divinity of the Roman gods. This information, first recorded by Numa “in the obscurity of a written text,” is subsequently buried, mysteriously discovered by a ploughman, and then burned by the senate. Augustine concentrates on the alternating degrees of the hidden and revealed nature of this story, highlighting the power of the truth as conveyed by the written word—first from Numa’s pen, then in the re-discovery of the text, then in the writings of Varro, who tells the story despite the fact that Numa’s books were burned, and finally into the pages of the *City of God* itself. Here Augustine situates his own re-telling and reinterpretation of this many-layered story in a place of authority which supersedes all of the others.

He uses a similar tactic later, in Book 18, when he returns again to the stories of pagans, most prominently Varro. Augustine is inclined to discredit the stories of the transformations of men into creatures as described by Varro, Homer, and Apuleius. Nonetheless, he realizes the danger of completely denying the credibility of these stories, and so subsumes them under a much larger argument about the omnipotence of God. Because “God can do anything he pleases,” these stories “may be either fact or fiction” (18.18; 782). By this assertion, Augustine denies the power of the demons, and offers

alternative explanations of these phenomena (usually involving dreams which are subsequently narrated by "persons we could not imagine telling lies to us" [18.18; 784]).

A similar impulse guides his discussion of various "freaks" in Book 16. He begins chapter 8 of this book by noting that "There are accounts in pagan history of certain monstrous races of men" (16.8; 661), and then considers how these stories can be explained in light of the origin of humans and animals from Noah—the biblical story he has just been explaining. Just when Augustine seems to have become caught up in Pliny's description of hermaphrodites, pygmies, shadow-feet, and other "monstrous creatures," he calls the discussion to a close with a "tentative and cautious answer" which is, nonetheless, his final comment on the subject: "The accounts of some of these races may be completely worthless; but if such peoples exist, then either they are not human; or, if human, they are descended from Adam" (16.8; 664). What Augustine is really defending here, as in so many places, is the authority of the Bible, for "there is no untruth of any kind in the Scripture, whose reliability in the account of past events is attested by the fulfilment of its prophecies for the future" (16.9; 664).

Now Augustine is free to return to the over-arching narrative of sacred history, and here his attention turns to positive exemplary models such as Abraham. Augustine tells the story of Abraham for the next sixteen chapters, examining every detail, filling in the history, and noting the meaning behind these events. The position of Abraham as the father of Israel makes him a natural figure for Augustine's attention, but this is also an opportunity for Augustine to lay down the foundation for the typological interpretation of Scripture—to outline the promises to Abraham, then to Isaac and Jacob, as harbingers of the promise fulfilled in Christ for Christians. This "storytelling" about Abraham is also a literary analysis in the sense that Augustine often notes formal features in Genesis: "we
must realize that Scripture is here, as so often, going back to a point that the narrative had already passed" (16.15; 673). Augustine examines character and plot while always holding onto both the historical and the allegorical meaning of these events. These stories of Old Testament patriarchs are bound up with Augustine’s theory of Old Testament exegesis, but as exemplary stories they also hold an anagogical significance. Above all, however, Augustine’s attention to this part of Scripture (from one of the most “narrative” of the Old Testament books) prepares the readers to identify with these characters, while looking for their complete identity in the writings of the New Testament.

Combining the life stories of biblical characters and the exegetical significance of these lives is the ultimate end toward which Augustine’s exemplary stories flow. Perhaps the best example of this is St. Paul, whose heroic qualities Augustine gleans from the words of Scripture to such an extent that his description of the Apostle is a tableau taken from the Epistles:

[Paul] was Christ’s athlete, taught by Christ, anointed by him, crucified with him; he gloried in Christ, and in the theatre of this world, for which he was made a spectacle in the sight of angels as well as men, he fought a great fight and kept the rules and pressed on ahead for the prize of the calling to the realms above. The citizens of God’s City are happy to gaze at this hero with the eyes of faith. (14.9; 563)

The hero provides a positive exemplum for the citizens, but this exemplum has more to do with how they should read Paul’s words than with how they should interpret his life. By participating in the reading of Paul’s letters, Christians become part of an interpretive community which requires that, even in the act of reading, they see themselves as readers. As Stock explains, “Life is a text, whose living is its reading: for, if the mind is the measure of time, the internalization of scripture can set up a narrative structure by
which the self is guided from within.” \footnote{131}{Stock, \textit{Augustine} 239.}

Augustine is not interested in the stories of Christian ascetics or heroes in the sense that hagiographers before him had been. Instead, he moves Christian discourse towards an embracing of what Markus calls “Christian mediocrity.” \footnote{132}{Markus, \textit{End}, Chapter 1, Part 4: “Augustine: A Defence of Christian Mediocrity.”}

This “mediocrity” is a way of making all believers (who are all alike in their innate depravity) part of the same lateral organization. This sense of cohesion in the community is achieved through a common experience of reading.

But if Augustine’s narrative makes Christians aware of how they read, it also incites them to act in accordance with God’s will as prescribed in his text. It is striking how similar this tactic is to the ways in which some of the late Roman emperors had called on their subjects to be obedient. In her study \textit{Actors in the Audience: Theatricality and Doublespeak from Nero to Hadrian}, Shadi Bartsch uses Nero as a pivotal figure to examine how “the accession of an emperor who performed on the stage brought to the front of [the consciousness of his times] a preoccupation with the nature of power and representation.” \footnote{133}{Bartsch 193.} Furthermore, “it spurred his upper-class audiences to reflect upon, evaluate, and reformulate the interplay between emperor and audience in all realms of life; it provided a situation rich with the potential to make of the stage a paradigm for larger questions about politics and theater.”

These preoccupations with truth and representation in the political realm were of great concern to Christians, who were often in danger of persecution under Nero or other emperors. The idea of drama became one of the most effective models for examining the problem of representation, but the Christians also discovered in this metaphor an excellent way to describe their relationship with their ultimate leader on a much greater stage. It is this relationship between representation and theatre that Augustine exploits in the \textit{City of God}, as he asks his readers to become not
just witnesses of, but participants in, the course of providential history which is played out as a dramatic conflict on a cosmic stage.

God as Author

If this drama of history is written by God, the precise nature of his “authorship” is nonetheless difficult to discern in the City of God. Partial clues to how we may approach this question appear in Confessions 13.15, where Augustine describes the firmament as a book that is laid open for us to read. This firmament is the Scripture (also known as God’s will or decree), which exists through the work of the prophets, who are the “hands of God.” Below this firmament, there are two types of people. There are those who cannot read the will of God in this Scripture because of pride or other sins, and for them the heavens will eventually be folded up and the book closed. But there are others who can see in the Scripture—though imperfectly—the will of God. These Scriptures are for our benefit; they separate us from the full glory of God, which we cannot attain, but also enable us to read in time the will of God (which is the only way we can read). By contrast, the ones above the firmament are already participating in God’s will. They read him like a book, but not as we would read a book. This reading is perfect and timeless, and results in a perfect concord of will. Vance notes that

unlike mortals enslaved by the liberal arts, for whom intellectual servitude is a consequence of the Law of Sin, these celestial readers give themselves over to a reading (lectio) that they choose of their own free will (elegendo) and that is only a source of esteem and delight (diligendo), not of difficulty.

For mortals who are chained in the world of history, however, God has created a script. As G.L. Keyes explains, “[Augustine] believes that the plot of the Divine Comedy has

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134 The image is from Revelation 6.
135 Vance 31.
exist from eternity in the mind of God, who has created performers, ourselves among them, who can and must carry out that plot in every external detail.”

God’s prescribing of history is evident in the Scriptures; when subsequent events take place which support prophecy, they give credence to God’s authority, for, asks Augustine, “could we rely on a better chronicler of the past than one who also foretold the future as we now see it happening before our eyes?” (18.40; 815). Not only does this prescription involve universal history, but it also involves each person individually. The most striking example of this is the “Book of Life” from the Apocalypse. Augustine explains that “What is symbolized [in this book] is the predestination of those to whom eternal life will be given…. The fact is that [God’s] foreknowledge of them, which is infallible, is itself the book of life on which they are written, that is, they are known beforehand” (20.15; 926-27).

Augustine asserts God’s authorship of the world against rival pagan views which see God reflected in, but not as the creator of, the natural world. Markus notes that, for Augustine, “the eternal law (or God’s will) orders (iubet) the conservation of the order of nature. It is not said to be embodied, or even reflected, in the order of nature, but stands behind it as its ultimate source and sanction.”

God’s will is the script behind history—all that will happen or has happened has been (in some mysterious sense) written by God. According to this Providential view of history, in which all events are predetermined by God, people are like mere actors in his play. Yet we should be careful of using a word like “mere” to describe God’s play, for Augustine emphasizes throughout the City of God that taking part in the drama of sacred history is the greatest of honours. Augustine’s call for people to participate in this eschatological drama gives them a distinct role to play in

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137 Markus, Saeculum 90.
salvation history—it includes them in an imagined community which can not be clearly
discerned in this saeculum, but which promises glory greater than mortals can fathom.

By contrast, the fables and fictions of the Roman stage do not follow God’s script;
in fact, the demons attempt to subvert that authoritative text by encouraging lies and
idolatry. This attitude toward theatre is reflected in Augustine’s view of Roman history
in general, for, as Peter Brown explains, Augustine turns the history of Rome into “the
story of a community, deprived of the authority of Christ, and left to drift at the mercy of
forces beyond the control of a fragile crust of human virtue.”138 Those who are not part
of God’s drama are left to drift in a directionless existence that is, we might say, like an
un-authored play. Without providence, the drama of human life is mere improvisation.

But in what sense does God control the actions of the actors? Because of free
will, each actor can choose to obey and follow God’s will, or else not to. There is no
other play, only a turning away from this one. Those who are not called or chosen by
God cannot properly be called actors. They are, instead, the “touches of black” (11.23;
455) in God’s creation. God does not “write” disobedience—those who are disobedient
are farther from God and thus closer to the nothingness from which they were created.
These “holes” in the drama do not detract from the beauty of the play; as they do in the
picture, these black touches allow an overall beauty in the whole because of the
usefulness of antithesis.139 “Augustine’s strong aesthetic tendency, his worship of
beauty,” argues John Figgis, “comes out in the doctrine that history is in truth a heavenly
song—that, in some way or other, the evil in it is overruled by the beauty of the whole—

138 Brown, World 311.
139 Keyes makes a similar point: “In the denouement, most of the human actors will be found to have been
expendable stage properties, consigned in the end to the dustbin of eternal damnation, but without
prejudice, St. Augustine assumes, to one’s belief in an essentially ‘happy ending’” (148).
Augustine's aesthetic model of creation, because of its central concern with the action of history, has even more in common with drama than it does with a painting or a piece of music. The stage of history gives meaning to our existence on earth. Augustine's dramatic view of creation focuses attention on the points of light—God's actors who are called to be part of the play. Yet at every moment Augustine must leave this glory unrealized, because the play, like the narrative of history, only makes sense from an eschatological vantage point that has not yet been attained.

IV. The Eschatological Spectacle

At the end of Book 22, the conclusion of the *City of God*, Augustine gives his famous periodization of history. He explains that "the epochs of history are reckoned as 'days', following the apparent temporal scheme of Scripture.... The first 'day' is the first period, from Adam to the Flood; the second from the Flood to Abraham" (22.30; 1091). The third is from Abraham to David, the fourth from David to the Exile, and the fifth from the Exile to the coming of Christ in the flesh. "We are now," says Augustine, "in the sixth epoch, but that cannot be measured by the number of generations" (22.30; 1091). These periods structure sacred history as a progression from infancy to adulthood to old age, and (as mentioned previously) Augustine does think of the world as being in its old age. However, the idea that the number of generations between the present time and the end of the world cannot be measured is important to Augustine, and is characteristic of his desire to move away from some of the millennial interpretations of the Apocalypse that had become popular. Nonetheless, the consistent thrust of Augustine’s approach is eschatological, and the end of time is not only a factor in his theology—it is the determining point in relation to which everything else must be interpreted.

All models and tropes, hermeneutics, and narratives are eschatologically oriented in the *City of God*. The centrality of the ending relativizes all narratives, which must be understood, as if retrospectively, from an imagined ending point. In this section, I shall look at Books 20-22 of the *City of God* in order to show how the ending of Augustine’s grand work helps us to understand the place of eschatological language in his theology.

and to relate this eschatological language to the language of theatricality and anti-theatricality in the *City of God*.¹⁴²

Augustine is certainly interested in the spectacle of the apocalypse, and the excitement he conveys during his description of the End Times draws upon a sense of spectacle that is informed by the idea of drama. However, Augustine's language lacks the ecstatic theatrical metaphors of his predecessor Tertullian, who argued that the spectacles of Christianity far surpass the greatest of pagan shows:

> If the literary accomplishments of the stage delight you, we have sufficient literature of our own, enough verses and maxims, also enough songs and melodies.... Do you want contests in boxing and wrestling? Here they are—contests of no slight account, and plenty of them. Behold impurity overthrown by chastity, faithlessness slain by faith, cruelty crushed by mercy, impudence put in the shade by modesty. Such are the contests among us, and in these we win our crowns. Do you have desire for blood, too? You have the blood of Christ. *(Spectacles 104)*¹⁴³

Like Tertullian, Augustine contrasts the wickedness of the pagan theatres with God’s great spectacle. However, Augustine’s is not a theatre of the martyrs, and his sense of spectacle is also less dramatic than Tertullian’s. Markus observes Augustine’s dramatistic language: "The Christians’ true spectacle, Augustine once said, is Jerusalem, ‘the vision of peace’, and Sion, ‘contemplation’; so let the pagans not imagine that they only have spectacles."¹⁴⁴ This is the same rhetoric that Tertullian employs in the passage quoted above (asserting the superior quality of Christian shows). But whereas Tertullian mentions boxing, wrestling, and blood, Augustine speaks only of a vision of peace and peace and

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¹⁴² Although Augustine also includes Book 19 in the group of last four (pertaining to the destined ends of the two cities), that book deals primarily with the definition of the “Supreme good” and contrasts the ultimate objectives of the two cities. Thus, it does not concern the End Times in the way that the following three books do.


¹⁴⁴ Markus, End 118 (he is quoting from *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 98.5, 147.8).
contemplation. This crucial difference points to his reluctance to use dramatistic language when he is imagining the ultimate bliss of heaven. Nonetheless, when Augustine describes the events leading up to the End, his narrative is informed by the idea of drama: his portrayal of the pre-ordained spectacle of the apocalypse presents the forces of evil on a sort of cosmic stage, and he transfers the imperative to act to the audience, making them feel a vital part of this dramatic denouement of history.

Augustine has already presented the origins and development of the two cities in Books 11-18; now, as he presents the ends of the two cities, the orientation of all that has come before becomes clearer. The end of the City of God, which is about the end of the world, draws together all of the literary as well as theological forces of this book in the same way that the denouement of a play ties all of the strands of its plot together for a final resolution. There is certainly a dramatistic quality to Augustine’s imagination of the End Times, but his most dramatic narratives in these final books involve events that he has experienced on earth, while his imagination of the bliss of the heavenly city ultimately leaves the language of dramatic action in favour of a language of rest and stasis.

Judgement

Book 20 concerns the Last Judgement. Augustine begins the book by announcing his methodology: “I am going to speak about the day of God’s final judgement, as far as he will grant me, and to assert it in the face of the irreligious and the unbelieving; and I must start by laying down as, so to speak, the foundation of the building, the evidence of inspired Scripture” (20.1; 895). Not only will he use the Scriptures in order to explain his case, but he will use them in a particular order: first the New Testament, then the Old, because the Old must be read in light of the New. By situating his exegesis in this
general typological mode, Augustine is able to present a structured analysis of the events of the Last Judgement. He begins with the passages from the gospel, then moves to the book of Revelation and Paul’s epistles. This New Testament foundation prepares him for a retrospective look at the prophecies of Isaiah, Daniel, the Psalms, and Malachi.

One of Augustine’s main objectives in forming a theory about the Last Judgement is to determine which passages refer to the judgement that is already happening in the world (as God judges everyone), and which are instead referring to the final apocalyptic Judgement. A similar problem arises when certain passages “may refer, for example, to the coming of the Saviour in the sense that he comes throughout this present age in the person of his Church, that is in his members, part by part and little by little, since the whole Church is his body” or else to “the destruction of the earthly Jerusalem.” Rather than leaving the problem unsolved, Augustine posits that “the two events cannot possibly be distinguished except by comparing the parallel statements on this subject in the three evangelists” (20.5; 902). This method of biblical comparison, which attempts to make all of the Scriptural accounts of a certain passage harmonize with one another, is one of the hallmarks of his biblical exegesis. This method even works intratextually:

Now in this book called the Apocalypse there are, to be sure, many obscure statements, designed to exercise the mind of the reader; and there are few statements there whose clarity enables us to track down the meaning of the rest, at the price of some effort. This is principally because our author repeats the same things in many ways, so that he appears to be speaking of different matters, though in fact he is found on examination to be treating of the same subjects in different terms. (20.17; 929)

Thus Augustine examines the writing style of a particular author in tandem with his exegetical principles of typology, cross-referencing, interpretation according to the “rule
Because of the cryptic nature of the prophecies Augustine discusses in this book, he must pay close attention to the use of figurative language. He explains that "metaphorical and literal expressions are intermingled in the prophetic manner, so that a sober attentiveness may arrive at the spiritual meaning by a painstaking effort which is both useful and salutary." This "sober attentiveness" is contrasted with a lower form of interpretation where "the indolence of the flesh and the slowness of an uninstructed and untrained mind is content with the superficial, literal meaning and thinks that no inner meaning is to be sought" (20.21; 940). The difference between the types of readers and the kinds of meaning they seek figures into larger questions about the spirit and the flesh, which are a central concern in this book, because Augustine speculates on the nature of the body after death. In order to answer all of the questions which he imagines may be put to him, he develops a complex theory of two deaths and two resurrections. Such a theory allows for both historical and figurative understandings of certain prophetic passages. When discussing the separation of the two cities which is enacted at the Last Judgement, Augustine again returns to the subject of the Church as a foreshadowing of the glory of the City of God to come; here he states more clearly than he had previously his view that the earthly church is a reflection of, but not a realization of, the eschatological church (20.9; 915).

The relationship between the part and the whole, and the accompanying metaphors of the body, dominate most of the latter half of Augustine's book. Especially on the cosmic battlefields of the last days, the two cities seem like two giant entities, with the members of each constituting a single body. Thus, Augustine chooses to interpret the
beast of Revelation 20 not as a historical person, but as “the godless city itself, and the people of the unbelievers, contrasted with the people of the faith and the City of God” (20.9; 917). Augustine associates this city of unbelievers with hypocrisy and deception. Although he does say that the two cities will become more clearly demarcated in the last days, he also notes that the False Prophet and the Antichrist (both masters of hypocrisy) will come to deceive the people. Therefore, Christians must not have excessive faith in their own abilities; instead, they should entrust themselves to God and his plan. Indeed, the principle of caritas presupposes a dependence upon the community. By enfolding his readers within the interpretive community that he constructs, Augustine ensures that they will not “stray” from proper interpretation, nor feel excluded from the community of believers.

Augustine’s eschatology centres upon the role of the individual within the community,145 thus, when he speaks of the role of the martyrs in heaven, he admits that they will have a special place, but not to the exclusion of the rest of the body of believers, because “we take the part as implying the whole, and interpret it as meaning that the rest of the dead also belong to the Church, which is the kingdom of Christ” (20.9; 916-17). Augustine elucidates this same interdependence between the individual and the larger body of the community when he discusses the Book of Life and the Book of Judgement, reminding his readers that at the end of time each individual’s life “will be recalled to mind and presented to the mind’s view with miraculous speed, so that each man’s knowledge will accuse or excuse his conscience.” He explains this metaphor in detail, remarking that “This divine power is no doubt called a ‘book’ because it ensures the

145 As Bultmann explains: “In the apocalyptic view the individual is responsible for himself only, because the end will bring welfare and judgment at the same time; and the individual’s future will be decided according to his words. And this judgment is a judgment over the whole world. Certainly, the welfare to come is also the welfare of the community, but the community is the community of the elect, the saints, and therefore not a community of a people or nation, but a community of individuals” (31).
recollection of the facts, and those facts are, as we may say, ‘read’ in this process”
(20.14; 924-25). This book is God’s Predestination itself, at once written and read and
known, in a synchronic moment which we cannot understand until this Last Judgement is
complete. The judgement of the law from the Old Testament is replaced by a new law in
the New Testament, but the book remains the best metaphor and a sustaining symbol for
the description of the Last Judgement which calls each individual to account.

After his detailed exegetical tour of the Last Judgement in this book, Augustine is
prepared to admit (lest he become too bold or certain of his interpretive powers in the
fallen world) that “All these events, we must believe, will come about; but in what way,
and in what order they will come, actual experience will then teach us with a finality
surpassing anything our human understanding is now capable of attaining.” “However,”
he adds, “I consider that these events are destined to come about in the order I have
given” (20.30; 963). We may be inclined to greet the rhetorical brashness of this
statement with a smile; however, by such a reaction we may be in danger of
underestimating what Augustine has achieved in the course of the twentieth book. He
has engaged his readers in a hermeneutical exercise, guiding them painstakingly through
all of the evidence. He has uncovered clues in the cryptic words of Scripture and found
treasure: “Here it is, then, made manifest, the hidden thing for which we were looking”
(20.30; 962). He also has dismissed some interpretations, explained why others must be
ture, left room in the middle for uncertainty, and cautiously posited some suggestions that
would work with the overall interpretation of the Last Judgement which he has
developed. He has even gone so far as to assert in the final chapter that

There is no one...who denies or doubts that the last judgement, as it is foretold in
holy Scripture, is to be executed by Jesus Christ, unless it is someone who, with
an unbelievable kind of animosity or blindness, does not believe in those sacred writings, which have by now demonstrated their truth to the whole world.

(20.30; 963)

At this point in his work, Augustine asks his readers to judge themselves as they will be judged. By doing so, Augustine shifts the perspective of the drama: no longer are his readers passive audience members—they are now actors who must be accountable under the gaze of an omniscient God. They must ask themselves whether they are part of this godless city, showing animosity or blindness, or whether they are part of God's city. If they choose the latter option (which, of course, they are bound to do), they are invited to imagine, with Augustine, what it will be like to become participants in the glory of God's eternal city, and observers of the punishment he metes out to the wicked.

Punishment

Augustine constructs Books 21 and 22 in an antithetical relationship to one another in order to provide a vivid contrast between the fates of the saved and the damned, who share opposite extremes of the same condition—"both the saints and the damned will be united with their bodies" (21.1; 964) for eternity. He uses the damned as he claims God does: to provide a contrast so that the saved will understand the extent of the glory which they are being allowed to share. As a result of the Fall, humankind is a "condemned lump," and

there is no escape for anyone from this justly deserved punishment, except by merciful and undeserved grace; and mankind is divided between those in whom the power of merciful grace is demonstrated, and those in whom is shown the might of just retribution. Neither of those could be displayed in respect of all mankind; for if all had remained condemned to the punishment entailed by just condemnation, then God's merciful grace would not have been seen at work in anyone; on the other hand, if all had been transferred from darkness into light, the truth of God's vengeance would not have been made evident. (21.12; 989)
The contrasting shades of light and darkness parallel the plight of the saved and the damned in a rhetorical coupling that makes use of antithesis to illustrate by opposition.

Augustine's use of antithesis throughout the *City of God* has been building up to this point. As Phillip Pulsiano remarks, Augustine "patterns his narrative by way of contrast, with narrative blocks clearly set against one another in an effort to relate his dual narratives." He adopts antithesis as his own rhetorical device, because he believes that it is one of the principles upon which God's creation is based:

The opposition of such contraries gives an added beauty to speech; and in the same way there is beauty in the composition of the world's history arising from the antithesis of contraries—a kind of eloquence in events, instead of in words....For God would never have created a man, let alone an angel, in the foreknowledge of his future evil state, if he had not known at the same time how he would put such creatures to good use, and thus enrich the course of world history by the kind of antithesis which gives beauty to a poem. (11.18; 449)

The parallels that Augustine sees between the structure of the natural world and the structure of language are absolutely essential to an understanding of the culminating effect of the dramatic tension between Books 21 and 22.

From the beginning of Book 21, Augustine sets out to prove that the Scripture's assertions about damnation are entirely possible. His detailed look at how a body can burn forever and how the soul can be afflicted for eternity is, among other things, an effective method of frightening his audience. But Augustine does not invent this language himself—he pulls it out of the Scripture and notes how Jesus repeats a phrase from Isaiah, referring to the hell of fire "where their worm never dies and their fire does

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not go out.” Augustine examines the rhetoric of this passage, and points out that “[Jesus] did not find it irksome to repeat the same form of words three times in the same passage.” Then he voices the natural readerly response: “Who could fail to be appalled at this repetition, this vehement emphasis on that punishment, uttered from his divine lips?” (21.9; 984). Augustine’s concentration on literary devices becomes part of a theory of how actual events and phenomena of this world should be read and understood. There are certain signs which should be read correctly; as Augustine explains,

These “monsters”, “signs”, “portents”, and “prodigies”, as they are called, ought to “show” us, to “point out” to us, to “portend” and “foretell”, that God is to do what he prophesied that he would do with the bodies of the dead, with no difficulty to hinder him, no law of nature to debar him from so doing. (21.8; 983)

Both events and words must be understood and interpreted as part of a natural order which God has presented to us. Augustine often attempts to echo this natural order by structuring his own tropes after the model of Scripture. His attention to the natural world is apparent in Book 21, where he turns to the marvels of nature in order to provide examples of fantastic phenomena which make it less incredible to imagine that flesh could burn for all eternity.

Augustine reads not only the Scripture, but other literature (e.g. Virgil) and the world around him in order to extrapolate the meaning of prophecy and the nature of hell. All resources are drawn into this interpretive arena and set up in a series of dialectics that imitate the antithetical model of the two cities. Peter Brown points out that

Juxtaposition... is the basic literary device that determines the structure of every book of the City of God. Augustine deliberately uses it to contrive a “stereoscopic” effect. The solutions of the new Christian literature must “stand out more clearly” by always being imposed upon an elaborately constructed
background of pagan answers to the same question. It is a method calculated to give a sense of richness and dramatic tension.\textsuperscript{147}

Augustine uses this dramatic tension to drive a wedge between the two cities—to anticipate the separation between them that God will create on Judgement Day. This antithetical presentation of the two cities at the end of the City of God allows his readers to imagine with horror and fear the fate of the damned—a spectacle of suffering that presumably tapped into the same sort of excitement generated by the gladiators or the public executions. Augustine’s much more important imaginative structure, however, creates a sense of wonder that allows his readers to imagine themselves as part of the eternal glory of God’s heavenly city.

Reward
Book 22 is about the blessedness of the saved and the glory of the fulfillment of God’s plan. As he fashions the denouement to the City of God in Book 22, Augustine intends to keep the only promise he has left unfulfilled: to discuss the eternal bliss of the Heavenly City. The first few chapters of this book meet the task at hand in a logical manner—by explaining the concept of eternity, giving Scriptural evidence for the resurrection and anticipating pagan objections. In chapter 5, Augustine defends the credibility of Christianity in an unusual manner—it is incredible that Christ ascended to Heaven, Augustine admits, but what is more incredible is that the whole world has come to believe this incredible event. The spread of Christianity, against all odds, lends the greatest credibility to the incredible story of Christ. The physical resurrection and ascension of Christ would never have been believed in the enlightened world of Augustus and Tiberius, argues Augustine, if these events had not been demonstrated by the truth of

\textsuperscript{147} Brown, World 306, my emphasis.
the divine power, with confirmation by miraculous signs. These miraculous signs are a
combination of scriptural and physical revelation; the testimony of the Prophets pointed
toward the divinity of Christ, but physical demonstrations of the divine power closed the
case. And these demonstrations occurred not just in the time of Christ, but afterwards,
and were especially evident through the martyrs who died for belief in him.¹⁴⁸

Using the martyrs as the link between miraculous events of Christ’s time and his
own, Augustine turns his attention to miracles he has either witnessed or heard of first-
hand. In chapter 8 (the longest of Book 22), Augustine tells one story after another of
incredible cures, mostly effected by the martyrs’ relics or shrines.¹⁴⁹ Each story shows
the efficacy of the martyrs even after their death, and provides a testimony that miracles
have not ceased just because, in Augustine’s words, “the whole world has come to
believe in Christ.” But there is a more unified purpose here, which is directly related to
Augustine’s project in Book 22. He is dismayed that these stories are not widely known;
“The canon of holy Scripture,” argues Augustine “ensured that those earlier miracles
should be read everywhere, and should stick in the memory of the people everywhere,
whereas the more recent examples, wherever they occur, are scarcely known to the whole
community there, or even throughout the particular neighbourhood” (22.8;1034).

Following the account of Petronilla’s cure, Augustine laments again:

¹⁴⁸ The attitude that Augustine has toward miracles in Book 22 is different from his earlier skepticism,
especially because these miracle stories were a hallmark of the Donatist faith which he attempted to refute.
Peter Brown explains that “when Augustine wrote On the True Religion in 390, he had stated, explicitly,
that miracles such as had happened in the times of the Apostles were no longer allowed to take place
[XXV,47]; and he had repeated this view, by implication, in many other books and sermons [Retr. I,13,7].
At the same time, however, he had actually witnessed, and accepted, the cures associated with the
spectacular discovery of the bodies of Gervasius and Protasius in Milan. Thus, Augustine’s sudden*
decision to give a maximum of publicity to miraculous cures in Africa, should not be regarded as a sudden
and unprepared surrender to popular credulity. It is, rather, that, within the immensely complex structure of
Augustine’s thought, the centre of gravity had shifted; modern miracles, which had once been peripheral,
now became urgently important as supports to faith” (Brown, Augustine 415).
¹⁴⁹ For Augustine’s use of stories such as this, see above, section III.B: “Exemplary Stories.”
these modern miracles are not so widely known; nor have they been pounded into
the memory by frequent reading, as gravel is pounded into a path, to make sure
that they do not pass out of the mind. At Hippo we have started the practice of
reading to the people the accounts of those who receive such blessings. But even
where this care is taken those who are present hear the story only once; and many
of the people are not present. The result is that after some days those who were
there do not keep in their minds what they have heard; and scarcely anyone can be
found who is able to tell the story he heard to one whom he knows to have been
absent. (22.8; 1045)

Part of Augustine’s objective in chapter 8 is to spread knowledge of these stories so that
they can be used in the service of the Christian community.

The final story of this chapter, that of the brother and sister afflicted with “a
frightful trembling of the limbs,” serves as a fitting conclusion to these narratives.
Augustine tells this story from personal experience, because the miracle of the cures, first
of Paulus and then of Palladia, happened in Hippo. Because he has first-hand
information, Augustine is able to present the events as historical fact rather than as a
fabulous tale. He traces the history of these unfortunate people, noting the origin of their
affliction and their subsequent travels. When the siblings arrive at Hippo, the entire
congregation becomes involved in the miracle of Paulus’ cure: “The cries came from all
sides; not a mouth was silent. I greeted the people; they replied with shouts expressing
even greater fervour” (22.8; 1046). Once the people have quieted down, Augustine
returns to the order of worship: “silence was restored and the appointed lessons from holy
Scripture were read.” He reads the Scripture, but during his sermon says few words
because he “[thinks] it better to give them a chance to hear, or rather to ponder in their
hearts, what might be called the eloquence of God in a work of divine power” (22.8;
1046). Here Augustine makes a direct parallel between the eloquence of God’s word and
His works, and engages his congregation in an exercise of education that will teach them
to read both. As a further step, Augustine brings this lesson to an even wider audience.
First, he commands that a story of the miraculous cure of Paulus be written and read the next day. Then he brings the siblings before his congregation as a sort of public spectacle. The presentation of Paulus and Palladia is dramatic because it is on a stage “just below the level from which [Augustine] addressed the congregation,” but also because these siblings serve as a graphic and physical antithesis to one another. The congregation is transfixed by this sight:

The whole congregation, men and women alike, fixed their gaze on the pair, the brother standing without any untoward movement, the sister trembling in every limb. Those who had not seen the effect of the divine mercy in him now observed it from seeing his sister. (22.8; 1046)

Here Augustine uses antithesis in a dramatic form, staging this spectacle as a witness to the glory of God. The result is the prayers of the congregation on behalf of Palladia, who becomes cured in the same way as her brother during the discussion Augustine is holding with his people about the miracle of Paulus’ cure. The congregation rejoices “with wordless cries,” having become united in one body, no longer afflicted.

The way in which Augustine chooses to narrate this story presents an efficacious and specific relationship between bodies, miracles, reading, ecclesial authority, and congregational involvement. The afflicted bodies are signs of the fallen condition. They are cured through the power of the martyrs who died as a witness to faith in Christ. The bodies of the afflicted are thus read as a sign of the glory of God in an arena in which Augustine, as the bishop, guides his congregation in their understanding of the relationship between these events and the words of Scripture. Then the stories of the

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150 Reading the account of a miraculous cure was apparently a well-established practice for Augustine. Brown explains that “In Hippo, [Augustine] insisted on receiving a written report from the healed person, a libellus; and this document would then be read out in church, in the presence of the writer, and later would be stored in the bishop’s library” (Augustine 414-15). The function of this practice is clearly communal; as Markus explains, Augustine saw the written text as “the means whereby the absent can be drawn into the group communicating by means of speech” (Signs 32).
miraculous cures are written down and read to the congregation, so that these narratives can become part of the interpretive framework of the textual community which is centred upon the Bible.

The story of Paulus and Palladia is perhaps the most dramatic narrative in all of the *City of God*—it includes a stage spectacle, antithesis, radical change, miracles, and audience reactions. Through all of this, however, we can see Augustine attempting to control this dramatic excitement. He is intent upon recording this story, but the drama of the event keeps threatening to interrupt this controlled act of writing and reading. By including the story in the *City of God*, Augustine finally succeeds in re-inscribing this highly-charged narrative within his own text. He is aware that people can become distracted by the drama and can lose sight of their ultimate goal (indeed, the length of this digression in chapter 8 of Book 22 attests to Augustine's own tendency to be caught up in the excitement). Therefore, by confining this drama to his text, he can direct his readers to use this story in order better to understand the promises of eternal felicity.

To gather clues about this heavenly bliss Augustine goes to Scripture, but where Scripture fails he must rely on his imagination, or even upon the clues in the world around him. He writes,

> Consider the multitudinous variety of the means of information and persuasion, among which the spoken and written word has the first place; the enjoyment afforded to the mind by the trappings of eloquence and the rich diversity of poetry; the delight given to the ears by the instruments of music and the melodies of all kinds that man has discovered. (22.24; 1073)

He returns to these aesthetic models in order to see a dim reflection of what will be in the End; of particular interest to Augustine is the future condition of the human body, which is endowed even in this lifetime not just with utility, but with dignity and beauty. Life in general carries beauty and moments of happiness and rewards, “And these are all the
consolations of mankind under condemnation, not the rewards of the blessed.” Augustine is then overcome by wonder when he imagines “What then will those rewards be, if the consolations are so many and so wonderful? What will God give to those whom he has predestined to life, if he has given all these to those predestined to death?” (22.24; 1075). He imagines that in heaven the martyrs’ bodies themselves will retain the scars they earned in this life to signify the purity of their lives and deaths: “For in [martyrs’] wounds there will be no deformity, but only dignity, and the beauty of their valour will shine out, a beauty in the body and yet not of the body” and he conjectures that “in that new age the marks of glorious wounds [will] remain in those immortal bodies, for all to see” (22.19; 1062).

The eloquence of God, of God the Writer and the Artist, appears again and again in these final chapters. The “Almighty Artist” of whom Augustine speaks is one who will raise the dead and clothe their bodies in immortality and incorruptibility. In all of the detailed conjectures about the condition, shape, and appearance of the resurrected bodies, one idea remains constant with Augustine, and that is the beauty of proportion. Heavenly bliss is characterized by perfect concord, harmony, and beauty. The heavenly bodies themselves will be translated into perfect works of art:

If, in order to preserve this beauty, something has been taken from a part displeasing by excessive size, and if this is dispersed throughout the whole body, in such a way that this material is not lost, while the congruence of the parts is kept, then there is no absurdity in believing that there may be some addition to the stature of the body as a result of this, provided that the material is so distributed in all parts as to preserve the beauty of the whole, which would be spoilt if it were concentrated disproportionately in one place. (22.20; 1063)

And of course this beauty of the individual is related to the beauty of the larger community: “Here we see what is meant by the ‘perfection of manhood’, the union of
head and body, which consists of all the members, and they will be completed in due
time” (22.18; 1059). This is a body in which the flesh is subject to the spirit, but they
both work together in the harmony that characterizes the bliss of heaven.

The glorious denouement of the *City of God* is the finale to the spectacle that
Augustine spends Books 11-18 discussing—the history of humanity from Adam up to the
Last Judgement. Augustine situates humans as a large cast trapped on the stage of history
to be viewed by all: God, angels, and other humans alike. This recalls Paul’s statement to
the Corinthians that “God has exhibited us apostles...we have become a spectacle to the
world, to angels and to mortals” (1 Cor. 4:9). Indeed, it is the glory of sight and spectacle
that are sustained in the final pages of the *City of God*, where Augustine imagines the
eternal felicity of heaven. The spectacle of the world becomes even more beautiful at the
end of time. Augustine was probably influenced in this idea by Tertullian, who contrasts
the petty and immoral Roman games and shows with the wonders of creation: “what a
spectacle is already at hand—the second coming of the Lord.... What exultation will that
be of the angels, what glory of the saints as they rise again! What a kingdom, the
kingdom of the just thereafter! What a city, the new Jerusalem!” (*Spectacles* 104).
Tertullian looks forward to the greatest moment of the drama—the End: “What a
panorama of spectacle on that day! Which sight shall excite my wonder? Which, my
laugther? Where shall I rejoice, where exult?” (105).

Similarly, during the eschatological finale of the *City of God*, Augustine
emphasizes the glory of sight in heaven. What seems unclear and murky in this
intermingled *saeculum* becomes brilliantly clear in the next life, for then we shall
“observe God in utter clarity and distinctness, seeing him present everywhere and
governing the whole material scheme of things by means of the bodies we shall then
inhabit and the bodies we shall see wherever we turn our eyes” (22.29; 1086). The sight of God ruling the universe is no longer obscured—the cryptic meanings of the script are revealed in a clarity that is represented by vision: “in the future life, wherever we turn the spiritual eyes of our bodies we shall discern, by means of our bodies, the incorporeal God directing the whole universe” (22.29; 1086-87). As God continues to direct the universe, the faithful will share his vision. Augustine’s final words in the City of God, in fact, are an exhortation to imagine not just the End, but all eternity in terms of perfect concord and spectacle: “there we shall be still and see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise. Behold what will be, in the end, without end!” (22.30; 1091).

Despite the emphasis upon sight, however, this spectacle is devoid of the action of drama.

The dynamic combination of change and rest that characterizes the City of God in this saeculum becomes, at the end of time, a condition of eternal rest. In the mean time, however, when people are in mediis rebus, there must be a language to live by. In the City of God, the most important function of dramatistic language is to give people an incentive to action in the midst of a philosophy which could turn to inaction, or even fatalism. The Providential control exhibited in God’s drama runs the risk of leaving no room for the excitement of human free will and action. In order to alleviate this tension, Augustine does indeed present a positive moral exemplum, but it is one that focuses on an eschatological vision of the End. His contrasting presentation of the fate of the saved and the damned heightens the readers’ desire to be identified with the saved, who will be able to share the divine vision as part of the heavenly audience. In this eschatological vision, Augustine makes his readers not only actors in God’s play, but also audience members. This shift is reflected when he gives the members of the heavenly city pseudo-voyeuristic pleasure; although they will not “go out” physically to see the punishment of
the wicked, their knowledge will go out and see it clearly, and “Those who are undergoing punishment will not know what is happening inside, in the joy of the Lord; whereas those who are in that joy will know what is happening outside, in the ‘outer darkness’” (20.22; 943-44).

The separation of the two cities also moves them to two separate stages, but part of the joy in the heavenly city involves being able to be an audience member as well as an actor—to see things as God sees them. This transference from historical to cosmic drama at the end of time engages the readers in a dual sense of participation in the final play. Just as the faithful are both members of the heavenly city and pilgrims in the earthly city, experiencing both change and rest, the final beatitude allows them another perfect combination of change and rest—the dual roles of actor and audience. In the midst of this combination of change and rest which is always dynamic and dramatic, Augustine is able to assure the faithful that even in the Heavenly City “there will be freedom of will.... It will be freed from all evil and filled with all good, enjoying unfailingly the delight of eternal joys.” The felicity in heaven makes people closer to God, as they “will remember...past evils as far as intellectual knowledge is concerned, but...will utterly forget them as far as sense experience is concerned” (22.30; 1089).

Yet if sensory experience as we know it must be abandoned in the Heavenly City, and if it is an incorporeal God directing the universe, how can we understand the corporeality of the actors? Augustine’s lengthy discussion of the bodies of the damned and of the saved in Books 21 and 22 shows that he is indeed very concerned with the resurrected body that will be taking part as both audience member and actor in God’s eternal and unchanging drama. But what is the nature of this eschatological drama? What relationship does the actor’s body bear to God’s prescripted drama?
In connection with the familiar argument that Christianity is fundamentally a religion of the book, Jacques Derrida argues that “the theological stage...is dominated by speech...by the layout of a primary logos which does not belong to the theatrical site and governs it from a distance.” However, Max Harris argues contrarily, noting the importance of the dual nature of the incarnate Word:

Christianity is in one sense a religion of the Book, relying heavily on written testimony, it is in another and arguably primary sense a religion of the Stage. The book claims to record and interpret performance....faith is shaped first not by distant text but by performance in the medium and in the midst of human flesh and blood.

Harris' argument is important for an exploration of the dramatistic elements in the *City of God*, because it allows us to take into consideration the centrality of the Incarnation in Augustine's theology. However, Harris' view must be qualified in light of the way in which Augustine imagines the body. Augustine's drama is not the same “fleshy” theatre that Harris imagines—it is, instead, one where eyes are spiritual and sight is a metaphor for knowledge. It is, in fact, a theatre constituted by words.

**The Apocalyptic Ambiguity**

Dramatistic language is an integral component of apocalyptic literature, which, Harry Maier observes, “repeatedly present humans as spectacles, actors under God’s eye whose deepest thoughts and most secret actions are visible to the divine *speculator* or surveillant.” Elsewhere, Maier argues that “Most of the *City of God* is the record of Augustine’s patient unveiling of the deeper significance of the course of historical events

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151 Derrida 235-36.
152 M. Harris, 54.
153 Maier, “Staging” 132.
and their actors and the cosmic powers warring through them.”154 This certainly seems an accurate way to describe the trajectory of the City of God’s argument, which reaches its fulfillment, like history, in the End. But how “apocalyptic” is the City of God? This question has received no small degree of attention, and of course it has everything to do with how we choose to define the term “apocalyptic.”

If we begin with its most specific meaning—pertaining to the Apocalypse of John—already we may encounter differences of critical opinion. At opposite ends of the spectrum stand van Oort, who contends that the Apocalypse of John was not influential in Augustine’s scheme at all,155 and Maier, who argues that “the final books of the City of God are structured mimetically after the final chapters of John’s Apocalypse.” Furthermore, Maier contends that in describing the City of God “The phrase ‘apocalyptic eschatology’ is apt because it signals the importance, literarily, of John’s Apocalypse in shaping Augustine’s narrative consideration of last things in the City of God.”156

A symptom of this divergence of opinion can be located in the shadowy figure of Tyconius. Augustine’s use of Tyconius at the end of Book 3 of On Christian Teaching makes it clear that he had, at least in part, read the work of this non-conformist Donatist.157 Tyconius had also developed a scheme of two cities, and many have argued that this is Augustine’s primary source for his model. Van Oor158 and O’Daly159 are

154 Maier, “End of the City” 154.
155 van Oort 111.
156 Maier, “End of the City” 157, 158.
157 For more on the subject of Augustine’s reading of Tyconius, see Paul B. Harvey, Jr., “Approaching the Apocalypse: Augustine, Tyconius, and John’s Revelation,” Augustinian Studies 30.2 (1999): 133-52. Harvey argues that Augustine did not make use of the apocalyptic dimensions of the book of Revelation until he had read Tyconius (after 397). Harvey concludes that “Augustine could use the Apocalypse in the City of God—as he did, especially in the latter books and notably in book 20—because he had read Tyconius and accepted, but not uncritically, that sometime Donatist’s allegorical hermeneutic of Revelation” (149).
158 van Oort argues: “Many investigators have referred to [Tyconius] as the actual source of Augustine’s idea of the two cities. However, due to the very complicated problems surrounding Tyconius’ commentary on the Apocalypse, great caution must be exercised. At any rate one cannot simply refer to the Liber
somewhat reserved about the extent of Tyconius' influence upon Augustine, but
Markus \(^{160}\) and others support this theory, even if they differ slightly on the degrees of
direct influence. Fredriksen argues that

it is Tyconius who stands at the source of a radical transformation of African—and thus, ultimately, of Latin—theology and whose reinterpretation of his
culture's separatist and millenarian tradition provided the point of departure for what is most brilliant and idiosyncratic in Augustine's own theology. And it is
Tyconius, most precisely, whose own reading of John's Apocalypse determined the Western church's exegesis for the next millennium. \(^ {161}\)

Fredriksen focuses her argument on Tyconius' typological reading of the Apocalypse, which contradicts millennial interpretations. However, she overstates her case when she says that "end-time events and more—Antichrist, Gog and Magog, the sea giving up its
dead—Augustine, through Tyconius, can consistently deeschatologize, transposing them back into the present, where they serve to describe typologically the current experience of the Church." \(^ {162}\) Augustine, it is true, interprets much of the Apocalypse "spiritually." However, he also is clear that "Elijah the Tishbite will come; Jews will accept the faith; Antichrist will persecute; Christ will judge; [and] the dead will rise again" (20.30; 963).

Because of the absolute importance of the End, Augustine cannot completely de-historicize the Apocalypse. At the ending of history, the apocalypse must literally take place, even if our expectations of it are determined by metaphors and narratives.

The Book of Revelation itself walks a fine line between metaphorical and physical predictions. Any apocalyptic text, even if it is what we may call "dramatic" in

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\(^{159}\) O'Daly 1003.
\(^{160}\) Markus, *Saeculum* 117.
\(^{162}\) Fredriksen 32.
nature, ultimately reveals the gap between what we are able to see physically and what we can imagine that we will see at the End. Although the theatre of history may include bodies on stage, this kind of corporeality is a product of the fallen condition, so the theatre beyond history must be understood as a physical drama, but one that involves a "theoretical" purified body rather than a fallen one. Meanwhile, Augustine asks of his audience a difficult task: to believe in the absolute importance of the End without worrying about when it will come.

Like his examination of the Last Judgement in Book 20, Augustine’s view of the apocalypse reaches before and beyond the Book of Revelation. He is not “apocalyptic” in the sense that he preaches a radical separation of Christians from this world while they wait for the next. Instead, according to Augustine’s theology, Christian pilgrims must make use of this world and of the indeterminate plane of history on which they find themselves. This emphasis pushes the imperative of the Incarnation from a cosmic to an individual level. As Kermode explains, “the present as ‘time-between’ came to mean not the time between one’s moment and the parousia, but between one’s moment and one’s death.” Yet this theology is not radically individualistic at all—it still asks individuals to consider themselves as part of a larger community. In his literary imaginings of the End, Augustine creates a theatre of the world in which the citizens of the City of God are brought together in the mean time.

As this chapter has made clear, Augustine’s relation to drama is a complex one. Considering his anti-theatrical diatribes through the City of God, it is no wonder that seventeenth-century Puritan polemicists were quick to use him in support of their

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arguments against popular drama. On the other hand, given the dramatistic emphases of Augustine’s narrative, it is also no surprise that critics often lapse unselfconsciously into dramatic metaphor when they describe his view of history. What I have outlined here are the major elements of Augustine’s model of the two cities—its tropes, its interpretive framework, its narrative of history, and its eschatological finale—in order to show how all of these are related to Augustine’s dramatism in the City of God. Dramatism is the language of action, and, in Augustine’s terms, of the fallen world. However, it is also the most effective way to speak to people who are members of this transitory world while they aspire to the stability/eternity of the next.

The rest of this dissertation will focus on three examples of English Renaissance writers who were influenced either directly or indirectly by the City of God. Many of the components of the City of God I have been discussing in this chapter will figure prominently in the examination of these writers—especially eschatology/apocalypticism, a concern with proper interpretation, and an understanding of history as a cosmic struggle between two opposing forces. These writers were influenced not only by the theology and history presented in the City of God, but also by Augustine’s literary practice of using dramatistic language within a framework provided by the Scripture in order to speak to people in the “in-between” time.
PART TWO

The English Reformers
The span of time between the Incarnation and the Last Judgement that Augustine saw as the last age of history became a battlefield for Protestant Reformers. They looked for an interpretation that could infuse post-Ascension history with meaning—a way to prove that the Protestants were the true heirs of the Apostolic church, and that the Roman Catholics were the aberration. In order to do this, the Reformers often appealed to the authority of the church fathers. As Crashawe's statement in the 1620 English translation of the *City of God* attests, many considered Augustine preeminent among the fathers, and the *City of God* preeminent among his works.

How Augustine arose to such a position of authority, not just in his lifetime, but especially afterwards, is a question which has been posed repeatedly. While he lived, he was a bishop and a charismatic individual with an influence upon those he met. As his first biographer Possidius wrote, "I think that those who gained most from him were those who had been able actually to see and hear him as he spoke in church, and most of all, those who had some contact with the quality of his life among men." However, by the latter stages of his life, especially in the wake of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine came to be known, first and foremost, as a writer. His written works would continue to speak for him for centuries after his death—a phenomenon greatly aided by his own foresight in putting together a list and a description of many of them in the *Retractations*,

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2 See my Introduction, page 1.
4 James O'Donnell observes that, "From [the Pelagian controversy] on, it was his books that spoke for him; and because books could speak beyond the range of his voice and travels, and because the Pelagian controversy quickly became 'international' in scope, it was in the last fifteen years of Augustine's life that he became a figure of truly international reputation." James J. O'Donnell, "The Authority of Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 10 (1991): 15.
which allowed his works to be known, catalogued, and saved in the wake of the barbarian invasions of North Africa.\(^5\) Little is known of the early reception of the *City of God*,\(^6\) but in the course of time, among all Augustine’s texts, this one obtained a privileged place.\(^7\)

Because the *City of God* was so frequently copied and so widely disseminated, any exploration of its influence must necessarily be incomplete. The impact of this book on the theology, ecclesiology, historiography, and political theory of the middle ages in the West is immense, and many facets of this phenomenon remain unexplored. The purpose of the following brief survey of the *City of God’s* influence is to trace the evolution of some elements of Augustine’s model that had an impact on the English Renaissance literary imagination. The structure of this thesis involves a large chronological gap between the English Reformation writers and Augustine. This move is, from one point of view, perfectly logical, because Bale and Foxe read Augustine’s work for themselves. However, it would be naive to ignore the fact that Augustine’s texts were also filtered through many centuries of medieval “Augustinianism” which had a large impact upon the way that sixteenth-century Englishmen read the works of the bishop of Hippo. Although it would be a huge task to account for all of these factors, there are certain ways in which Augustine’s model of the two cities had been adopted and

\(^5\) As O’Donnell notes, “Augustine left this world with a more secure claim on future readers’ attention than any other writer of his age. The availability of the two comprehensive lists of Augustine’s authentic words did more, immediately and throughout the middle ages, than anything else could have to assure that the names of Augustine’s books were known; and that knowledge in turn made it easier for readers everywhere to seek out his works, to fill gaps in their collections, and to recognize doubtfully attributed works as authentic” (“Authority” 16). O’Donnell explains that the “second stage in the making of Latin patristic literary history is the period from roughly Jerome to Cassiodorus when the fact of the literature’s existence imposed itself on the minds of the audience” and that this development helped to establish “the emergence in the Latin west of a distinctively Christian body of religious literature” (“Authority” 21). The *City of God* became one of the most significant works in this body of literature. See also Mark Vessey, “*Opus Imperfectum*: Augustine and his Readers, 426-435 AD,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 52.3 (1998): 264-85.


\(^7\) As Gerard O’Daly points out, the *City of God* is “among the most (if not the most) copied of Latin early Christian texts” (1005).
adapted in the Middle Ages and Renaissance which have a direct bearing upon my discussion of Bale, Foxe, and Shakespeare.

The *City of God* in the Middle Ages: Apocalypse, Community, and Drama

When Cassiodorus collected and catalogued a library for his monks in the sixth century, he directed them to "read with tireless zeal the 22 books which St. Augustine has written on the City of God, books in which disordered Babylon, the city of the devil, and glorious Jerusalem, the city of Christ the Lord, are pointed out as existing with suitable difference in man's way of life" (*Institutiones* 17.7). To this description Cassiodorus adds that Augustine provides in the *City of God* an illumination of the apocalypse. Considering all of the passages that Augustine illuminates in addition to (and at more length than) the Apocalypse, it is interesting that Cassiodorus sees the apocalyptic scope of the *City of God* as one of its most important features. This attests to one of the main developments in the appropriation of the *City of God*: an increased emphasis upon its apocalyptic features. Medieval apocalypticists continually used the final books of the *City of God* in order to develop their own eschatological theories.

But if many used Augustine as evidence of the nature of the End Times, others were more interested in his notions of community and the complex relationship between earthly institutions and the two cities. Although Augustine denied that the City of God was the same as the institutional church, this distinction was barely visible in the centuries following him. Otto of Freising, the twelfth century theologian and pupil of Hugh of St. Victor, stands at the culmination of a tradition that used Augustine to claim

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pastoral authority. Going far beyond his predecessors, Otto "clearly and definitively establish[ed] the Church as a social and political entity with full civic as well as religious prerogatives." Inspired by Augustine but clearly altering his idea of the two cities, Otto made a strong connection between the institutional church and the City of God, suggesting that the church comprised the entire community of believers.

The emphasis on Augustinian eschatology and upon his theories of community both point to the imaginative power of the *City of God*—the ways in which this work spoke to the "secular imagination." Thus Augustine's texts were used to help Christians imagine the end of the world, or to account for their place in it; nowhere is this phenomenon more pronounced than in the work of Dante. John Took argues that "It was from Augustine that Dante learned of, and learned how to depict, the living reality of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, the *qualis est* of separation and election." Took highlights the drama of self-recovery from the *Inferno* to the *Paradiso*—a journey that is a reflection of Augustine's own in the *Confessions*. Yet the sense of a communal journey in the Divine Comedy also dramatically echoes the larger story that Augustine tells in the *City of God*.

The dramatistic aspect of Augustine's influence in the Middle Ages extends beyond metaphor to the influence of the two-cities model on the genre of drama itself. The scope of the cycle plays, like the *City of God*, covered the period from creation to the Last Judgement, and attempted to provide a model of history in order to educate the spectators/readers. As Robert Brawer has noted, the presentation of the Biblical themes of juxtaposition, peregrination, and salvation in these plays ultimately depends on the

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theology of the *City of God*. The plays "[attend] with great particularity of detail, characterization, and dialogue to those whom Augustine calls sojourners in the city of men."\(^{12}\) By using the dramatic medium to tell exemplary stories, these authors were appropriating the impulses toward narrative and dramatistic presentation in the *City of God*.

The Continental Reformation: In Search of Authority

Although the *City of God* had maintained its place of authority throughout the Middle Ages, it gained a heightened importance in the wake of the Reformation because it covered the subjects of grace, sacred history, and the place of the institutional church in relation to the state. The debates over authority and antiquity in Christianity drove the Reformers back to the texts of the church fathers (*ad fontes*), where they searched for evidence that their doctrines were closer to primitive Christianity than the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. This project had already been started by the humanists, who were also interested in a return to the scholarship of Christian late antiquity. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the *City of God* was printed several times.\(^{13}\) The humanists and Reformers alike used this text, and saw Augustine’s model of the two cities as a reflection of their own historical situation.\(^{14}\)


\(^{13}\) At Subiaco in 1467, Basel in 1489, and Antwerp in 1576. C.A. Patrides points out that “By 1490 the Latin text was already in print at Basle, Strasbourg, Venice, Rome, Naples, etc.... Among the editors of the Latin text: Joannes Caesarius, Margarinus de la Bigne, Aeneas Vulpes, Andreas Schottus. Translations into French were undertaken by Claude de Deyssel; into Italian, by Giovanni Guerini; into German, anonymously.” C.A. Patrides, *The Grand Design of God: The Literary Form of the Christian View of History* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) 61. The most important printed text of the *City of God* in this period was likely that of the Spanish humanist Juan Louis Vives (Basel, 1522), which he undertook at the urging of Erasmus.

\(^{14}\) See also Mary B. McKinley, “The *City of God* and the City of Man: Limits of Language in Montaigne’s ‘Apologie,’” *Romanic Review* 71 (1980): 122-40.
From its beginnings, the Reformation was connected with Augustine; the
Augustinian monk Luther developed his reformed theology through his reading of this
father's works on Paul and the doctrine of grace. Luther also followed Augustine's
periodization of history based on the defining moment of the Incarnation. His interest
in the Incarnation extended beyond the theological into the aesthetic realm; Peter Auksi
notes that "Luther's positive valuation of art rests on the lesson of the Incarnation. Like
Augustine, he justifies art in the spiritual life on the grounds that man needs the
mediation of body, matter, and the senses to grasp the immaterial." Patrides relates
Luther's adoption of Augustine's aesthetic model of history to a kind of theatrical
metaphor, by which he viewed "history as a series of events manipulated by God in such
a way that all aspects of the created order appear to be so many divine masks." Like
Luther, Calvin shows an appreciation of the material world that seems to be taken, at
least in part, from Augustine. David Steinmetz explains that "Rivers and mountains,
birds and flowers, even the human body itself" were for Calvin, following Augustine,
"important sources for the natural knowledge of God." For Calvin, therefore, "In spite of
the human fall into sin, the created order continues to function as a theater of God's
glory." Huston Diehl also relates Calvin's appreciation of the natural world to
theatrical metaphors: "Calvin repeatedly urges the faithful to discover signs of God in

15 John Headley explains that "it was Augustine who most fully recognized the powerful implications of
Christ's appearance in time and who most successfully related the pattern of divine interventions to the
course of history. As the recipient of this rich inheritance, Luther was subject to this concept of change in
terms of the Incarnation and the increasing clarity of revelation." John M. Headley, Luther's View of
Church History (New Haven: Yale UP, 1963) 107. See also Lothar Graf zu Dohna, "Staupitz and Luther:
Continuity and Breakthrough at the Beginning of the Reformation," Via Augustini: Augustine in the Later
Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation, ed. Heiko A. Oberman and Frank A. James, III (Leiden and
16 Auksi 205.
17 Patrides 48.
18 David C. Steinmetz, "Calvin and the Natural Knowledge of God," Via Augustini: Augustine in the Later
Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation, ed. Heiko A. Oberman and Frank A. James, III (Leiden and
the visible world, a world he likens to a ‘most beautiful theater,’ ‘a spectacle of God’s glory,’ and a ‘Glasse, wherein we may beholde’ God.”

As the reformers adopted the idea of the two cities, so they also adopted the theatrical ideas inherent in Augustine’s model. But despite the willingness of Luther and Calvin to consider the theatre of the world, the Protestants developed a different emphasis for the two-cities model. Because of their insistence on Scripture as their ultimate guide, they were inclined to fit the struggle between the two cities inside the confines of the biblical text. Any concept, including the idea of drama, had to be kept inside a theology of the Word.

The English Context

In a play entitled The Book of Sir Thomas More (c.1592), Erasmus appears as a bumbling scholar whose wit pales in comparison with More’s. The idea that both of these men would appear in a drama is not surprising, for both had a flair for self-dramatization—Erasmus’ appreciation of drama is evident in his character Folly, and More even treated his own execution as a theatrical show. What is unrealistic about this scene between the two humanists, of course, is that it ignores their close friendship and the important influence that Erasmus had upon More, especially in the areas of biblical and patristic scholarship. In 1501, just two years after Erasmus had set foot on English soil, More was giving lectures on the City of God. These lectures are not extant, but several scholars

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have suggested that it is likely that the *City of God* somehow influenced More’s idea of Utopia.\(^2^1\)

But if More was inclined to find in the *City of God* an inspiration for an imaginary no-place, the Protestants were more interested in finding rules for the institutions they were engaged in creating. Therefore, even though many of the early Protestants had returned to a more “pure” reading of the *City of God* which called for an understanding of the church as an invisible community of the elect, by the latter half of the sixteenth century, others were as eager as Otto of Freising had been to see parallels between the two cities (or churches, as the Reformers would have it) and the institutional church.

Two of the greatest politicians and theologians of the English Reformation, Thomas Cranmer and Matthew Parker, were both noted for their libraries of early Christian texts, and the *City of God* held an important place in their ecclesiology.\(^2^2\) The dissensions of the Reformation in England spawned multiple, competing versions of sacred history, and representatives of various factions were interested in applying Augustinian theology to their own visible world and ecclesial situation. Thus, even as some of the English Reformers played up the apocalyptic angle of Augustine’s model, there was a competing


\(^{2^2}\) Diarmaid MacCulloch notes that “[Cranmer’s] detailed knowledge of the fathers, built up over years of taking systematic notes, gave him one built-in advantage over Gardiner. For instance, both in the Defence and the Answer, he could gather together from various sources Augustine of Hippo’s discussion of how to detect figurative language in scripture: this was admirable for his purposes, and left Gardiner reduced to inept verbal contortions, to which Cranmer drew delighted attention. Similar results followed from a contest over passages from Tertullian. Sometimes Cranmer’s knowledge both of current patristic scholarship and its medieval background enabled him to cast doubt on texts which made for the realist case.” Diarmaid MacColloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996) 489. For information on patristic texts in Cranmer’s library, see David G. Selwyn, *The Library of Thomas Cranmer* (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society) and “Cranmer’s Library: Its Potential for Reformation Studies,” *Thomas Cranmer, Churchman and Scholar*, ed. Paul Ayris and David Selwyn (Rochester, NY: Boydell, 1993).
tendency to de-eschatologize this apocalyptic, and to see the City of God (and even the apocalypse) in terms of the church and the state.

The English Reformation involved more than a series of theological and political debates—the Reformation was interwoven with the burgeoning of English literature itself. Certainly it is difficult to separate the development of an English religion from the simultaneous developments of the English language and the English nation. The church fathers, Augustine prominent among them, were made to speak in English in the sixteenth century. When the English Protestants found the theatrical world of the *De civitate dei* and enclosed it in a theatre of the Word, the words in which they wrote were English.

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23 MacColloch points out that “it is Cranmer’s language which remains the most enduring monument to Henry VIII’s and Edward VI’s most faithful servant. Twentieth-century scholarship has reminded us just how fundamental is the structure of language to the way in which we construct our lives and our culture. Cranmer’s language lies at the heart of our own English-speaking culture, which has now become so central to the destiny of the world” (632). See also John N. King, *English Reformation Literature: The Tudor Origins of the Protestant Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1982).


Despite Augustine's own ambiguous position with respect to the Apocalypse, his successors had no trouble in calling their apocalyptic viewpoints his. And although van Oort and others may argue that Augustine's model of the two cities was not based on the dualism between Jerusalem and Babylon expressed in Revelation, the sixteenth-century Reformer and writer John Bale, like many before him, certainly believed that it was. On the second page of his *Image of Both Churches*, the first English commentary on the Apocalypse, Bale states confidently: “And after the true opinion of St Austin, either we are citizens in the new Jerusalem with Jesus Christ, or else in the old superstitious Babylon with antichrist the vicar of Satan.”¹ Like many Protestant Reformers of his time, Bale took special note of Revelation: he used the Babylon/Jerusalem dichotomy as a model for a division of all history into a cosmic struggle between good and evil, with various historical individuals playing different parts at different times.

Bale's concern with polarity, with separating a good community from a bad community in order to delineate a clear picture of history, is the defining principle upon which both his prose works and his plays are founded. This chapter explores the ways in which Bale's idea of the two churches is an appropriation of, and an alteration of, Augustine's model of the two cities.

Despite the wide chronological, geographical, and theological gaps between Augustine and Bale, there is, in fact, an uncanny similarity between the situations of these two men, both from a biographical and an historical perspective. Augustine and

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¹ All quotations from the *Image of Both Churches* are taken from *Select Works of John Bale, D.D.*, ed. Henry Christmas, Parker Society (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1849) 249-640. This quotation is from 252.
Bale both had a conversion experience, became leaders of their church in remote locations, wrote autobiographies, and felt themselves in one way or another exiled from the main centres of power on this earth. Yet both of them found their position on the supposed margins very useful; though removed geographically from Rome, Carthage was a major centre of power in the Christian Roman empire—a fact which Augustine exploited from nearby Hippo. Similarly, although Bale went into exile on the continent twice, the active printing press made this, in many ways, an ideal place to be.

Biographical similarities aside, there is another connection between the two men which made their purposes in writing these two works similar. Bale needed to prove that the Protestant church was the true and authentic church of Christ, and to separate it from all connection with the Roman Catholic church. This project bears a striking similarity to what Augustine was attempting to do in the *City of God*—to explain the significance of the Catholic church, and to differentiate it from pagan religions. Both men, however, freely appropriated facets of the very culture from which they were trying to differentiate themselves. Augustine used Roman historians when their scholarship could help him prove a point about the depravity of the Roman republic and empire just as Bale used medieval historians who revealed events that shed bad light upon the popes. Bale also used medieval dramatic techniques as freely as Augustine used his early training in rhetoric. The "epistemological excision"\(^2\) that Augustine performed on pagan culture is repeated in kind by Bale on Roman Catholic culture. Both men were responding to a historical moment during which they needed to differentiate themselves from the control of institutions. Dividing history into two camps made clear the border between them which had become dangerously obscure.

\(^2\) Markus defines "epistemological excision" as "The elimination—except for its most basic constituents, such as orthography, grammar and the like—from Christian discourse of a whole sphere which we may call 'secular'" (*End* 225).
This chapter's discussion of the relationship between Bale's model of the two churches and Augustine's model of the two cities will focus upon how Bale, like Augustine, conveyed to his audience a theology of history dependent upon the Bible, yet included dramatistic elements as a vital part of his writing. I begin with a discussion of the life and works of Bale, tracing his interest in drama, history, and the apocalypse. The next section focuses upon his play *Three Laws*, which is evidence that, even as he was first developing the model of the two churches, Bale was using drama within a controlled superstructure provided by the words of Scripture. The third section delineates the relationship between the *City of God* and Bale's *Image of Both Churches*, with special attention to historiography and exegesis. Finally, I show how Bale's model of the two churches continues to play a central role in his later martyrological works, as he dramatistically narrates the story of Protestant heroes of the faith.

Bale sought to define the Christian community in English Reformation terms, and found in the *City of God* a ready model for this purpose. His writings, from plays to exegetical works to martyrologies, show an awareness of the complex view of drama inherent in Augustine's model. Yet, in the hands of Bale, who emphasizes the *imminence* of the ending to God's cosmic drama far more than Augustine was ever prepared to, Augustine's conception of the two cities undergoes an alteration: it becomes more apocalyptic, more historically specific, and the two cities/churches become more discernible in *this* lifetime.
I. John Bale: Writer and Reformer

Life and Works

Born in 1495 into a poor family that sent him to a Carmelite friary at the age of 12, John Bale was from the beginning entrenched in a Roman Catholic world. He went to Cambridge in 1514, where he cultivated a particular interest in history. The first of what would prove to be a long list of his writings was a history of the Carmelite order to which he belonged. After visiting the Low Countries and France in the 1520s, Bale was admitted to the degree of Bachelor of Divinity at Cambridge in 1529 and eventually earned his D.D. He was for a short time the prior of the Carmelite Friary at Maldon, and he preached in the London diocese. In 1533, he became the prior of the Carmelite Friary at Ipswich, and in 1534 he was moved to Doncaster, but around this time his religious sentiments began to change.

It is unclear what happened during the next few years of Bale’s life to alter his views, but at some point during the first half of the 1530s he began to have reformist opinions, and by 1536 he was vehemently Protestant. The only hint Bale gives us about his conversion concerns the influence of Thomas, Lord Wentworth of Nettlestead. In 1536, Bale left the Carmelite order and became a stipendiary priest at Thorndon, Suffolk, where he was immediately attacked for his preaching against Roman Catholic

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3 Because Bale wrote four accounts of his own life, much of the early biographical information on him derives from his own writings. Twentieth-century biographers such as Jesse Harris, Honor McCusker, Leslie Fairfield, and Peter Happe have adduced biographical information in addition to what Bale provides, and have arrived at an impressively detailed picture of his life. (See subsequent notes for the bibliographical information for these works.)

4 The tradition that he attended Jesus College has been questioned recently (and convincingly) by Richard Rex in “John Bale, Geoffrey Downes and Jesus College,” Journal of Ecclesiastical History 49.3 (1998): 486-93.

5 Bale mentions this in Catalogus 1:702. See Leslie P. Fairfield, John Bale: Mythmaker for the English Reformation (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 1976) 34.
ceremonies. The next year, Bale was delivered from prison through the intervention of Thomas Cromwell, who became his patron. In 1537, he married a woman named Dorothy, about whom very little is known. During the next few years he wrote stage plays, and toured the countryside with a small troupe supported by Cromwell, performing dramas in order to spread Protestant propaganda. Of the more than thirty plays which are recorded to have been written by Bale, only five are extant. *King Johan*, the first English history play, which casts King John as a prototype of King Henry VIII; *Three Laws*, a sort of morality play focusing on the corruption of the Roman Catholic church; and three plays which appear to have been part of an attempt to create a Protestant mystery cycle: *God’s Promises*, *John Baptist’s Preaching*, and *The Temptation of our Lord*.

When Cromwell fell from power in 1540, Bale fled to Germany and stayed there until the accession of Edward VI in 1547. He spent the first few years of his exile in Antwerp, where he wrote extensively, translating Thomas Kirchmayer’s *Pammachius*, and beginning work on the *Image of Both Churches*. Bale then moved to Wesel, where he continued this work and also began his written account of the Protestant martyrs in England with *The Examination of Anne Askewe*. Hoping for preferment when Edward became King, Bale moved back to England, but it was not until 1552 that the dubious honour of the bishopric of Ossory in Ireland was urged upon him. Bale’s difficulties at Kilkenny were myriad because of the strong Roman Catholic sentiment there, but his time in Ireland was short; when Mary became Queen of England in 1553, he had to make a hasty escape from Dublin aboard a ship that was subsequently captured by pirates (a story Bale relates in detail in *The Vocacyon of Johan Bale*). Surviving this adventure, he ended up in Basel, Switzerland, and he remained on the continent until 1559.

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His second exile was at first marred by the disputes among the English Protestants at Frankfurt, but then he spent several productive years in Basel with his friend John Foxe, with whom he worked to spread the Protestant message via the printing press. The most notable of Bale's projects during this time was the *Scriptorum Illustrium maioris Britannie...Catalogus*, a record of English writers which he had been compiling for many years, and which was published by Oporinus in 1557. Returning to England during Elizabeth's reign, Bale spent the last few years of his life as a canon at Canterbury, and died on 15 November 1563.

Bale's life and writings parallel the shift from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism that England itself was experiencing. The interest in literary history that Bale had as a Carmelite was focused upon England, and his stage plays and later works that were written in the vernacular reached a wide (and popular) audience—the Reformation had begun to speak in English. In addition to supporting the campaign of Bible translations into English, Bale added his own works and commentaries on the Bible in order to help the people understand the meaning of Scripture. By identifying the Reformation itself as a sign of the last days, and by reading the events of history as proof of the fulfillment of biblical prophecies, Bale brought apocalyptic history to the centre of English Protestant consciousness. However, he is most famous not for his positive contributions to Protestantism, but for his vehement attacks on the Roman Catholicism of which he had once been a part. His need to identify the Roman Catholic Church with every kind of evil produced the most notable feature of his writing—the insistent division of all things into two categories or camps. This division, which Bale saw as the defining

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7 When Bale wrote his history of the Carmelite order, he became particularly interested in English heroes of the faith (see Fairfield 9).
force of history, influenced everything he wrote. Interestingly, it has continued to influence Bale’s critics, who have a divided view of his literary corpus.

Bale and His Critics

In 1988, John Arden published a “fiction of history” entitled Books of Bale, a novel about the life and art of John Bale. Arden claims in his preface that his book is an attempt to find a connection between the two disparate views of Bale: “On the one hand we have an important pioneer playwright of revolutionary zeal, on the other we find ourselves invited to wonder at the violent cultural colonialism of a tactless and coercive bishop.” In addition, Arden was attempting to “create some human link between Bale’s theatre and that of the more celebrated Elizabethans.”

Arden’s impulse to write a singular narrative about a man who has received such divided attention from scholars in different fields is understandable, for it is difficult, given the history of criticism on Bale, to arrive at a realistic view of what he may have been like as a person, much less how his works relate to one another and to their historical context.

Thomas Fuller wrote in the History of the Worthies of England (1652) that “Biliosus Balaeus passeth for his true character,” giving Bale an epitaph (“bilious Bale”) that has stayed with him for over 300 years. Most early criticism on Bale recognized him as a “minor light of the Reformation,” but the short biography of him in the 1849 Parker Society edition of his works ends with a very telling statement:

Bishop Bale occupied such a position in connection with this history of the Reformation, that it was in a manner necessary for the Parker Society, in pursuance of its plan, to republish some of his numerous works: but there are
others of them, it must be acknowledged, which could not with propriety be presented to the public; and the re-printing of the present portion of them must not be considered as indicating an approval of all he either said or did. (xi)

This embarrassment surrounding Bale was probably related to Fuller’s opinion that Bale was more “bilious” than scholarly; it also attests to the nineteenth-century distaste for Bale’s language, unabashed polemic, and repetitive style. Twentieth-century criticism has raised Bale (at least partially) from this low opinion,10 but what criticism there has been of his work tends to fall into one of two camps—one concerned with his drama,11 the other with his prose works. The interest in Bale’s drama is usually devoted to King Johan because it is considered the first English history play. The prose work most analyzed is the Image of Both Churches, for many critics have become interested in Bale’s role in the evolution of apocalyptic thought in sixteenth and seventeenth century England.12

Because there has been a general interest in Bale either as an apocalyptic theologian or as a liturgical dramatist, his work has not been generally studied for its

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10 Two books of the 1940s became foundational for the renewed interest in Bale’s works: Jesse Harris’ book (see previous note) and Honor McCusker’s John Bale: Dramatist and Antiquary (Bryn Mawr, 1942). Two decades later, F.J. Levy placed Bale in a prominent position among English historiographers in Tudor Historical Thought (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1967).


contribution to “literary” practice in the English Renaissance. Attempts to analyze his work as literature are often riddled with complaints about his style—in particular, his tendency to have a divided view toward metaphor and toward drama. For instance, Ritchie Kendall complains that Bale resolved his ambivalence towards drama by “parting the waters of drama like some Old Testament Saint. All that he feared...he sequestered among his enemies...all that he could safely love, he appropriated as his own.” The conclusion reached by Kendall, as by many, is that Bale’s art is “severely limited” as a result of this division. Yet Bale’s active use of a wide variety of genres and traditions in itself shows a depth of sensitivity to narrative and dramatistic elements of literature that few have recognized.

Literary History

In the Catalogus, Bale includes himself at the end of his list of famous English writers. This rhetorical move is inherent in the genre of bio-bibliography as revived by Jerome in his De Viris Illustribus (late fourth century), and it shows the desire of the one who compiles literary history to become a part of it. Indeed, one of the most persistent features of Bale’s writing is his use of the past and the writers of the past. Because critics have not viewed Bale as a particularly “original” writer, they have often speculated

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13 There are some exceptions, such as John King’s English Reformation Literature, which boldly locates Bale’s works as part of the literature of Edward’s reign, and suggests continuities between Bale and the literary developments of the English Renaissance in general. The other exceptions are Andrew Hadfield’s Literature, Politics and National Identity, which attempts to draws attention to Bale’s use of allegory and other literary devices, and Peter Happé’s John Bale (especially his last chapter, “John Bale and Sixteenth-Century Literature”).
14 Kendall 131.
16 See Happé, Bale 63, for Bale’s awareness of Jerome’s De viris illustribus.
17 For example, Jesse Harris denies that Bale “possessed any great original genius” and argues that “His originality lies in the field of application rather than in that of invention” (99).
about his sources and the way that he uses them. In the case of his dramatic works, critics have focused on his use of the Bible, his debt to medieval morality and mystery plays, and his probable interest in the "Christian Terence" movement.\textsuperscript{18} His dramas, like his other works, show an author who is capable of absorbing a wide variety of material and appropriating it for his polemical agenda.

His non-dramatic writings tend to be filled with marginal references to other authors and works. Bale most commonly quotes or cites the Bible, but he also frequently cites patristic and medieval sources. His interest in the writers of antiquity, especially relating to English and Lollard history, is evident throughout his corpus. As his attention to the Apocalypse developed, he turned to the work of the twelfth-century heretic Joachim of Fiora, as well as Francis Lambert and Albertus Magnus.\textsuperscript{19} Bale’s view of Lollardry as the predecessor to Protestantism precipitated his interest in the works of Wycliffe and Huss. As an antiquarian by nature, Bale probably found little difficulty in following the lead of Luther, Tyndale,\textsuperscript{20} and other Protestants who used the fathers of the church in support of Reformation doctrine. Bale is quick to point out that these “saints” were only men,\textsuperscript{21} but he finds them useful authorities to prove the ceremonies and theology of the Roman Catholic Church wrong. How deep was Bale’s debt to the fathers,

\textsuperscript{18} Blatt explains that “Bale’s acquaintance with classical learning, with commentaries on Terence, and with plays belonging to the Christian Terence tradition admits of no doubt. When he began his career as a dramatist, several religious plays on Terentian pattern had already been written, e.g. \textit{Acolastus} by Gulielmus Gnaphaeus, published in 1529, and \textit{Ruth} by Jakobus Zovitius from 1533, while the early years of the century had brought the learned humanist dramas in Latin of Gianfrancesco Quinziano Stoa, whose \textit{Theoandrothanatos} was published in 1508” (Blatt 184).

\textsuperscript{19} Christianson points out that “With some exceptions, [Bale] most frequently cited either contemporary reformed scholars or medieval heretics—Francois Lambert (48), Sebastian Meyer (26), Martin Luther (14), and Johannes Oecolampadius (11) in the one category, John Wycliffe (20), John Hus (17), and Joachim of Fiora (7) in the other” (15). See also Firth, Chapter 2: “From Exile to Exile: John Bale and the Two Churches.”


\textsuperscript{21} “What though all they in many points have erred, to declare themselves men, and lest their authority should be taken among the people above the authority of God’s word?” (Image 318).
and to Augustine in particular? Happé observes that “Although Bale’s surviving early work shows little interest in discussing the patristic writings, he obviously knew and collected them extensively, as his list of lost books indicates.” This list refers to Bale’s record of the books he had to leave behind in Ireland, but he never saw more than a third of these manuscripts again, even though he requested the help of Matthew Parker and Queen Elizabeth in his efforts to recover his library.

His own writings also show an interest in the fathers, and he cites a range of patristic sources, including Irenaeus, Tyconius, Jerome, Augustine, Cassiodorus, and Isidore. However, while it is a relatively straightforward project to determine the extent to which Bale was influenced by other Protestants, such as Luther, Wycliffe, and Tyndale, it is much more difficult to determine exactly how much he knew of the fathers, and how much he was taking directly from them as distinct from what he was learning at second or third hand. In the case of Augustine, for instance, we cannot be at all certain whether most of Bale’s knowledge came from direct reading, from his Carmelite education, or from his reading of Reformers such as Luther and Calvin. Yet, in the case of Augustine in general and the *City of God* in particular, Bale’s modern critics speak with a surprisingly uniform voice: Augustine’s doctrine was central to Bale’s conception of history and theology.

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Bale and Augustine

"Conclusion! And I arrived at it through Augustine’s refutation of the erroneous Manichees, notwithstanding I must on several points part company with the undoubted saint of Hippo."

-Bale to Dorothy in *Books of Bale*

It seems likely that Bale was influenced in some way by Augustine; nonetheless, discerning the nature of this connection is difficult. It is true that Bale makes direct references to Augustine occasionally, and cites him in the margins of his prose works (such as the examinations of Lord Cobham, William Thorpe, and Anne Askew). In most of these cases, Bale uses Augustine in order to support the Protestant view of the sacraments or the marriage of priests. The words of Augustine are often put into the mouth of the martyr who is speaking, and when Bale himself comments on Anne Askew’s view of the sacraments, he points out that “St Augustine, defining a sacrament, calleth it...‘a sign of an holy thing.” Bale uses a similar tactic in the *Vocacyon*, where he cites Augustine in support of his own objection to Roman Catholic ceremonies.

It is also true that Bale loosely follows Augustine’s idea of the seven ages of history in his dramatic and prose works. Yet it is not his plays or his examinations that have led critics to assume a strong influence from Augustine, but the *Image of Both Churches*; Bale’s title (and his citation of Augustine on the second page to support this title), has led many critics to suggest that Augustine’s *City of God* influenced, or even inspired, Bale’s idea of the two churches.

Bale’s first modern biographer Thora Blatt is adamant: “It seems to me incontestable that at the basis of Bale’s politico-religious creed we find St. Augustine, partly as he may have found his thoughts expressed at second hand in the Middle Ages,

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24 Arden 129.
25 Reference noted by Christmas, 212. Bale is referring to the *City of God* 10.5.
partly as he may have known them from his reading of *De Civitate Dei.*"27 This connection has been noted by others as well;28 Firth posits that, “From Augustine’s two cities and the eternal opposition of the spirit and the flesh [Bale] derived an earthly conflict between two sorts of men, the faithful and the unfaithful, and their two churches, of Christ and of antichrist.”29 Even the more reserved commentators on this subject, such as Peter Happé, admit that “There is a distinct possibility that St. Augustine’s *City of God* was influential on Bale’s division.”30 Avihu Zakai identifies the *Image* as “an ecclesiastical history of universal scope yet singularly adapted to England, and modeled after *City of God.*”31 How closely Bale actually follows Augustine, and how particularly “English” the *Image* really is are two related questions which will form the basis of the third part of this chapter.

Bale first uses the idea of the two opposing churches in his play *Three Laws,* and he develops this model more elaborately in the *Image of Both Churches* as he constructs Protestant historiography according to the framework of Revelation. Bale’s literary expression of the idea of the two churches, first in drama, then in exegesis, and eventually in all of his writings, shows both a debt to and an alteration of Augustine’s model of the two cities that had an important impact on the development of sixteenth-century English literature. A detailed analysis of this connection shows that the models are remarkably similar in their ideas of history and community, but that important differences arise because of Bale’s greater interest in the apocalypse.

27 Blatt 59.
28 See Fairfield 83; Christianson 15; Bauckham 55.
29 Firth 58.
30 Happé, *Bale* 50, my emphasis.
II. Reformation Drama: Staging Protestant History in *Three Laws*

Apparaunt is that church and open to the eyes;  
Their worshippynges are in outward ceremonyes.  
That counterfet church standeth al by mennys tradycyons,  
Without the scriptures and without the hartes affeccyons.  
My church is secrete and evermore wyll be,  
Adorynge the Father in sprete and in varyte.  
By the worde of God thys church is ruled onlye,  
And doth not consyst in outwarde ceremonye.  
Thys congregacyon is the true church mylytaunt;  
Those counterfet desardes are the very church malygnaunt,  
To whom Christ wyll sae, “I knowe non of your sort.”

(l. 1347-57)\(^{32}\)

A decade or more before Bale wrote the *Image*, he had begun developing a model of the two churches—a false and a true. The above quotation comes from Bale’s first extant play, *A Comedy concernynge Thre Lawes, of Nature, Moses, and Christ*, *Corrupted by the Sodomytes, Pharysees and Papystes*. *Three Laws* is a kind of morality play structured in five acts. During the first act, Deus Pater calls the three laws (Naturae Lex, Moseh Lex, and Christi Lex, who is also known as Evangelium) before him to give them directions and to provide a sign for each. Natural Law’s job is “In the hart of Man hys conscyence for to stere / To ryghteouse lyvynge and to a just beleve” (l. 110-11), and his sign is a heart. The Law of Moses is supposed to provide people with harsh rules, and therefore his sign is a pair of stone tablets. Finally, Evangelium is presented with a New Testament, which signifies his role—to spread the new law of Christ. Acts 2 through 4 follow a consistent structure. In each act, one of the laws meets Infidelity, who is the head vice, and talks with him briefly before leaving the stage. Then Infidelity employs two other vices to help him in each case—Sodomismus and Idololatria in the first act, Avaritia and Ambitio in the second act, and Pseudodoctrina and Hypocrisis in the third

\(^{32}\) All quotations from Bale’s plays taken from Peter Happé, ed. *The Complete Plays of John Bale*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1986). References throughout are to the line numbers of Happé’s edition.
act. Together, the vices destroy each law. Natural Law is infected with leprosy, Moses becomes blind and lame, and Evangelium is burned as a heretic. In the fifth act, Vindicta Dei punishes Infidelity for all of his transgressions, and then turns into the kindly Deus Pater again. The Laws, now restored, gather while Fides Christiana comes forth to govern the true Christian congregation under the direction of all three laws.

_Three Laws_ was first published in 1538, but it is likely that Bale had written it some years earlier as part of the repertory for his troupe of players under the patronage of Cromwell. Drama was one of the first genres with which Bale experimented as a Protestant, and it is even possible that he had written Roman Catholic plays before his conversion. Bale’s plays were polemical pieces designed to outline the abuses of the Roman Catholic church. The vice characters wore the robes of monks and bishops—his message against his opponents was never subtle. However, Happé explains that “The plays do not exist solely as polemical exercises: they invite a response in terms of language and of drama, and a full account of them cannot ignore the intimate connection

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33 Jesse Harris argues that _Three Laws_ could have been written as early as 1531 (Harris 67-74), but Happé and others favour a later date (Happé, _Bale_ 71). Bale revised the play during his first exile and added references to contemporary events; this revision can be dated between January 1547 and September 1548 because of the ending references to the “late” King Henry and a prayer for Catherine Parr (Happé, _Bale_ 74).

34 We cannot be certain that the play was actually performed in the 1530s because there is no record of a performance, and the text itself provides contradictory evidence regarding its intended audience. On the one hand, the stage directions are marked in detail, but on the other hand, these stage directions are in Latin, which leads Happé to conjecture that it is more “likely that at the point of printing Bale had readers more in mind than performers” (Happé, _Bale_ 71). However, stage directions even in Shakespeare’s time were often written in Latin, so this is hardly evidence that the play was not performed. The most convincing piece of evidence that Bale’s plays were performed is that it includes a marked division of the roles in the play among five actors, which would have made it a suitable piece for the repertoire of Bale’s troupe. There is also a record that Bale proposed a performance of _Three Laws_ in 1551, and since his other plays were performed in both the 1530s and the 1550s, it seems likely that _Three Laws_ also came to the stage in both decades.

35 His first contribution to the Reformation was certainly the composition of dramas; Bale testifies that Thomas Cromwell saved him from Archbishop Lee’s charges on the basis of the comedies he had written: “ob editas commedias” (_Catalogus_ 1:702). See Fairfield 38 and Happé, _Bale_ 9.

36 Happé conjectures that the two titles which Bale omits from his later list of his dramas, _On the Lord’s Prayer_ and _The Seven Deadly Sins_, may have been traditional Roman Catholic plays (Happé, _Bale_ 6).
between theatrical effectiveness and theological concepts." Perhaps preeminent among Bale’s theological objectives in his dramas was the development of a coherent view of Protestant history.

History and Drama

Whatever the medium or the intended audience of Bale’s works, their main purpose was to educate his audience toward a proper reading of history. Many of Bale’s plays follow a strict periodization of history, especially the “trilogy” *God’s Promises, John Baptists Preaching*, and *The Temptation of Our Lord*. In *God’s Promises*, Bale uses Augustine’s concept of the seven ages of mankind as the organizing principle of sacred history. However, the scheme in *God’s Promises* is slightly different because Bale, following Francis Lambert, splits Augustine's third age (from Abraham to David) into two (Abraham to Moses and Moses to David). Thus Bale calls the “present” time the seventh age, whereas Augustine calls it the sixth, but both men emphasize that this is the last age before the apocalypse, so this subtle difference does not cause a divergence in their understandings of history.

Augustine’s interpretation of history was only partially dependent upon the “seven ages” scheme; he had also divided history into three periods: *ante legem, sub lege*, and *sub gratia*. This emphasis on the transition from the law to grace became central to Augustine’s arguments against the Pelagians, and remained an important part of his view of history in the *City of God*. Markus points out that

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37 Happé, *Bale* 74.
38 As Blatt notes: “The characters [in *God’s Promises*] chosen by Bale belong together in a group, and they are not chosen at random. The concept of seven ages in the history of mankind goes back to St. Augustine, who sets forth his division based on the seven days of creation in the last chapter of the last book of *De Civitate Dei*” (87).
39 See Fairfield 197, n 67.
Behind the traditional six periods Augustine saw a more fundamental duality between the period of promise and that of fulfilment. On occasion he displays history as articulated in the threefold Pauline (and Rabbinic) scheme: before the law, under the law, under grace. Both the threefold and the sixfold division were old by this time, reaching beyond the work of Christian writers into Jewish traditions. Augustine drew on these as it suited his purpose, sometimes turning from one to the other scheme within a single paragraph.\footnote{Markus, \textit{Saeculum} 18-19.}

Bale, like Augustine, uses both schemes—in \textit{God's Promises}, the "seven ages," and in \textit{Three Laws}, the "three periods."

In \textit{Three Laws}, it is evident that Bale’s exegesis depends, like Augustine’s, upon a typological reading of the Bible. However, rather than limiting his exegesis to the events of the Bible (as Augustine generally does), Bale also extends these readings to his own time. If the prophecies of the Old Testament foreshadowed the New Testament, he assumes, so the prophecies of Revelation must foreshadow his own time. Most importantly, his typological reading of the Bible encouraged him to look for common patterns, which led him to believe that the periods of history repeat themselves in different ways. By situating \textit{Three Laws} in an Old Testament setting with contemporary characters, Bale was illustrating this repetitive quality of history. Leslie Fairfield notes that "Bale was searching for some way to understand, to view in historical perspective, the attacks by conservatives in England on the Cromwellian Reformation. He needed to see that it had all happened before, and that nevertheless, the true faith had persisted."\footnote{Fairfield 57.}

Through proper exegetical practice, Bale sought to provide Protestants with a history that was seamless and provable. Rainer Pineas argues that Bale’s view of history in \textit{Three Laws} is "anachronistic":

40 Markus, \textit{Saeculum} 18-19.
41 Fairfield 57.
Bale's] use of anachronism is so sustained and pervasive that it has to be regarded as one of his most important polemical weapons... [B]y far the heaviest use of anachronism occurs in *Three Lawes*, the play in which Bale is *ostensibly* treating the various dispensations of God's dealings with man.  

Pineas believes that Bale cannot possibly be dealing with the Old Testament if he is concerned with the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church, and therefore concludes that the play is only "ostensibly" about God's dealings with man. Here Pineas misses the point that, for Bale, it is completely natural to deal with several time periods at once, and the similarity between the past and the present only serves to strengthen his argument. History is not something that unfolds only once; rather, it unfolds again and again, with certain repeating cycles and patterns, until the end of time, which is the end of history and of evil. Just because Bale does not have the same historical values as Pineas does not mean that Bale is not a historian or is "completely uninterested in the internal and overall consistency of his polemics or in historical or chronological accuracy." On the contrary, what is notable about Bale's method is his consistent division of all history into the story of a cosmic struggle between good and evil, with various historical individuals playing different roles at different times.

Because *Three Laws* is the first place where Bale talks about the idea of the two churches, and also because it shows hints of Bale's movement toward a historical framework based on the Apocalypse, it is an ideal starting point for an exploration of Bale's debt to, and derivations from, Augustine. Bale's use of the dramatic genre, and his presentation of history and exegesis within it, prepare him for a fuller formulation of the idea of the two churches which is the subject of the *Image*.

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42 Pineas, "Polemical Drama" 203 (my emphasis).
43 Pineas, "Polemical Drama" 208.
The title page of *Three Laws* says that Bale “compyled” the play. His role was not to be the author, or even the director, of the play, for only God can serve those functions. Bale’s role is merely to read God’s drama, and to provide an educational arena that allows his audience to do the same. But what was Bale’s role in a more literal sense? At the end of the 1538 printed version of *Three Laws*, there are directions for how the parts should be divided among the five actors. The first part listed in the divisions includes the role of the Prolocutor, Infidelity, and Christian Faith, and was probably played by Bale himself. A closer examination of these three parts in *Three Laws* reveals how Bale uses the structure of the play in order to present the historical struggle between good and evil through a range of contrasting examples. The Prolocutor introduces the theme of exegesis into the play, outlining the forthcoming action as if he were giving the

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44 According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (hereafter *OED*), “Compyle” was a word for authorship of an original work since at least the time of Caxton (v3). Yet this usage also denotes the word’s more common meanings: “to collect and put together (materials) so as to form a treatise” (v1) and “to make, compose, or construct (a written work) by arrangement of materials collected from different sources” (v2). Information about the difference between an “author” and a “compiler” in the Middle Ages can be found in A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scolar P, 1984). “According to Bonaventure,” explains Minnis, “The compiler adds together or arranges the statements of other men, adding no opinion of his own” (94). Minnis further remarks that “Whereas an auctor was regarded as someone whose works had considerable authority and who bore full responsibility for what he had written, the compilator firmly denied any personal authority and accepted responsibility only for the manner in which he had arranged the statements of other men” (192).

45 Into fyve personages maye the partes of thys Comedy be devyded.

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<tr>
<th>The Prolocutour.</th>
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Deus Pater.

Vindicta Dei.

The fift.
headings of a sermon. At the end of the play, Christian Faith unites the community in its struggle against evil. In between these two parts (the Prolocutor in Act 1 and Christian Faith in Act 5), the vice Infidelity represents a world of dangerous free play that Bale contrasts with God’s controlled (and containing) drama.

**Exegesis: Baleus Prolocutor and His Book**

The Prolocutor’s title in *Three Laws* is “Baleus Prolocutor,” because Bale himself appeared on stage to explain the forthcoming action of the play, wearing no costume and with the Bible as his only “prop.” He appears, in effect, *cum sola scriptura*. Fairfield explains that in *Three Laws*

*Sola Scriptura* now not only meant for [Bale] that the Bible supplied the norm by which to test doctrine, morals, and church government. It also confirmed and strengthened in his mind the age-old Christian belief that God who revealed his will in history also revealed it in His Word: that the Bible held the key to understanding the past, the present, and the future.

In the prologue, it is Baleus Prolocutor who holds the Bible, and in turn he also holds the position of the one who must provide an interpretation of the Word. The Prolocutor’s part is that of the preacher (which means, of course, that Bale was not “acting” at all), and his responsibility is to direct the audience (congregation) in the interpretation (exegesis) of what they will see. He begins by citing two classical precedents for laws, next explains the three Laws of God, noting each of their qualities, then summarizes the action of the play. The meaning and moral are carefully elucidated before the action of the play.

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46 Blackburn notes that Bale “outlines the first four acts, in the manner of a preacher giving out sermon headings” (41).

47 Fairfield 58.
begins; the Prolocutor not only has the first word, but also sets up the stage as an arena for the presentation of God’s Word.

Happe contends that Bale wrote his plays for two interrelated reasons: “In part, Bale’s playwrighting was a sustained polemical commentary on this Word of God, newly available for interpretation and argument. In part, it was a vilification of Rome, whose ‘traditions’ had for Bale obscured and corrupted the pure Word.” Bale focuses his polemics against the Roman Catholic church in terms of exegesis, formulating a dualism that opposes his own concept of God’s church to Rome’s based on their different treatments of the Word.

The opening of *Three Laws* shows the perfect Protestant interpreter, modeled after Bale himself. In Acts 2 through 4, however, Bale presents two opposing models of exegesis in order to emphasize his point about the difference between the two churches. In contrast to the virtuous laws in the play, the vice figures are caught in a Catholic world in which the concern is not for the words themselves, but for the ceremonies and rituals that they have developed, in Bale’s view, in order to obfuscate the Word. Infidelity, like Baleus Prolocutor and Evangelium, carries a book, but it is likely a *missal* rather than a Bible. Infidelity and his six sub-vice are the authors of deliberate misinterpretations

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48 Happe, *Plays* 20.
49 This is a tactic which Bale develops more fully in his later play *The Temptation of Our Lord*, in which the character Jesus has what can best be described as an “interpretive war” with Satan. Bale uses this biblical story and the huge gulf between Satan’s and Christ’s interpretations of Scripture to draw a parallel between these and the Catholic versus Protestant ways of looking at the Word. Satan at first says that he is a hermit who does not pay much attention to the gospel. Next, Satan attempts to beat Christ at his own game, but the mistake he makes is using part rather than all of the Scripture. As Jesus points out, he should have gone on to read the whole passage: “Yes, there is soch a text, but ye wrast it all amys....ye omytted foure wordes whych foloweth next” (l. 222,226). *Sola Scriptura* means not only the Scripture alone, but *all* of the Scripture. Satan then resorts to his only real tool—he attempts to convince Christ to reject the promise of the Word entirely: “Forsake the beleve that ye have in Gods worde, / That ye are hys sonne, for it is not worth a torde” (l. 293-94). Here Satan’s language is so ludicrous that it is clear where his words stand in comparison with the Word of God, and it is easy to see why Jesus has defeated “Satan Tentator.”
50 As Happe suggests regarding the line “By thys blessed boke” (l. 235), “perhaps Infidelity carries a book: a missal would be appropriate” (l. 161). It would, of course, be highly unlikely that Infidelity is carrying a Bible, and it makes sense that this book would provide a visible contrast with the Prolocutor’s Bible.
which corrupt the Laws on both a physical and a spiritual level. Whereas Idolatry and Sodomy erase the writing on Natural Law’s heart (a corruption of the flesh), Avarice and Ambition pollute the writing on Moses’ tablets (a corruption of the word). Ambition explains,

With fylthy gloses and dyrti exposycyons
Of Gods lawe wyll I hyde the pure dysposycyons.
The keye of knowledge I wyll also take awaye
By wrastynge the text to the scriptures sore decaye.

(1.1099-1102)

For the vices, glossing is the only way around God’s language. Infidelity even uses the word “gloss” as a synonym for lying. The vice characters are not at all concerned with the truth of the writing, but instead with how they can avoid obedience to it. They do not write their own laws, but operate only by corrupting the Word of God. Bale uses the idea of the “veil” spread over Moses and relates it to the interpretive corruption performed by the vices on the Law of Moses. Avarice promises,

A vayle wyll I sprede upon the face of Moses,
That non shal perceyve the clerenes of hys contenaunce,
Whych is of the lawe the meanyng and true ordynaunce.

(l. 1103-5)

and Ambition proudly explains the Catholic corruption of the ten commandments:

Where as God doth saye, “No straunge goddes thu shalt have,”
With sayntes worshyppyng that clause we wyll deprave.

51 Infidelity uses the word in this sense: “a my fayth, I do not glose” (l. 813). Happé’s own glossary (Plays 187) defines this word as “lie.” According to the OED “gloze” meant also “a pretence, false show, specious appearance; also, a disguise” (sb. 2b).

52 Bale is here evoking the Christian hermeneutical tradition that equated the “veil” spread over Moses’ face in Exodus 34:33 with the difficulty inherent in interpreting the Old Testament. This reading was an extrapolation of Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 3:13-15, where he contrasts the Christians’ ability to approach the Scripture directly (because of the redemption offered by Jesus), with the Jewish necessity to have the Word covered in ceremonies and rituals. The darkness of the Old Testament prophecies thus stands in sharp contrast to the light of revelation (literally, “unveiling”) in the New Testament. Because the Protestants attacked the rituals of the Roman Catholic church, they could change the original opposition between Jewish and Christian into one between Catholic and Protestant.
And though he commaunde to make no carved ymage,
For a good intent yet wyll we have pylgrymage.
Though he wyll us not to take hys name in vayne,
With tradycyons yet therunto wyll we constrayne. (l. 1109-14)

Ambition also corrupts the Word "With longe Latyne houres" (l. 1146) that keep the people from understanding the truth of Scripture. The result of all this corruption of Moses' Law is shown on stage at the end of Act 3, when the actor playing the Law of Moses appears blind and crippled, symbolizing how the old law is no longer able to save mankind. The old law loses its original clarity, and instead appears like a difficult code that must be deciphered.

As the play moves from Natural Law to the Law of Moses to the Law of Christ, each character has more exegetical skill than the previous one. Evangelium, the embodiment of the New Testament, is the ideal interpreter; he alone deduces the identity of Infidelity with no help: "Thu aperest by thy frutes to be Infidelity" (l. 1398). Unlike the earlier laws, Evangelium cannot be corrupted or erased. He has the strength to insist on his right to speak ("Gods worde never taketh hys autoryte of man" [l. 1619]), and, by implication, to speak in English. The vices Pseudodoctrina and Hypocrisis must resort to their only remaining weapon—to burn Evangelium as a heretic. The suffering of the martyrs serves as evidence for Bale; it strengthens his belief that, in this time of trial, Protestant lives and deaths alike give authenticity to the prophecies of the Bible. Evangelium's martyrdom shows the immortality of the Word:

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

(l. 1739-42)
Because Evangelium is not a person, but a symbol of the gospel, his burning has an allegorical significance that relates the power of his character to the power of the Protestant message. The Word of God may now be imprinted upon the minds of the followers as surely as ink is imprinted on a book. During Infidelity’s first appearance, he says,

I wolde have brought ye the paxe,
Or els an ymage of waxe,
If I had knowne ye heare.

(l. 184-86)

God is not interested in these transitory images of wax; at the end of the play, Deus Pater tells Christian Faith to “Enprent [the laws’] declaracyon / Of my swete promyses” (l. 1931-32). Happé notes that “Christian Faith represents the spirit of the Reformers” and that “The injunction to print is probably literal.” This idea of the impermanence (and inauthenticity) of an image engraved in wax provides a sharp contrast to the permanent and authentic Word of the Protestant printing press. Deus Pater asks his audience to devour the Word of God in the way that John ate the New Testament: “Reserve the same boke for a sygne of heavenly poure, / For that boke thu art that Johan from heaven ded devour” (l. 1900-1). The same message travels down a line of Johns—the Apostle (in both the gospel and Revelation), the King, and now the Playwright.

53 Happé, Plays 180, note to l. 1931-33.
54 The importance of the printing press for the Reformers is often noted, but it is important also to take measure of the argument of Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-modern Europe, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979) that the printing press was also an active creator of the conditions for Reformation, rather than just a passive instrument of Protestant propaganda. See especially her section on “Resetting the Stage for the Protestant Reformation” (367-78). Eisenstein also makes an important connection between the pastoral objectives of the Protestants and the printed word; while she argues that it is “misguided to envisage sixteenth-century reformers addressing townsmen without first placing the new presses on the scene,” she also admits that “It is because the printed page amplified the spoken word and not because it silenced it that Luther regarded Gutenberg’s invention as God’s ‘highest act of grace’” (374). The crucial interdependence between the printed and the spoken word for Protestants is exactly what is at issue in Bale’s play, where the performance serves a pastoral objective, and the printed text of the play also seeks to reach a wider audience.
Drama: The Free Play of Infidelity

In contrast to the emphasis on words and interpretation represented by the Prolocutor, Infidelity reigns over the most dramatic dimension of the play. Through the character Infidelity, Bale shows his keen awareness of the potential of the dramatic medium and his debt to his Roman Catholic predecessors. He appropriates many Roman Catholic dramatic conventions in his plays, altering them where necessary to add Protestant polemic. Pineas argues that in *Three Laws*

Bale approached the conventions of the morality play in exactly the same spirit as he had those of the mystery: those he found useful for his polemical purposes he retained; the others he discarded, for he was completely uninterested in these conventions for their own sake, just as he had absolutely no interest in founding any new dramatic genres.

Bale’s own practice of epistemological excision, however, shows only that he was adept at taking from traditions what he needed for his purposes—alteration of existing forms cannot be considered, despite Pineas’ complaints, as evidence that Bale lacked interest in drama itself. Naturally he believed that the Roman Catholics had used drama to further their own evil purposes, so it is understandable that he desired to counter these traditions with his own.

Ritchie Kendall argues that Bale found both positive and negative elements in drama, and that he divided these elements carefully in order to “demonstrate the opposition between godly stagecraft and Catholic playing.” Just as Bale contrasts the Roman Catholic with the Protestant method of interpretation in the play, so he contrasts two types of “acting,” demonstrating the difference between the free play of the vice

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55 Infidelity is very much like the traditional vice figures in medieval morality plays.
56 Pineas, “Polemical Drama” 197.
57 Kendall 109.
Infidelity and the obedient actions of the virtuous characters. This presentation of these contrasting ideas of drama and of interpretation is confined to Acts 2 through 4. The drama and the exegesis of Acts 1 and 5 is controlled and one-sided, under the direction of Deus Pater. Thus the structure of Three Laws imitates the Christian view of history, in which God controls all of the discord, including the division between the two churches/cities. The “star” of Acts 2 through 4 of the play is Infidelity, but his dangerous playing is encased within the larger dramatic framework, which makes him ultimately only a temporary and less threatening antagonist to God’s play.

“The essence of [Infidelity’s] role,” writes Peter Happe, “is his adaptability; he uses his ability to adapt to others always with evil intention but also always in ways likely to draw attention to himself. His role is theatrically the plum part, one demanding performing skills and the capacity to exploit the center stage in every possible way.”

Not only does Infidelity operate by corrupting the Word, but he also portrays in both his speech and his actions a character who constantly threatens the stability that was established by the Prolocutor. This adaptability is shown most clearly through the various costumes and “disguises” that Infidelity and his cohorts assume. Bale carefully describes the costumes not of the three laws or Deus Pater, but of the vices:

Lete Idolatry be decked lyke an olde wytche, Sodomy lyke a monke of all sectes, Ambycyon lyke a byshop, Covetousnesse lyke a Pharyse or spyrituall lawer, False Doctryne lyke a popysh doctour, and Hypocresy lyke a graye fryre. The rest of the partes are easye ynough to conjecture.

The Roman Catholic church, Evil, and shifting identities are all inextricably linked in Bale’s dramas. In contrast, the virtuous characters are marked by stable identities.

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58 Happe, Bale 76.
59 Happe, Plays 121.
Unfortunately, their costumes are not specified by Bale, and they fall under the “easy enough to conjecture” category. For a modern audience, what costume would be worn by characters such as Natural Law and Deus Pater is not easy to conjecture at all. However, it does seem safe to assume that they wore simple costumes in contrast to the elaborate costumes of the vices. In any case, the costume description itself suggests that the identity of the vices is tied to their physical appearance, while the identity of the virtue characters is certainly more than costume-deep. The virtuous characters have a “depth” that is marked by the signification that is established at the beginning—a sort of vertical hermeneutic that proceeds from sign to meaning.

By contrast, the lack of depth in the vice characters results, in part, from their fluid identities. When not dressed in the robes of the Catholic church, they play the parts of peddlers, witches, spiritual lawyers, etc. Any false art that plays on the gullibility of the senses is connected to these characters; Bale uses them to show how things that appear pleasing to the eye can be manifestations of evil. These vice characters are illusions, and thus, by definition, untrue. Infidelity’s identity is shown to be slippery through his own shift in costume between Acts 2 and 3, when he changes from a peddler to a grey friar. These disguises fool Natural Law and the Law of Moses, because they both talk to Infidelity for far longer than they would have had they known his identity.

In a similar but perhaps more startling way, Idolatry explains that s/he has changed sexes:

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60 Thora Blatt’s theory that they wore long robes is certainly believable: “On the title-page of The Temptacyon of Our Lorde there is a picture of St. John writing in the book, which is supported by an angel in a long robe. This is the official dress of angels in the Bible illustrations too, and seems the likeliest kind of costume for the Laws” (136).

61 White notes a similar situation in King John: “in King John Pope and Popery do not wear the mask; they are the mask, the fictions of true religion behind which diablerie and Anti-Christ hide and cozen the public into damnation” (35).

62 See Happé, Plays n801.

63 The exchange between the Law of Moses and Infidelity is the most telling:

M: What art thou called, I praye the hartelye?
I: Graye fryre am I non—by the messe I can not flatter.
Inf: What, sumtyme thou wert an he!
Idol: Yea, but now ych am a she.

(l. 425-26)

The mutability suggested by a change in costume is here compounded by the idea that a deeper physical change could occur, thus leaving doubt as to what is "really" beneath the changing costumes. The vice characters fool not only their virtuous counterparts, but also their fellow vices. They have trouble recognizing one another, for despite Infidelity’s boasting that he can "conjure" Sodomy and Idolatry, he doesn’t recognize them when they arrive, and exclaims when he sees them, "such two I never sawe" (l. 409). Similarly, Ambition and Avarice must be beaten until they recognize their own "father" Infidelity (l. 981 SD).

The props that the vice characters carry are also associated with artificial show, such as magic and witchcraft. The vices have bells, whistles, and other tricks of the trade that Bale associates with the false ceremonies of the Catholic church. He directs attention to their merchandising of religion, pointing to the economic obsessions of these vices (from peddlers to lawyers). The symbols and props do not really "mean" anything for the vice figures—they are merely convenient ways for them to go about their evil purposes. By contrast, any symbols that Bale associates with the virtue characters are carefully explained. For example, when each of the Laws is given an icon at the beginning of the play, Deus Pater explains specifically what each one represents. These physical icons serve only as memorial aids to direct the audience’s mind toward the mental concepts that they signify. The outer symbol of the heart given to Natural Law

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I am Infydelyte, to tell the truth of the matter.
M: And hast thu so longe dyssembled thus with me?
I: Yea, for advauntage, to smell out your subtylyte.
M: Avoyde hens I saye, thu false Infydelyte.

(l. 951-55)
serves as a token for the inner conscience of man. The stone tablets signify the hardness of Moses’ rules. The New Testament represents “a seale of [God’s] covenaut, and a lyvyng testament” (l. 134). The point is not that symbols are bad in and of themselves, but that they must be controlled and must be used instructively. Paul Whitfield White relates Bale’s guarded use of images to Calvin’s view that “‘Figures are illusory without an explanation’ and that whenever ‘God offered any sign to the holy fathers, there was added an inseparable knowledge of doctrine, without which our senses should be made amazed with bare beholding.’” White subsequently suggests that

This helps to explain why every scene in every play Bale wrote is accompanied by verbal commentary pointing to the scene’s homiletic significance. In contrast to Scripture through which God directly reveals his will to the elect, truth mediated through visual means is much more susceptible to abuse and misunderstanding.  

Furthermore, each symbol dictates an interpretive movement from an outer/literal to an inner/spiritual signification. Bale explains the presence of numerous signs in the Old Testament by referring to the Jews as “childish”—they needed signs for their faith. The true Christian faith came with the gospel, when God began to demand a more mature and mental devotion. The Roman Catholics, for Bale, have hopelessly reverted to the childish state of the Jews, but the Catholics are even worse than the Jews because they are plainly contrary to Bale’s concept of “good” in the post-messianic age.  

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64 White 39. Huston Diehl also relates the Reformers’ guarded use of images to a heightened meta-theatrical awareness (13-14).

65 Kendall explains: “The Jews, claimed Bale, were ‘flexible and prone to ydolatry’ not because they were evil, but because as believers they were mere infants. Incapable of comprehending a religion of spirit, they were granted a religion of objects. God coaxed the Jews with the toys and games of ceremonial pageantry until their ‘tendre infauncy’ gave way to ‘more years of discession.’ The birth of Christ marked the advent of spiritual maturation. Nonetheless, the Catholics regressively sought shelter in a world of ceremonial play, ignoring the more laborious worship God now demanded” (97).
that they have become “all spyrytuall” (l. 575), this does not mean pure in spirit or internally devoted, but “taken over by religious and spiritual leaders.”

The speech patterns of the characters also reflect their respective inner and outer identities. As Kendall points out,

Both Idolatry and Sodomy speak the same slippery language as their ringleader. While reserving the stately cadences of rhyme royal for Natural Law, Bale employs a sing-song, eight-line stanza containing two triple rhymes to characterize the speech of his villains.

At times the speeches of the vice characters are funny (or at least they think so). Infidelity tends to think he is particularly clever, and laughs at his own jokes. The stage direction in Act 3 reads, “Enter Infidelitas laughing,” and is followed by a line which is printed thus: “Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha,” showing the uncontrolled (and ridiculous) laughter that has seized this vice. His language, too, threatens constantly to fall into a state of disarray. At one point, Natural Law has to remind Infidelity that he has ceased to mean anything within his tangled web of language:

Ye are dysposed to dallye,
To leape and oversallye
The compasse of your wytte:
I counsell ye yet in season,
Sumwhat to folowe reason,
And gnawe upon the bytte.

(I. 244-49)

Later in the play, even Infidelity’s own companions, Pseudodoctrina and Hypocrisy, become confused when Infidelity begins to mock the Pope and his Church: “Eyther thu doest mock, or els thu art sure mad” (l. 1530). Bale’s use of language for these

66 Happé, Plays 165.
67 Kendall 104.
characters, in particular for Infidelity himself, suggests that the "substance" of the vices' words amounts to nothing at all. Without form and shape and consistency, meaning dissolves altogether. Infidelity's aim is to throw the laws "to confusyon," and this is exactly what he does, through disguises and speech.

The colourless but doctrinally pregnant speeches of the Laws, and also of Vindicta Dei and Deus Pater at the end, show extreme control reminiscent of a sermon (exemplified by Natural Law's suggestion that Infidelity "gnawe upon the bytte"). This is the sort of speech, Bale shows, that comes from virtue and truth. Bale's awareness of the dangers of the slippery speech exemplified by Infidelity makes him all the more concerned to establish a plain and unadorned speech for his didactic purposes—the "Christian Plain Style" that was becoming increasingly important in the sixteenth century. As boring as the virtue characters may seem to us, in Bale's drama the audience is forced to conclude that these characters have a "reality" and a truth that the vice characters simply do not. Bale portrays Protestantism as a world of inner, contemplative, and introspective Christianity, which is why he characterizes his church as "secrete," as opposed to that wicked church, which is "Apparaunt...and open to the eyes" (l. 1347). The purpose of the virtues' manifestation in the drama, as explained in Act 1, is to teach, because "Man in hymself is not clere" (l. 65). Bale's lesson, however, is crystalline.

The fluid characters such as Infidelity and his partners are more than just shifty—they are the opposite of what is good and true. They can exist only in opposite relation to God's plan. Like Augustine, Bale believes that evil is not an essence in itself, but a corruption of or turning away from good. Therefore, when Natural Law writes the

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68 See Auksi, Chapter 9: "Spiritual Rhetoric and the English Reformation," which does not mention Bale directly, but discusses a tradition that Bale's work both influenced and was influenced by.
knowledge of God and his ways on man’s heart, the only tactic that Idolatry and Sodomy can use is to corrupt that writing which already exists:

Sod: I wyll corrupt Gods Image
    With most unlawfull usage,  
    And brynge hym into dottage, 
    Of all concupyscence.

Idol: Within the flesh thu art, 
    But I dwell in the hart, 
    And wyll the sowle pervart
    From Gods obedyence.

(l. 683-91)

Unnatural desires are brought about by an absence of natural desire. Bale’s contentious (and somewhat personal) example of how this works lies in his frequent defense of marriage. Sex with a lawful partner of the opposite gender is perfectly natural, he explains, and it is through not engaging in this natural desire that priests and monks are led to unnatural desires (such as sodomy). What the vice characters perform on the people under Natural Law’s reign is a sort of erasure of the natural laws written on man’s heart. When corruption succeeds, the effect of the sins of the people is displayed on the physical bodies of Natural Law and the Law of Moses as well. Natural Law’s corrupted body, ridden with Leprosy, is a sign of the sexual diseases associated with the transgressions of the people. The vice figures are a sort of “anti-matter,” or, in Augustinian terms, the “touches of black” in the picture of creation; their sole “substance” is merely a negation of Natural Law.

The characters in Three Laws all seem to share an awareness that they are playing parts in a drama. When Infidelity plots against the Laws, he says, “Now wyll I contryve the dryft of another playe” (l. 1422). Kendall notes that Infidelity’s sense of drama is
"an escape from contingency and law, of its tendency to confuse rather than clarify spiritual identity, of its establishment of a world that reveals God’s universe." Kendall refers to Infidelity’s drama as a “play within a play,” which is precisely the right emphasis. His play is not the “real” play, but only a false stage constructed out of the intended opposition to the one true drama, which, for Bale, is the great drama of human history, with man as its star and God as its director. The last phrase of the play, in fact, is “God be their directour” (l. 2041), and while we cannot read this idea of direction in a modern theatrical sense, the idea that God is in control of all events on earth recalls the same dramatistic view of cosmic history that we witnessed in Augustine.

Infidelity may believe that he has some sort of control, but his control, like his identity, is illusory. Infidelity’s imagined power is dashed in Act 4 by Vindicta Dei, who tells the deluded vice, “Thynkest thu to stoppe me with thy folysh conjuracyon, / Whom God sendeth hyther for thy abhomynacyon?” (l. 1778-79). The “real” drama continues, and ends with a comic resolution, for Infidelity, like all the vices, represents merely the attempt to stop and corrupt this drama. The vices do not have a separate programme of their own; they merely react to the one already in place. In Bale’s idea of drama, the comedy is revealed, not constructed. Thus Kendall states correctly that “the audience is always aware of the larger drama to which Infidelity’s plot is merely subsidiary. This drama, ‘complyed’ by John Bale but ordained by God Himself, is a comedy.” The differentiation between comedy and tragedy in Bale’s plays is a very important one. For instance, Bale calls God’s Promises a tragedy, but Three Laws is a comedy, apparently because of its apocalyptic resolution which is the fulfillment of the Christian hope.

69 Kendall 109.
70 Kendall 108.
Infidelity's play within this comedy is a tragedy; as he himself remarks, "Companyons I want to begynne thys tragedye" (l. 1425).

The evolution of the actor's part from Baleus Prolocutor to Infidelity to Christian Faith is an example of how Bale attempts to contain the dangers of Infidelity (as representing vice, corruption, and evil) within the larger framework of his drama. Like tragedy, Infidelity has a finite time to reign, and then will be subsumed into the larger tide of history. The "threat" of a character like Infidelity is lessened considerably because he is defeated at the end of the play. In addition, he is contained within the dramatic structure, not only between the Prolocutor and Christian Faith as characters, but also within the actor's body itself. As the author and actor of this play, Bale himself contains the threat of Infidelity by surrounding the dramatization of the struggle between good and evil with the Word of God.

Yet the very presence of Infidelity, even if he is contained, leaves open the possibility of contamination, and thus the danger of vice and corruption is made very real in a context in which vice threatens at every turn to break out of the confines of the drama and into the audience. When Natural Law appears on stage with leprosy, it is evident that, as Kendall says, "The play world of the Vices has broken loose from its confines and spread its unholy disorder through the world at large." The audience is implicated in this corruption, as Bale deliberately confuses the boundary between drama and reality in order to show the audience the danger of the forces of evil that are inevitably intermingled with the forces of good in this temporary tragedy of human existence.

71 Kendall 106.
The Congregation of Christian Faith

In Act 5, Vindicta Dei punishes Infidelity with water, wildfire, and a sword. This apocalyptic cleansing clears the way for the final scene of the play, in which Deus Pater calls forth the character Christian Faith “to governe our congregacyon” (l. 1929). Thus the play ends with an emphasis upon the faithful Christian community and its ability to outlast the corruption of vice and the threat of tragedy. The victory of Christian Faith over its opposite, Infidelitas, echoes the struggle between Christ and the antichrist and provides the organizational principle for the entire play. Importantly, this final act also situates the resolution of this struggle beyond time and history, in the promise of the next world.72 Ruth Blackburn writes of the intersection between apocalyptic and educational themes in the play:

Infidelity admits to playing the Antichrist...Babylon (“old popishness”) is destroyed, God announces a new heaven and earth and the advent of the Bridegroom, and the three Laws, now purified, go out to continue their work. Fides Christi urges the audience to heed the teaching of the Laws and to have faith in Christ.73

The educational agenda of these plays is made quite clear in the final act as Deus Pater gives a lesson to Christian Faith, who promises to register these exhortations in his memorial, and then turns to the audience to make sure they are doing the same. Thora Blatt argues that Christian Faith is “a type of the Reformer,”74 and this is the part that he plays in the end, providing the renewal and hope after the time of decline. The action in Act 5 seems somewhat removed from the dramatic movement of Acts 2 through 4.

72 As Fairfield observes, “One is hard put to find in Balc anything of the Calvinist assumption that the world’s end might be indefinitely postponed, and that in the meantime the people of God had best busy themselves building godly Genevas on earth” (113).
73 Blackburn 42.
74 Blatt 84.
because Bale is bringing the drama from the enclosed world of Infidelity to the cosmic theatre of God. This is exemplified in the final lines of the play, which call for an order in England where everyone acts appropriately, with God as the director:

Praye all to the Lorde for the longe contynuaunce
Of hys graces lyfe in thys worldes habytacyon;
And that of hys nobles he have true mayntenaunce
In the pryncyles of thys most worthy foundacyon,
That he maye to Christ brynge us from desolacyon.
Praye for Quene Kateryne, and the noble Lorde Protectour,
With the whole counsell that God be their directour. (l. 2035-41)

The play concludes on a triumphant note, for Christian Faith has unified the Protestant community, which is ready to play its part in God’s historical drama. The play has guided the audience through a shared interpretive experience, and they now constitute a textual community with a common understanding of the biblical script.

Blurring the lines between worship service and Christian drama, Bale refers to his audience as a “Christian congregation.” The Catholic mystery plays also fostered a sense of community, so how could Bale make this idea of community different from the Catholic model, and what sort of “imagined community” does he hope to create in this arena of controlled exegesis? Bale uses two opposing examples of exegesis and of drama in order to support his main objective, which is to present a vision of two communities, one of the faithful, and the other of the unfaithful. His dualistic model of communities is established by Act 5, where he underlines the position and role of the godly community in the divine drama.
Many critics, prompted by William Haller's influential work, have argued that the English nation is at the centre of Bale's vision of the Christian community. Hadfield contends that, in its nationalistic tendencies, Bale's community does bear some resemblance to Anderson's "homogeneous empty time" of the nation; using King Johan to prove his point, Hadfield concludes that "The necessary form of Bale's history is inexorably metonymic and nationalistic." Most critics who emphasize the nationalistic tendencies of Bale's work use King Johan as their main point of reference, and it cannot be denied that Bale took a special interest in the English nation. Yet, despite the strong connections between English nationhood and Bale's plays, perhaps we should not be so quick to be convinced that the nation lies at the centre of Bale's idea of community. The rhetoric of nationhood is useful to him, and he spent a great deal of time documenting English history for precisely this reason, but England is not what Bale pictures when he imagines the ideal community/church. England is a good model, but, perhaps because he had lived there through the worst of times, Bale views it only as a model, a dim shadow, of the glory to come, just as Augustine uses Rome as an imperfect foreshadowing of the City of God.

Bale's reading of Revelation necessitates an understanding of nationhood and community that goes beyond the rulers of this world. His new heaven and new earth are founded upon the inward faith of man:

The apostle Johan in the Apocalyps doth saye
He sawe a newe heaven and a newe earth aperynge,
The olde earth and see were taken cleane awaye;
That heaven is mannys fayth, that earth hys understandynge,
Whom we have renued by our most secret workynge. (l. 1861-65)

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76 Hadfield 78.
The internal and secret world of Bale’s theology shows an idea of the Protestant community that is not coterminous with the English nation. Bale’s core idea of community is the Church. Every other dichotomy he poses in terms of community ultimately falls under the distinction between the true and the false church:

Thys is not the church of dysgysed hypocrytes,
Of aypsh shavelynges, or papystycall sodomytes;
Nor yet, as they call it, a temple of lyme and stone,
But a lyvysh buyldynge, grounded in fayth alone,
On the harde rocke Christ whych is the sure foundacyon:
And of thys church some do reigne in every nacyon,
And in all contrayes though their nombre be but small.

(l. 1327-33; my emphasis)

Here the idea of community or church goes beyond the coasts of England, and Bale asks his audience to imagine themselves as part of a nation-like structure that is not determined by the boundaries of countries, but instead by the boundaries of belief. Thus, while we cannot deny that the Reformation in England drew a close connection between the church and the state, it is evident that the nationhood Bale attempts to explain is the Christian nation, with its members, like the members of the City of God, scattered throughout the earth in the midst of those who do not belong. Bale is clear that “some do reign in every nacyon” (l. 1332). Most importantly, Bale, like Augustine, ultimately defines these communities eschatologically, so they cannot ever be synonymous with temporally bound nations.

The distinction between the faithful and unfaithful communities in Revelation is expressed in terms of a dichotomy between two cities—Babylon and Jerusalem. Rather than discussing two cities, however, Bale needed to put this dualistic model into more contemporary terms. For Bale, the vital difference for Protestants was not between two
cities, but between two churches: a false outward church ("Apparaunt is that church and open to the eyes" [l. 1347]) and a true inward church ("My church is secrete and evermore wyll be" [l. 1351]). The dualism based on the difference between "inner truth" and "outer falsehood," however, quickly became a difficult distinction to uphold, because Bale's use of the dramatic medium itself brought him dangerously close to presenting truth in terms of illusion and to showing the power of Infidelity as all too potent.

Ritchie Kendall argues that Bale's attempts to contain and control the dangerous elements of drama resulted in a very limited art: "A man who lived in a universe of stark antinomies, Bale resolved his problem by parting the waters of drama like some Old Testament saint. All that he feared in the stage, he sequestered among his enemies and their creations; all that he could safely love, he appropriated as his own." Kendall concludes that Bale was "a man who hated and loved drama with the same breath and yet somehow managed to fashion an artistic creation to house his divided soul." This view of Bale's practice as a dramatist obscures an important point—Bale was not afraid or divided in his attitude toward drama, but he did believe that drama, like everything else, could be good or evil. When he divides drama, he is doing the same thing that he does when providing two models of exegesis and two models of a true church. By rehearsing these dualities for the audience, he asks them whether they will be part of Satan's body, or of Christ's.

However, it cannot be denied that Bale's dramatic form unearthed problems with the simplicity of his original dualistic model. The difficulty of discerning the difference between truth and falsehood in a world in which the two churches are intermingled became a serious problem for Bale, who was not as content as Augustine to leave the

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77 Kendall 131.
eschatological separation an unsolved mystery. Perhaps immediately after his conversion he believed that he could argue that the Roman Catholic church was the ultimate embodiment of evil, while the new Reformed church could be associated with the faithful community of believers. If so, it soon became clear to him that there was not just one Reformed church, but many; such a fact became painfully obvious when the Protestant Bale was exiled from his own Protestant country (a situation which probably prompted him to write the *Image*). As Bale began to work on the first English commentary on Revelation, he needed a more complex view of the two churches that would account for the difficulties of which the dramatic form had made him aware. Most of all, he needed a more complete historical/exegetical framework that could help him to identify the nature of the two churches more clearly—to separate them from their inherently intermingled condition.
III. *Civitas to Congregation:*
*Augustine’s Two Cities and John Bale’s *Image of Both Churches*

The idea of the two churches that Bale had developed by the time he wrote *Three Laws* became an even stronger part of his theology in the following decades as his increasing interest in the Apocalypse became central to his exegetical and historical projects. In his various autobiographical sketches, Bale makes it clear that part of this interest was a personal one—he was a stranger most everywhere he went, often facing harsh opposition for his beliefs. When he wrote the *Image* during his first exile on the continent, he remarked:

> I have exiled myself for ever from mine own native country, kindred, friends, acquaintance, (which are the great delights of this life,) and am well contented for Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the comfort of my brethren there, to suffer poverty, penury, abjection, reproof, and all that shall come besides. (260)

The full title of the *Image* reads: *The Image of bothe churches after the moste wonderfull and heavenly Reuelacion of Sainct John the Euangelist, contayning a very fruteful exposicion or paraphrase upon the same, Wherein it is conferred with the other scripturs and most auctorised historyes. Compiled by John Bale an exile also in this life for the faythfull testimonie of Jesu.* As the title indicates, the work is part exegesis and part history. Written between 1541 and 1547, the *Image* is divided into three parts, and Bale follows a consistent method throughout, quoting several verses of the book of Revelation, numbering each word or phrase on which he wants to comment, and then providing a full commentary for each of these numbered points. In Part 1, he also provides extensive

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78 The first edition of the *Image* was completed in 1541, the second was published with the first in 1545, the final part was added in 1547, and the entire three books were finally published in London in 1550-51. The *Image* also went through several more printings in the next few decades.
marginal references to support his assertions and to lend weight to his overall argument about the two churches.

Focusing on a historical dualism between two churches was not a new idea for the Protestants. Bauckham explains that “The doctrine of the two churches was a basic tenet of the Tudor Protestant apocalyptic outlook, frequently an underlying assumption even when not explicitly stated.” Bale was part inheritor and part creator of this outlook. When he constructed Three Laws as an arena for teaching his audience about the opposition between the two churches, showing contrasting examples of exegesis, drama, and communities, Bale was (consciously or unconsciously) following many of the basic elements of Augustine’s model of the two cities. His decision to write a work about the two churches suggests that he was aware of the Augustinian genealogy and that he was following the “true opinion of St Austin” in his work of historical exegesis. As mentioned earlier, there has been no shortage of critical opinion that the City of God influenced, or even inspired, Bale’s theology of history. Yet this theory has never been adequately tested or explained. Only by first looking closely at the direct references Bale makes to Augustine in the Image, and then comparing Augustine’s model of the two cities with Bale’s model of the two churches, can we begin to understand the legacy of Augustine’s City of God in sixteenth-century England.

Bale Reading Augustine: The Textual Evidence

In the Introduction to the Image, Bale includes two references to Augustine in the margins. The first is beside the passage quoted above about Babylon and Jerusalem, next to which Bale cites Augustine, Revelation 21 (where the new Jerusalem is

79 Bauckham 54.
80 See the opening paragraph of this chapter.
described), and Jeremiah 1 (concerning the judgement of the wicked, and Jeremiah’s fortification of the city against them). The next marginal reference to Augustine accompanies a passage about the theme of exile in the book of Revelation:

Of such a nature is the message of this book with the other contents thereof, that from no place is it sent more freely, opened more clearly, nor told forth more boldly, than out of exile.... In exile was it first written.... In exile are the powers thereof most earnestly proved of them that have faith. (254)

Bale’s citation of Augustine in this case probably relates to the importance of peregrination and alienation in the *City of God*. Bale connects Augustine’s idea of alienation to his own situation as an exile, thus uniting the condition of the Henrician exiles, John of Patmos, and the Augustinian *peregrini*.

Because Bale is attempting to elucidate the book of Revelation, his interest in Augustine focuses upon this father’s comments on the Apocalypse. Significantly, Bale lists Augustine as a commentator on Revelation in the year 420.\(^{81}\) This must be a reference to the *City of God* because of the date and the fact that Bale’s only direct references to Augustine in the *Image* concern the *City of God*. Whether or not the *City of God* is in fact primarily about Revelation, it is clear that Bale *thought* it was. This citation of Augustine as a commentator on the Apocalypse highlights the nature of Bale’s use of Books 20-22 of the *City of God* as a source for his eschatology. Because he reads the *City of God* as a commentary on Revelation, any reference he makes to that work tends to be within an apocalyptic framework.\(^{82}\)

Part 1 of the *Image* contains no direct quotations from Augustine, and Bale mentions Augustine only once in the main text, in a list of Greek and Latin writers who

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\(^{81}\) Bale lists numerous commentators on the Apocalypse, and says “Saint Austin also, anno dom. 420” (*Image* 255).

\(^{82}\) His only direct citations of the *City of God* are from Book 20, in which Augustine discusses Revelation.
were “faithful believers and constant witnesses of the verity in this life” who “preserv[ed] the undefiled scriptures” (317). However, he does cite Augustine in the margins seven times. The references serve to support some of Bale’s points, and in these instances Augustine is included along with the relevant biblical passages and a list of other commentators on the subject (patristic, medieval, or Reformation). Not all of his references to Augustine are from the City of God, but some of them are. For instance, Bale’s cautious view of exegetical practice, “In the search therefore of godly mysteries, not the wit nor the learning of the man is to be sought, but rather the right meaning of God working in the man” (375) echoes similar cautions throughout the City of God. The other marginal notation accompanies Bale’s explanation of the silence after the opening of the seventh seal, where he again mentions the relationship between God’s secrets and the “inward working...reserved to his spirit” (372). In both cases, Bale seems interested in Augustine’s theories of exegesis, especially concerning the relationship between “inner” and “outer” significance.

After Part 1 of the Image, Bale abandoned the practice of including marginal references, claiming that “two cruel enemies have my just labours had on that behalf” (380-81). These two enemies are the sloppy printers and an unnamed “blasphemer” who had apparently used Bale’s marginalia in order to prove him wrong and unlearned. Because of this change of practice, it is difficult to determine where Bale was using

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83 For example, Bale’s first marginal reference to Augustine has him as a supporter of the doctrine of the trinity, along with Athanasius, Fulgentius, Revelation 1, and Isaiah 44 (Image 302). Bale also lists Augustine twice in connection with those who fought against heresies in the early church (Image 316 and 346).

84 See, e.g., City of God 16.2; 652, in which Augustine explains that all of the hidden meanings of Scripture should interpreted “with reference to Christ and his Church, which is the City of God.” See also Bale’s reference to angels (368), which probably lists Augustine as an authority because of Book 12 of the City of God.

85 The blasphemer, whom Bale calls “Momus or Zoilus,” was probably a real person, but the identity remains unclear (see Image 381-82).
Augustine as a source or as a general authority in support of his own assertions. Part 2 is a particular problem because Bale never mentions Augustine there at all. Whereas we could still discern Bale’s usage of Augustine from the marginal notes despite the absence of direct references in the text in Part 1, in Part 2 we have neither and are left entirely to conjecture.

Part 3, by contrast, contains the clearest evidence of Augustine’s influence upon Bale. There are six direct references to him, including two specific references to the *City of God*. The first of these is in connection with Bale’s reading of Revelation 20.4, where he notes:

> St Augustine, in his twentieth book *De civitate Dei*, willeth by Gog to be signified the glorious hypocrites of the world, and by Magog the open enemies of righteousness. (570-71)

As the footnote in the Parker Society edition of the *Image* correctly points out, this is not exactly what Augustine says in chapter 11 of Book 20 when he discusses Gog and Magog. Instead, Augustine says that Gog and Magog respectively mean “the roof” and “from the roof,” or “the house” and “the one who proceeds from the house.” He interprets this etymology as a metaphor for the devil and those wicked men who proceed from the devil’s camp. When Augustine describes these enemies in more detail, he refers the readers to his discussion of enemy nations in a previous chapter.\(^86\) in which he warns that the followers of the devil are shut up secretly and cannot be discerned, which may be where Bale derived the idea of the connection between these evil characters and hypocrisy. Furthermore, in chapter 9 of the same book, Augustine gives his interpretation of the seven-headed beast as a representation of “the godless city itself.”

\(^86\) “according to our interpretation given above” (*City of God* 20.11; 920).
He then relates the “image” of the beast to his pretence and hypocrisy, which stands for those who put on an outward show of being Christians even though they are not. Thus, Bale read Augustine’s general idea about two kinds of faithless people into his discussion of Gog and Magog as agents of the devil at the end of time. What holds these two ideas together is the emphasis on hypocrisy, on the difference between seen and unseen. Throughout the Image, Bale notes that there are two facets of the Antichrist—the one that can be seen, and the one that cannot be seen: “Therefore I do take [the beast] for one universal antichrist (as I did afore), comprehending in him so well Mahomet as the pope, so well the raging tyrant as the still hypocrite; and all that wickedly work are of the same body” (436). Like Augustine, who points out that “it is not only the open enemies of the name of Christ and his most glorious City who belong to this beast” (20.9; 917), Bale allows for a complex understanding of his two churches that goes beyond a simple dichotomy between “seen and unseen.”

The other direct reference to the City of God in Part 3 of the Image reads: “For, as witnesseth St Augustine in his twentieth book and twelfth chapter, De civitate Dei, not only is this punishment to be referred to that latter judgment but also to the extermination of antichrist’s host by the word of God the world over” (576). This is indeed a paraphrase of this short chapter of the City of God, and Bale’s direct citation of this point certainly suggests that he had a copy of the City of God at hand (or else was referring to the work of someone else who had), and used it as an authoritative commentary on the end times. The fact that both of these direct references to the City of God concern Revelation 20 is no accident: this chapter is the only part of Revelation which Augustine discusses in any detail in the City of God. Moreover, Bale’s use of the passage shows
that he is looking for places in the *City of God* which suggest that some of these "apocalyptic" events have already begun.

Bale also uses Augustine in defense of the doctrine of grace, but more often in support of his exegesis. For instance, he uses Augustine as an authoritative voice in favour of a more "general" interpretation of passages than other exegetes allow.

Furthermore, he includes Augustine's name in a list of Christian writers and exegetes who "spoiled the Egyptians" by bringing the glories of the pagan world into the Heavenly City, in which there is no darkness (which Bale relates to exegetical error—a "doctrine of darkness" [614]). Finally, Bale defends Augustine and his fellow commentators against the admonition in Revelation 22:18-19 to "put nothing, nor take any thing from, the Word" by pointing out that these exegetes have done no injury to the word by elucidating it for others (637).

To summarize: in the marginal references, Bale includes Augustine along with other authorities in order to add weight to his general argument. He never gives the exact source in these citations, and they usually function as a supporting authority to his views against heresies, on the doctrine of grace, or upon other points of orthodoxy. All of Bale's allusions or direct references to the *City of God* are to the last three books, which deal with the End Times, and which Bale seems to use as one of his many sources on the Apocalypse. Bale's direct use of Augustine is thus less extensive than might have been supposed, given the affinity of their projects. However, there are important patterns that can be detected from these direct references which make it easier to set up a discussion of

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87 "Not our good works (Saith St Augustine), but his own mere gifts, doth the Lord crown in us" (631).
88 When discussing Revelation 21:19-20, Bale lists several different opinions that commentators have given about the meaning of the various gems in the new Jerusalem. Rather than committing himself to one of these, Bale writes, "Enough is it for us to shew you, after the mind of St Augustine, these stones to signify the divers graces of the Holy Ghost" (609).
89 This is a reference to *On Christian Teaching* 2.40; 65-66.
the ways in which Bale may have been indebted to Augustine. For instance, it is evident that Bale was (in some sense) reading the *City of God*, that he believed it to provide a commentary on Revelation, and that he was interested in Augustine's theories of exegesis. Finally, perhaps the most striking point that begins to emerge from this initial survey is that Bale saw his two churches as homologous with Augustine's two cities, and saw both of these models as a dramatistic expression of the apocalyptic struggle between the forces of Babylon and Jerusalem.

**A Spiritual Community: Civitas to Congregation**

Bale's title has led most critics to assume that the *City of God* was the major inspiration behind the *Image*. Paul Christianson argues that "Bale took St. Augustine's idea of the two cities and transformed it into that of the two churches—one headed by Christ and the other by antichrist." However, the nature of this supposed "transformation" deserves closer attention. Too often critics have been led by Bale's polemical attacks against the Roman Catholic church to believe that Bale identified it directly with the Church of the Antichrist, and in turn identified the Protestant church with the true Christian church. As Blatt would have it, "Bale, of course, has a strong tendency to identify *civitas diaboli* with the papacy, which is as un-Augustinian as the attempt of the Church to monopolize *civitas dei*." Indeed, a direct identification between either institutional church and the city of God or Man would be un-Augustinian, and at times it is easy enough to understand why Bale can be read in this manner. He uses phrases such as the "proud church of hypocrites," the "rose-coloured whore," the "paramour of antichrist," and the "sinful synagogue of Satan" (251) to describe the Roman Catholic Church. Nonetheless,

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90 Christianson 15.
91 Blatt 128.
it is important to note that while Bale did identify the Roman Catholic Church in this manner, his concept of the wicked church reached beyond the boundaries of this one institution.

Richard Bauckham, recognizing the complexity of this issue, observes that “In Tudor Protestant thought the relationship between the ‘church of the wicked’ and the Church of Rome is often as difficult to pin down as that between Augustine’s *civitas Dei* and the visible church of Christ.” Bauckham’s basic premise is correct, but his analogy between Bale’s “wicked church” and Augustine’s City of God confuses the issue, because it compares the negative community of Bale’s model to the positive community of Augustine’s model, implying that there is not a similar ambiguity in the other halves of Bale’s and Augustine’s models (which, of course, there is).

It is more fruitful to compare the relationship of Bale’s “church of the wicked” and the church of Rome not with Augustine’s City of God and the visible church, but with his earthly city and the city of Rome. Augustine consistently equates the earthly city with Rome, but sometimes he uses Rome as a negative apocalyptic symbol, as an embodiment of evil, while at other times he speaks of Rome as a more neutral place that can be “used” by the pilgrims of the city of God while they are on earth. While these two views may seem to create an ambiguous picture, one thing is clear: Rome may be neutral as a city of the earth, but Rome as a symbol of the earthly city is certainly not neutral—it is entirely evil. Similarly, for Bale, the “church of the wicked” is completely evil. However, despite the claims of critics such as Blatt, it is evident that Bale does not limit the citizenship of the wicked church to the Roman Catholic Church any more than Augustine limits the citizenship of the earthly city to the city of Rome. Certain

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92 Bauckham 55.
93 See Chapter 1, section I.3: “Rome and the Earthly City.”
institutions (the Roman Catholic Church or “The Turks” for Bale, and Rome for Augustine) may serve as resonant symbols for these negative communities, but they are merely a particular historical manifestation of a much larger concept. The entire human race, Augustine insists, can be divided into “two branches: the one consist[ing] of those who live by human standards, the other of those who live according to God’s will. I also call these two classes the two cities, speaking allegorically” (15.1; 595, my emphasis). By “speaking allegorically,” both Augustine and Bale can construct ideas of communities that include, but do not limit themselves to, earthly institutions.

Like the earthly city, Augustine’s City of God is a community that extends beyond institutional boundaries, and that exists on a symbolic level. When Bale discusses the heavenly city or church, he shows himself attuned to Augustine’s spiritual/metaphorical description of this city. When he speaks of the holy city, he often cites the verse from Psalm 87 (“Glorious things are spoken of you, O City of God”), which was the basis of Augustine’s title. And Bale makes it clear that the heavenly City is not the earthly Jerusalem, but a city “grounded upon the strong foundation of the apostles and prophets, even upon the hard rock-stone, Jesus Christ” (385). Bale sees this city not only as an eschatological realization, but as a “living generation of them which fear, love, and seek their Lord God in faith, spirit and verity, and not in outward shadows.” Like Augustine, he views the pilgrims on this earth as “children of promise, the true offspring of Abraham, the chosen house of Israel, and the kingdom of the Holy Ghost” (385-6). Thus, when he says the “city of God, or the holy congregation” (547), we should not take it any more literally as a reference to the Protestant church than we take Augustine’s phrase “God’s church” as a reference to the Catholic church of his time.
Bauckham argues that "the doctrine of the two churches has its deepest roots in Augustine’s doctrine of the two cities, and though Augustine never used the terminology of churches, early sixteenth century writers had no hesitation in calling their doctrine his."\(^94\) What does this shift in terminology imply? First of all, it is important to note that Bauckham is not entirely correct in this assertion, because Augustine did all use the term "church" (ecclesia), and thus perhaps there is not so large a shift in terminology. When speaking of both communities, however, Augustine always used the term civitas, which made more sense to his audience because of the prevailing dichotomy between the societies of Babylon and Jerusalem, and because of the importance of the city (urbs) and society (civitas) of Rome. In Protestant rhetoric, however, the true and false cities had been overlaid with true and false churches, and whereas Augustine could also call the City of God a church, Bale could also call the church of God a congregation. The term "congregation" was the preferred one for Protestants, because it emphasized a unified but non-institutional community of believers. Thus, despite the shift in terminology, Bale’s usage of Augustine’s scheme of the two cities is much more faithful to the original idea than medieval writers such as Otto of Freising had been.\(^95\)

Although both Augustine and Bale privilege the spiritual and symbolic significance of the City or Church of God, they do not ignore the literal or temporal level, because without the original form of an earthly institution, there would be nothing to reflect, and therefore there would be no image of what is to come. It is the movement from the temporal to the eternal, from the literal to the spiritual, which structures Augustine’s and Bale’s models. The exegetical journey parallels the structure of the City of God, which is divided between citizens of heaven and pilgrims on earth. As

\(^94\) Bauckham 55.

\(^95\) See Lavere, passim, and Firth 2-3 for a discussion of Otto’s use of Augustine.
noted above, Bale identified Augustine’s themes of pilgrimage and alienation with the themes of persecution and exile as described in the book of Revelation, and with his own situation. Although Bale could not quite see himself as a martyr, he did see himself as an exile throughout most of his life, and thus he felt particularly prepared to provide a commentary on the book of Revelation. Bale’s sense of alienation informed not only his understanding of the Apocalypse, but also his framework of the two churches. The citizens of the true Christian church are often sent into exile, or even persecuted, for they are strangers to life here on earth whose “reign is not of this world.” Bale believed that persecution was a sign of election, and used martyrs as the symbol of these strangers on earth—people such as John Oldcastle, Anne Askewe, and even himself as he escaped, like St. Paul, from torments on the sea.

Katharine Firth contends that “In Part II of the Image, Bale had made a point of the importance of martyrdom in his history of the church, and had hinted at the transformation of the two cities, represented in the Apocalypse by Jerusalem and Babylon, into two kinds of people and two churches, one dedicated to the spirit and one to the flesh.”96 This dichotomy between the spirit and the flesh is certainly emphasized by Bale in many places, most notably when he says, “In the church is evermore variance and strife without ceasing betwixt the Spirit and the flesh, the good and the bad, the faithful and the unfaithful. Continued hath this battle from the first beginning, and so shall still to the latter end” (411). However, a closer look at Bale’s views on flesh and spirit shows that he was not setting up a simple dichotomy between the two in terms of good and evil. He says of the godly church,

96 Firth 44.
In spirit and verity shall they worship him, and not in dumb ceremonies nor outward shadows. Speared\textsuperscript{97} is God's temple, when his true worshiping is hid; and opened it is again, when that is clearly seen. Till Christ's coming in the flesh nothing thereof appeared: with the key of David opened he the mysteries thereof; whereby through faith the conversation of many is now and hath been ever since in heaven. (403)

The first sentence is a distinction between two kinds of worship, and does indeed associate the godly people with spiritual and unseen truths. Yet Bale's emphasis on the Incarnation shows that there is an integral relationship between flesh and spirit, and that there is a good flesh as well as a bad flesh. In this case, it is Christ's flesh that leads to the spiritual understanding which God's pilgrims may glimpse partially during this life, and fully in the next. Like Augustine, Bale sets up a binary model that does not allow for a separation of flesh into one realm and spirit in another. For Augustine, the essential event at the Last Judgement is the perfect union between the spirit and the flesh—for both the saved and the damned. In like manner, Bale sees the resurrection, and the community of believers, as a harmony of spirit and flesh. Therefore, although there are naturally differences between Bale's model and Augustine's, Bâle's term "church" is analogous to Augustine's "city": in both cases, these terms are used to define two communities that are radically opposed throughout the drama of history.

The most important facet of the two cities for Augustine is that they are intermingled here, but separated at the end. The eschatological orientation of these two cities determines the way that Augustine views the sciences of history and interpretation, which are both necessary only because of the Fall.\textsuperscript{98} Because Bale adopts the general model of the two cities (and because his use of the term "church" does not essentially

\textsuperscript{97} "Spear" in the sense of \textit{OED} v1, 1: "To shut or close firmly or securely; to bar or block (a way)."

\textsuperscript{98} See Chapter 1, section III: "History and Narratology: The Plot of God's Cosmic Drama."
alter this scheme), it is only natural that this model informs Bale’s methods of historiography and hermeneutics as it does Augustine’s.

The Two Churches as a Model for Historiography

When Bale presents these two communities in the Image, although he is using a non-dramatic medium, his attention to the dramatistic elements of the model of the two cities/churches has not wavered. The Image, like Three Laws, shows the opposition between these two communities in the way that each of them uses drama. On one hand, there is the wicked church (represented by the beast), which features various historical personages in the antichrist’s play:

The supper of the Lord, that was sometime a mutual participation of Christ’s body and blood, must now be a new crucifying of him, one traitor playing all parts, Judas, Annas, Caiphas, Herod, Pilate, and the Jews. (Image 431; my emphasis)

But this drama, like Infidelity’s, is only temporary, and is overshadowed by God’s drama. Bale’s explanation of the end of Revelation includes a change in God’s role (“From henceforth doth the Lord change the manner of his speaking, representing again the personage of an angel or messenger” [Image 632]) that is strongly reminiscent of the change from Vindicata Dei to Deus Pater in Act 5 of Three Laws.

As Bale’s presentation of history in Three Laws makes clear, he is much more willing to talk about the history of his own age than was Augustine. Like many medieval apocalypticists, Bale saw the seven seals, trumpets, and vials of Revelation as a prophecy of seven stages of post-Ascension history. At first glance, this would seem to be a completely different way of seeing history than that which Augustine presents in the City of God. But while it is true that Augustine believed that there could be no more decisive turning points in history after the Ascension, he does not leave the sixth age devoid of all
meaning. Augustine is aware of a gap in sacred history for the last age, and when he turns his attention to prophecy and revelation in Books 19-22 of the *City of God*, he does cautiously sketch the outlines of what the Scripture seems to say about the ends of the two cities. For Augustine, the gap in history between the Ascension and the Last Judgement gained significance mainly on an individual level, in the spiritual journey of each believer. For Bale, who is interested primarily in the universal history of the last age, this gap becomes central. There are important differences that arise from these diverging emphases to which we shall return in a moment. In principle, however, Bale’s objective was not so very different from Augustine’s: to trace the origin, development, and destined ends of the two cities/churches.

Because Bale sees Revelation as the “complete sum and whole knitting up...of the universal verities of the bible” (252), he combines his understanding of the Apocalypse with other scriptural sources in order to explain the origin and development of the two cities/churches. Like Augustine, Bale equates the beast of Revelation 13 with the earthly city, and he explains in the *Image* that

From the world’s beginning hath this beast risen up in Cain, the first murderer, in the fleshly children of men, in Cham the shameless child of Noe, in Ismael and Esau, in Jannes and Jambres, in Balaam and Baal’s prophets, in the Benjamites and Bel’s chaplains, in Phasur and Semeias, in Judas, Annas and Caiphas, in Barjesu and Diotrephes; and now, since their time, most of all in Mahomet’s doctors and the pope’s quiresters. (437)

The genealogy of the beast, or wicked church, is traced by Bale in the same way that Augustine traces the genealogy of the earthly city, even using the same biblical characters for support. This listing of members not only relates individuals to communities, but also locates historical people and events within the larger framework of history. Although

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Bale does not comment extensively on pre-Ascension matters in the *Image*, this passage certainly calls into question Firth’s assertion that “Bale limited the universal antichrist to the history of the Christian church from the Ascension.” Indeed, Bale is adamant that “The execrable beast or carnal kingdom of antichrist, which thou hast seen here in mystery, was as concerning his beginning in Cain first of all, and so continued forth in the fleshly children of men” (499). While Bale assigns a preeminent importance to the Incarnation, he clearly believes that the opposing churches had their origin in the garden of Eden. Bale sees the pregnant woman of Revelation 12 as the growing body of the righteous who

waxed…bigger and bigger, till the fulness of her time was come that she should be delivered: which was such time as Christ appeared to the world, taught, and was conversant here among men. And this course hath she kept ever since, and shall do to the latter day in them that believe. Thus hath she had Christ in her womb since the beginning. (405)

Although Augustine does not discuss Revelation 12 in the *City of God*, Bale's reading of this passage is strikingly similar to Augustine’s interpretation of Revelation 21, which reads,

This City is said to come down from heaven because the grace by which God created it is heavenly…. This City has been coming down from heaven since its beginning, from the time when its citizens began to increase in number as they have continued to increase throughout the period of this present age. (20.7; 928)

Thus both men consider the two cities/churches as products of a history that had its beginning in the garden (or before then, in Augustine’s case), and that continues until the end of time.  

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100 Firth 53.
Both Bale and Augustine, after explaining the origin and development of the two cities/churches, must describe, to the best of their ability, the destined ends of these two communities. Bale's reading of Revelation emphasizes the opposing ends of the two churches, showing how the wicked lament for Babylon: "Oh, that city, that city, that sometime was so mighty and strong, so fair and beautiful, so glorious and holy, is now become waste and desolate!" (525). He then assures the faithful citizens of the other city/church of their promised felicity: "No longer are ye strangers and foreigners, but citizens of heaven and the very household children of God" (545). The Augustinian themes of pilgrimage and citizenship dominate Bale's understanding of both communities. Like Augustine's *peregrini*, Bale's faithful pilgrims wander as exiles in this world because they are members of a heavenly community which they cannot enter until the end of time.

The major difference between Bale's historiography and Augustine's is that whereas Augustine emphasizes the intermingled quality of the two cities throughout history, Bale is more interested in the moment of separation between the two churches and so reads his eschatological understanding back into secular history in a way that Augustine is reluctant to do. It is true that Bale interprets many of the events of Revelation as if they had happened in the past, whereas Augustine considers all of these events as part of the future. However, this is not to say, as Avihu Zakai does, that

The great difference between Bale, and indeed Protestant historiography in general, and Augustine, is that while in Augustine's thought the struggle between the two cities marks the essence of profane, secular history, and will be resolved beyond time and history, according to Bale the apocalyptic struggle between the two churches is inherent in providential history and is played out and resolved within time. It is in history (now redefined as "providential history"), Bale argued, that "the two churches" receive their due fate.\(^{101}\)

\(^{101}\) Zakai 28.
First of all, any suggestion that Augustine thinks that the struggle between the two cities is exclusively the domain of "profane, secular history" is clearly a misunderstanding of the *City of God*. Secondly, it is unclear how Zakai imagines that Bale’s concept of "providential history" is any different from Augustine’s account of "sacred history."

Also, for Augustine these apocalyptic events are not resolved "beyond time and history"; instead, they actually constitute the end of time and history. Zakai goes on to argue that in sharp contrast to Augustine’s pessimistic view of history as devoid of any sacred or human progress, and his resultant concept of alienation from the world, Bale and other Protestant historians developed a sense of history as the arena in which the drama of salvation is unfolding, a realm in which sacred, and hence human, progress is made from divine promise to its fulfillment. In sharp contrast to Augustine, Protestant historiography perceived history as rich in immanent meaning.\(^{102}\)

It is not fair to label Augustine’s caution about interpreting history as "pessimism," or to say that he viewed history as completely devoid of meaning. Zakai and Firth are right to contend that there are differences between Bale’s and Augustine’s historiography. Yet this difference is not one of kind so much as of emphasis. Both Bale and Augustine see the Incarnation as central. Even though Augustine views the Incarnation as the decisive moment after which history as a cosmic evolution has nothing more to accomplish, that does not mean that he believes the sixth age has no meaning—this last age of history exists to make up the number of saints, and this goal gives contemporary history a significance that cannot possibly be seen as "devoid of any sacred or human progress."\(^{103}\)

\(^{102}\) Zakai 28.

\(^{103}\) In Book 14, Augustine assures us that “equally fortunate would be the whole united fellowship of mankind if our first parents had not committed an evil deed....[T]his felicity would have continued until... the number of the predestined saints was made up; and then another and a greater happiness would have been granted, the happiness which has been given to the blessed angels” (14.10; 567).
Like Augustine, Bale is a preacher, and there are deep pastoral and educational concerns within the theological fabric of his historiography. Caught in a secular world between the Incarnation and the Last Judgement, the pilgrims of the City of God must make sense of history by becoming part of a community of believers that reenacts the story of human salvation on a microcosmic level. In Augustine’s narrative of history, there are hermeneutic spaces that can be filled by the “secular imagination.” One of the ways in which both Bale and Augustine fill these gaps is by involving their readers in the dramatic conflict between the two communities, and making them feel part of it through a shared interpretive experience in God’s theatre of history.

In the *City of God*, Augustine gestures towards the meaning of Revelation cautiously, yet tantalizingly, leaving room open for conjecture and imagination. For Bale, the story of this last age comprises a space that becomes cosmic in its significance. It is this hermeneutical gap that Bale, as the citizen of a world 1100 years older, cannot but attempt to fill.

The Two Churches as a Model for Exegesis

Bale hated the empty ceremonial theatre of the Roman Catholic church and its potential for uncontrolled free play that corrupts God’s word. In *Three Laws* he contains the threat of Infidelity within a dramatic structure that imitates God’s ultimate control over history; in the *Image* he uses the structure of the book of Revelation to construct an arena for controlled interpretation that progresses from letter to spirit.

Augustine’s belief that Scripture holds all of the answers, coupled with his belief that we can see only dim reflections of the truth of God’s word in this *saeculum*, creates an unattainable desire for perfect hermeneutical understanding; his exegesis moves, like his desire, from the literal to the spiritual level of signification. Even in his interpretation
of Revelation, where he is reluctant to be historical, he still begins with the literal level of the text—at the word itself. After quoting one passage, he often quotes several others that seem related, and from there he begins to construct a spiritual interpretation. All of Augustine’s exegesis in the City of God points to the idea of the two cities, for, just as the governing principle of his exegesis in On Christian Teaching is caritas, in the City of God it is the absolute opposition between the two cities.\(^\text{104}\)

Similarly, Bale structures his entire exegesis of Revelation around the idea of the two churches—churches which can be glimpsed not by their reality, but by their “images.” He also begins with the words of Scripture, insisting that the “literal interpretation of the biblical text must underlie all historical application.”\(^\text{105}\) Throughout the Image, he attempts to provide a model Protestant exegesis that moves from the literal level to the spiritual, underlining correct interpretation while accusing his chief adversary, the Roman Catholic Church, of bad interpretation. In fact, Bale relates the beast of the earth to the problems with the corruption of the Word, interpreting the beast’s two horns as

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\text{the corrupted letter of the two testaments, falsely interpreted, and for a carnal purpose alleged. And therefore it is but apparent, hypocritish, and deceitful; yea, and clean repugnant to the Lord’s meaning, not having the judgment of his Spirit. This letter without the Holy Ghost is dead, and nothing pertaineth unto Christ: he is the verity and life; this is but a fable or fiction. (437)}
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This statement makes it clear that Bale was not a “literal” interpreter of Scripture, as some have alleged. Instead, there must be a perfect interlocking between the letter and the spirit, and an exegete must be able to move from one to the other. The Word of God

\(^{104}\) Because the people are divided into two groups based on their “love” for one city or the other, this can be seen as the same principle that Augustine posits in On Christian Teaching.

\(^{105}\) King, English Reformation 63.
is the key of David "which openeth the kingdom of God to them that faithfully believe, and that speareth it up also from them which dwelleth in unfaithfulness.... The word speareth and openeth, looseneth and bindeth, saveth and damneth" (389-90). In contrast, the other church says, "Interpret the scriptures at your own lusts and pleasures, as your law-master of Rome hath done afore your time" (444). When Bale complains about the two enemies who corrupted Part 1 of the *Image*, he cites two different types of corrupters—the ones who were visibly erring (the printers), and the mysterious blasphemer who corrupted the text. Thus Bale finds both a literal and a spiritual corruption in his own text, which parallels the double deception of the Antichrist as typified in the workings of Mohamet and the Pope.

Bale's emphasis upon the unseen nature of the beast—the spiritual corruption of Satan's church—explains in part why he used the term "image" to describe both churches. Both churches have a literal or carnal side, and they also both have a spiritual side. Bale describes the false spirituality of the wicked city/church:

For spiritually is their city called. A glorious name usurp they, as though they were none of the world. They will be called the holy church.... And therefore the Spirit of God doth judge here this great city not to be called Jerusalem, but stinking Sodom, and most miserable Egypt. (392-93)

As noted above, Augustine says that the "image of the beast" stands for pretence, and when Bale speaks of the "image" of the Antichrist's church, he is often describing the false ceremonies and shows of the Roman Catholic church, or the superstition of the Jews. At the same time, however, the church of God has an image. This is not associated with pretence, of course, but with the dim reflection that is all we are able to see because of the difficulty of discerning truth here on earth. This dim reflection of God's church is seen most clearly not through the model of earthly institutions, but through the text of the
In the Image Bale presents an arena for controlled interpretation—for a progression from the letter to the spirit which will provide the people of God with the clearest possible image of the glory to come.

Yet Bale’s efforts in the Image betray his fear that it is difficult to understand the nature of Revelation at all, and he notes several times, as does Augustine, that John’s language is difficult, for he often repeats in a different way something he has already said. And even when Bale attempts to present his readers with a proper interpretive text, he is besieged by problems with the printers and enemies which he uses as evidence that both the seen and the unseen elements of the beast are at work at all times to frustrate the efforts of honest Christians.

Bale’s view of exegesis is often misunderstood because of his seemingly inconsistent view toward prophecy. Paul Christianson argues that Holy history provided the framework for [Bale’s] exegesis, but the mystery of unlocking sacred tropes preserved Bale from too direct an application of specific prophecies to individual historical events. The chronology mattered most, not the minute details.... [C]aught up in the task of convincing his compatriots that they lived under the mantle of the false church, Bale sometimes ignored his own dictum and descended to specifics.

This statement fails to recognize that there is an essential difference between the way that Bale views past history and future history. He is very cautious when interpreting Revelation in terms of future events—a caution no less marked than Augustine’s in Book 20 of the City of God. Only when interpreting events of the past does Bale “descend to

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106 John King explains Bale’s usage of the term image: “The title implies that the problem of discrimination between images of truth and falsehood is central to the Reformation.... Guided by faith, the elect Christian reader should see in Revelation his own individual history and the history of mankind. The scriptures offer an image of the divine, an image of past human history, and an image of one’s own personal condition” (English Reformation 63).

107 See, e.g. City of God 20.17; 929.

108 Christianson 16.
specifics," for this use of specific historical events to support his theories is all practiced under the mantle of the two churches, where any number of historical moments can be used to support the view that there have been two churches from the beginning, progressing through time towards the destined end that is suggested in Revelation, but never quite understood because of the limitations of interpretation on earth.

The problems that Bale himself faced while attempting to spread the Word of God are, in his view, typical of the human condition. The difficulty in interpretation is a product of the fallen world and of the history that results. Bale, like Augustine, is ambiguous on the point of how much is legible in this saeculum, but both men speak of the enjoyment of heaven in terms of the revelation of hidden meaning (a model taken from Revelation itself). He describes heavenly felicity as an exegetical revelation for the saints:

Their senses were opened, and great knowledge had they in the scriptures. The figures and prophecies that were hid to others were manifest and open unto them. The dark veil was removed from Moses’ face, and the light of the laws appeared. They could then discern good from evil, light from darkness, and sweet from sour. The yoke was then taken from them, and no longer were they subject to strangers. Dead men perceived the secrets of the book. (565)

In this passage, Bale uses allegory to explain the revelation of hidden meaning after the judgement, just as he had used the symbol of the key of David earlier to explain the role of exegesis. Bale’s method of exegesis informs his practice as a writer in general—specifically his use of allegory. Many critics have had occasion to propose that Bale’s own use of language was divided between “figurative” and “plain.” Andrew Hadfield, for example, writes that a

binary opposition between “true” and “false” is stated as the key to Bale’s reading; language can be divided as easily as martyrs, governors and the church.
But whilst Bale fulminates against the use of “figurative speech”, he is seemingly blind to his own use of metaphor to establish the distinction between the literal and the figurative, i.e., the key of David opening the door.¹⁰⁹

I would agree with Hadfield that Bale divides language as he does everything else, but would emphasize that Bale’s division is not in this case a simple distinction between “figurative” and “plain” language. Because both churches have spiritual components, Bale distinguishes between two types of spiritualities and interpretations. Allegory can be used effectively if it is directed toward the purpose of educating the true believers on the nature of their church. Bale is opposed to the employment of allegory that does not clarify the message but instead obscures it, yet the key of David is just the opposite—it is the sort of allegory of which Bale approves because he divides his language not between figurative and plain, but according to how each church uses each type of language.

Hadfield calls Bale’s project in the Image an attempt to “produce a text that, in Roland Barthes’s terms, has been ‘already read’ because all answers are known in advance; all meaning has become confined to an allegorical code which cannot be challenged.”¹¹⁰ This allegorical code directs the reader toward two stable signifieds—the two churches. Any of Bale’s exegetical movements can be reduced, or enlarged, to fit into this model. Yet the very difficulty of Bale’s project suggests that he knew only too well that language resists stable signification that could help to identify these still intermingled churches. Indeed, he takes the very multiplicity of the beasts as a sign that meanings are multiple and not completely discernible by human comprehension.

Therefore, no matter what Bale interprets, he is careful not to stray far from the letter, so when he provides a commentary on Revelation, he includes the entire text, verse by verse. In fact, Bale’s exegetical method is much narrower than Augustine’s. The

¹⁰⁹ Hadfield 67.
¹¹⁰ Hadfield 68.
latter used the text of the Bible to explain the world, and the world to explain the Bible, letting his exegesis be wound into a narrative structure that ultimately is a "reading" of more than the Scripture. Bale did not ignore the world outside of the text, but he reduced it into the confines of the Word. Just as Bale had established strict exegetical control in Three Laws, so he continued this method in the Image, beginning and ending with the Word—sola scriptura.

In the Augustinian scheme, this movement from letter to spirit is the pilgrimage of the faithful, who still live in the world where both cities are intermingled. Bale’s belief in the imminence of the apocalypse allowed for less intermingling (and therefore claimed more certainty) in the membership of the two churches than Augustine did. However, despite Bale’s rather different interpretation of Revelation, he does remain true to Augustinian thought in his practice of an exegetical method that looks for a movement from the letter to the spirit throughout an entire history that can be read as a seamless story of two opposing communities in a drama directed by Providence.
IV. The Word as Spectacle

The idea of the two churches, which Bale explored first through drama, then through exegesis, is the underlying model on which all of his other works are predicated. Whether he was writing polemical tracts, accounts of Protestant martyrs, or his autobiography, Bale used all events and people as added support for his view of history as a struggle between two churches. These works all share an interest in bringing the community together through a common interpretive experience. Bale, Bible in hand, was always a preacher, and always engaging in exegesis, regardless of the genre in which he was working. Similarly, even years after he had stopped composing plays, Bale’s writings were all inherently dramatisic, underlining the conflict between the two cities, and inviting his readers to see themselves as a vital part of God’s drama. Like Augustine, Bale understood that it was the dramatistic elements of the two cities model that had the most potential to unite the community, teaching them how to live (and even how to die) in the “in-between” time.

The Drama of Martyrdom

Bale’s interest in Revelation was probably both fuelled by and the fuel for his interest in persecution, exile, and martyrdom. While working on the Image, he was also writing accounts of various martyrs, such as William Thorpe, John Oldcastle, and Anne Askew. As Fairfield observes, these two projects are closely related: “the creation of a Protestant martyrrology followed naturally from Bale’s emphasis on the ‘faithful in all ages’ in The Image of bothe churches, on which Bale had been working since his flight into exile.”111

In these accounts of the martyrs, Bale includes both the written testimony of the martyrs

111 Fairfield 25.
themselves and his own narrative of their trials before the Roman Catholic magistrates. These accounts are highly dramatic in nature; in the words of John Knott, these confrontations became “a theater of persecuted innocence in which the victim is shown to be the spiritual victor.” Bale portrays the spiritual victors as members of God’s church, while the examiners are members of the antichrist’s church, playing parts which have been repeated since the time of Christ; Oldcastle “dramatize[s] his innocence by comparing his accusers to Annas and Caiaphas sitting in judgment upon Christ and skillfully playing to the audience of onlookers.” Bale interrupts Askew’s testimony to address her accuser: “O Shaxton, I speak now unto thee, and (I think) in the voice of God. What devil bewitched thee to play this most blasphemous part, as to become, of a faithful teacher, a tempting spirit.” This rhetorical interlocution is reminiscent of Augustine’s tendency to address his pagan opponents in the City of God, asking them why they have not been able to discern the truth. But of course the “real” addressees in both cases are not the opponents themselves, but the presumably sympathetic audience that will read and learn from this dramatic exemplum. The educational potential of Bale’s examinations is closely related to the dramatic form, for, as Kendall explains, these dialogues “may be conceived of as playbooks, recorded debates meant to be read aloud for the edification of actors and audience.”

Anxious to differentiate himself from the medieval hagiographical tradition, Bale looked for an earlier precedent for his martyr narratives, which he found in Eusebius. Bale compares the trials of the Protestants of his own time with those of the Christians of

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113 Knott 51.
115 Kendall 131.
the early church, and relates the story of Askew's martyrdom to Eusebius' account of Blandina at the beginning of Book 5 of his *Church History*. Although Augustine was less interested in martyrdom than Eusebius, the *City of God* does show an interest in martyrs, which is heightened during his discussion of the End Times in Books 20-22, because the themes of martyrdom and persecution are central to the Apocalypse. Bale relates his martyr stories to the dichotomy between the two churches by identifying two kinds of martyrs: one category of "false" martyrs who have been put to death by "temporal princes and secular magistrates," and another of "true" martyrs, who have been put to death by officials of the Roman Catholic church for preaching the gospel (*Latter Examination* 188-89). Having established this distinction between martyrs, he is willing to fit any sufferer into these categories—even himself.

Bale's tendency toward self-dramatization is most apparent in the *Vocacyon*, where he narrates the harrowing account of his short term as the Bishop of Ossory, his hasty escape from Ireland, and his adventures at sea before he reached the safety of the continent. King points out that the *Vocacyon* "dramatizes Bale's life as a radical bishop and its immediate aftermath in terms of his familiar roles of missionary and exile" and that the title-page woodcut "depicts Bale's Irish ministry as yet another encounter between the true and false churches."116 Bale dramatizes his own life just as he does Askew's, casting himself in the role of a witness for the truth on the eve of the apocalypse, fighting against the enemies of Christ.

No matter what the form, Bale was directing his audience through a series of exempla that always helped to uphold the model of the two churches, and to clarify the difference between them. Although Bale did revise his plays in the 1550s, and even was

116 King, *English Reformation* 419.
daring enough to have some of them performed for a stubbornly Roman Catholic audience in Ireland on the eve of Mary's succession, he wrote no new plays after c.1538. His prose works were still full of dramatistic elements, but for some reason, he no longer wanted to produce the struggle between the two churches on stage. Perhaps he was too aware of the seduction of a theatrical expert such as Infidelity, and preferred to keep dramatic play within the confines of a book. In the absence of visual display, the two churches would necessarily have become a more "internalized" concept—a dramatic struggle worked out within each individual reader. But even without a stage, there was another form of visual spectacle that Bale could use to demonstrate his point: that of the picture.

The Image and the Book

The frontispiece of the Summarium (1548) shows Bale presenting his book to the young Edward VI (see Figure 1). The use of a picture to show the centrality of the written word is typical of sixteenth century Protestant use of images. The Protestants were willing to use images of various sorts to relay their message; as John King says, "Edwardian literature contradicts the stereotype that protestant radicals were intrinsically hostile to images and art." Bale was interested in visual representation as well as drama; just as he illustrated two types of drama in Three Laws, he illustrated two types of images in the Image. As King notes,

The key term in the title for the Image...stresses the figurative nature of the Apocalypse. Deriving from the Latin imago ("imitation, copy, likeness"), the word implicitly raises the problem of interpretation. Although the richly poetic elements

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118 See Harris 37-38.
119 King, English Reformation 14.
imagery of Revelation functions to conceal the truth from the reprobate, it makes a powerful appeal to the reader's imagination.\textsuperscript{120}

When employed by the wicked church, images relate to false pretense and show—the world of Infidelity and hypocrisy—where truth is obscured by empty ceremonies and rituals. Bale's "iconoclasm" is directed toward this sort of abuse of images, which of course is an accusation aimed directly at the Roman Catholic church. On the other hand, "the scriptures offer an image of the divine, an image of past human history, and an image of one's own personal condition."\textsuperscript{121} The images which fill the Apocalypse are essential to proper interpretation because they provide a dim reflection of the divine.

As noted in Chapter 1, Augustine's own attitude toward images and aesthetic models had its limits, because of the logocentric nature of his theology. Like others of his generation, Augustine used images in a conservative way, which falls under what Cameron refers to as the "early stages" of Christian visual representation, where images were justified "as a way of educating the ignorant and illiterate."\textsuperscript{122} Of course the employment of images for worship became central to Christianity in the Middle Ages, and it is exactly this use of images against which the Protestants were rebelling. Therefore, they "returned to the patristic use of images as handmaids to biblical understanding."\textsuperscript{123} This attitude toward images is evident in \textit{Three Laws}, where each image is accompanied by a careful explanation of what it signifies. The \textit{Image} is filled with woodcuts, inspired by Dürer and Cranach, that depict scenes from the Apocalypse. The seven-headed beast, the scene in heaven around the throne, the battle of Armageddon—all of these are portrayed in strikingly literalist drawings that underline the

\textsuperscript{120} King, \textit{English Reformation} 62-63.
\textsuperscript{121} King, \textit{English Reformation} 63.
\textsuperscript{122} Cameron, \textit{Christianity} 226. Augustine's use of images is a major focus in Robert O'Connell's \textit{Soundings in St. Augustine's Imagination}.
\textsuperscript{123} King, \textit{English Reformation} 147.
fact that these are not intended to be “real” pictures of events, but instead are
iconographic mnemonic devices intended to direct the reader back to the words of the
text (see Figure 2). King calls these woodcuts “images of the Word in the form of a
book,”124 for they are clearly a conscious antithesis to Catholic devotional images. For
Bale, as for Augustine, even the aesthetic models point back to the pure unadorned word,
but Bale is more confined by the strictures of the Word than Augustine. Whereas
Augustine was willing to use pagan stories, rhetoric, and tools, Bale became part of a
generation of English writers who were suspicious of the non-Christian world.125 Bale’s
scope was not as wide as Augustine’s, and his model of the two churches did not embrace
a universal perspective in the way that Augustine’s did.

Nonetheless, Bale does share with Augustine an interest in how his own writing
could serve a pedagogical and community-forming function. Bale’s view of literature
shows an awareness that writing can be employed in the service of either church, and
holds no intrinsic good or evil.126 Hadfield sees an inconsistency in Bale’s attitude
toward literature because he “argues that his own literature is ‘true’ and seems to make
no distinction between the writing of a play and an expository tract, Scriptural
commentary or polemical pamphlet.”127 Because Bale uses all of his writings to direct

124 King, English Reformation 155.
125 Auksi explains that “Because Renaissance humanism was so successful in retrieving andreviving the
texts and models of the classical world, it threatened the emergent and purified spiritual culture envisaged
by the Reformers, some of whom attempted theocratic communities or biblically mandated experiments in
isolated communal living as barriers to the allegedly unholy, corruptive, or defiling. At least three literary
results accompany this fear of worldly, pagan values. The first is an unprecedented interest in peculiarly
spiritualized forms of religious rhetoric.... A second result is a suspicion of rhetoric itself as a
manipulative, worldly, or materializing implement capable of drawing Christian listeners away from the
spiritual intensity of an unworly, unfleshy discourse not given to display or heathen excellences. The
third and most problematic result is the reinterpretation of Scripture as the great normative or prescriptive
text filled with rules for utopians, for polemicists, for self-dramatization and self-narrative, and for spiritual
speaking” (267).
126 The frontispiece to the Summarium (see Figure 1) emphasizes the usefulness of Bale’s writing, as he
presents it humbly to the king, as a service to his country and church.
127 Hadfield 71.
his readers toward an elucidation of the two churches, and because this scheme is in his mind the true Word of God, there is every reason to assume that he would regard his own literary production as "true." For Bale, there is no ultimate difference between genres because all of his writing is an attempt to express God's truth, but this should not be seen as an "inconsistent" view of literature.\textsuperscript{128}

As I have discussed in this chapter, Bale's interest in drama was apparent throughout his career, and even though he moved from drama as a genre into the realm of exegetical and historical works, he still retained this sensitivity to the usefulness of the idea of drama. Like Augustine, and even more explicitly, Bale creates a division between two types of theatre—the false play of the Roman Catholics on the one hand, and the greater spectacle of God's play on the other. Fitting this idea within a historical framework provided by the Scripture, Bale managed to adopt and adapt not only Augustine's model of the two cities, but also some of the literary tactics that were a fundamental part of it.

Bale's development of the idea of the two churches, and his literary expression of this idea, had an enormous impact upon later writers. His influence has been traced in such diverse directions as the Geneva Bible, Holinshed's Chronicles, Matthew Parker, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Prynne.\textsuperscript{129} When Bale chose to follow Augustine's model of the two cities and the historical, theological, and literary ideas which accompanied it, his apocalyptic emphasis changed the model in a significant way. Because of Bale's

\textsuperscript{128} In this sense, Bale's view of literature bears similarity to Augustine's. The latter writes, "The City of God of which we are treating is vouched for by those Scriptures whose supremacy over every product of human genius does not depend on the chance impulses of the minds of men, but is manifestly due to the guiding power of God's supreme providence, and exercises sovereign authority over the literature of all mankind" (11.1: 429).

\textsuperscript{129} See Happe, John Bale, Chapter 8: "John Bale and Sixteenth-Century Literature."
insistent concentration on the End Times and his willingness to interpret contemporary events in light of Scripture, the intermingled quality that was central to Augustine's model became much less apparent. Believing that he was living at the time of the eschatological separation of the two cities, Bale used his own literary production (drama, images, exegesis, history, etc.) in order to mirror this rift. It was the willingness to leave the cities intermingled that enabled Augustine to create a "totalizing discourse" from so many diverse elements. Even though Bale also pulls together a tremendous amount of material to support his scheme, his apocalyptic theology always threatens to break down this totalizing discourse into its constituent elements. This is perhaps why Bale's influence and works are so often seen in fragmented ways, because his model could not be adopted whole, yet provided a wealth of material that was spread piecemeal throughout England, absorbed into a variety of textual communities.
CHAPTER 3
A Theatre of the Word (2):
Foxe’s Martyrs and the Narrative Community

“Augustine conceived the whole history of mankind as occupied with the recurring opposition of
two orders within every order, two cities within every city, two churches within every church, one
of grace and election, the other of nature and reprobation, one ideal and transcendent, the other
material and temporal. On these pregnant conceptions men in later ages had rung many changes,
and sixteenth-century reformers, confronted by the collapse of the medieval order, seized upon
them again to explain what was happening in their own time and what they would have happen in
the time to come. To express these ideas afresh for the English public in its own vernacular, and
incidentally for the inspiration of John Foxe, was Bale’s most important accomplishment.”

In 1548, John Bale met a young scholar named John Foxe at Mountjoy House in London, where the latter was employed to tutor the late Earl of Surrey’s children. Foxe was then 31 years old, and had been living in poverty with his wife Agnes Randall since he resigned his fellowship at Magdalen College in 1538. Foxe and Bale became life-long friends. They both fled to the continent during the reign of Mary, and after a brief time at Frankfurt, moved to Basel where they lived in the house of Oporinus the printer. Bale’s interest in martyrrology, apocalypticism, drama, and church history were all shared by Foxe, and through a variety of genres Foxe continued to express the Protestant view of the two churches. As a scholar, writer, and influential English Reformer, Foxe overshadowed Bale. Bale once said that he wished “some learned Englishman would put forth the chronicles in their right shape,” and it was Foxe who answered this call. During his exile, Foxe worked on the Commentarii rerum in ecclesia gestarum (1554), a work largely intended to tell the story of the English Lollard martyrs. He published an

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1 Haller 67.
2 Bale’s influence on Foxe has been conjectured and discussed by many critics. See Happé 16, 22, 25, 138-39; Fairfield 152, 155; Haller 58-71; Levy 88-97, 104; and Neville Williams, John Foxe the Martyrologist:
His Life and Times (London: Dr. Williams’s Trust, 1975) 51.
expanded version of the *Commentarii* in 1559, and dedicated it to his former pupil, Thomas, Duke of Norfolk. This work was written in Latin for an international audience, and concerned the continental as well as the English Lollard martyrs. During the reign of Mary, exiles on the continent received reports that the number of English Protestant martyrs was increasing daily. Foxe recorded these stories and added them to the expanded work which became the *Acts and Monuments*. When Foxe first published this work in 1563, it was a book written in English for the English people.

The *Acts and Monuments* (commonly known as the *Book of Martyrs*) was one of the most important books of sixteenth century England. It was printed by John Daye, who saw it through four printings during Foxe’s lifetime (1563, 1570, 1576, and 1583), each expanded, and whose son Richard Daye saw it through another printing in 1596. During the seventeenth century, there were another four complete reprints. The impact of the *Acts and Monuments* upon the English reformation and the English people is only now beginning to be fully examined. Recognizing the importance of Foxe’s magnum opus, Huston Diehl writes:

Because its influence on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century popular imagination is undisputed, the *Book of Martyrs* is a particularly valuable text for anyone who wishes to understand how the religious conflicts of the mid-sixteenth century—and the social disruptions that accompanied them—were remembered and interpreted during the Elizabethan and Jacobean age, especially by people

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3 The full title of which reads: *Rerum in Ecclesia gestarum, quae postremis et periculosis his temporibus evenerunt, maximarumque per Europam persecutionum, et sanctorum Dei martyrum, caeterarumque rerum si quae insignioris exempli sint, digesti per regna et nationes commentarii.*

4 Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this work are taken from *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, ed. Stephen Cattley, 8 vols. (London, 1837-41; rpt. 1965). Quotations in my text are followed by the volume number and then the page number.

5 Note especially Helgerson’s last chapter in *Forms of Nationhood, “From Apocalyptic to Apologetic.”* In 1993, the British Academy decided to undertake a new critical edition of the *Acts and Monuments*; this ongoing project has also created a new interest in Foxe studies. A collection of critical essays, entitled *John Foxe and the English Reformation*, ed. David Loades (Aldershot: Scolar P, 1997), is a result of this renewed interest, as is the international conference on “John Foxe and his World” that was held at Ohio State University, 29 April – 2 May, 1999.
who were not themselves theologians or active reformers. Written in the vernacular and incorporated into the popular culture of early modern England, it...helped to shape the English people’s understanding not only of the Reformation but of the world they inhabited as well.6

Although Foxe’s first edition of the Acts and Monuments was printed in 1563, it was the 1570 edition, greatly expanded and enhanced, that became the basis for all later editions. This was the version that was ordered to be chained to the pulpit of every parish church in England.7 The full title of the first of two folios reads:

*The First Volume of the Ecclesiastical History Contaynyng the Actes and Monumentes of Thynges passed in euer Kynges tyme in this Realme especially in the Church of England principally to be noted, with a full discourse of such persecutions, horrible troubles, the sufferyng of Martyrs, and other things incident, touchyng aswel the sayd Church Of England and also Scotland, and all other foreine nations, from the primituie tyme till the reigne of K. Henry VIII.*8

The length and breadth of the title is a good indication of the massive scope of this work; four points are clear: 1) the work’s genre is ecclesiastical history, 2) its content is the “acts and monuments” of certain events, 3) its location is principally England (and Scotland), and 4) its special subject matter is the trials of the martyrs.

The accompanying woodcut portrays the struggle between the two churches (see Figure 3).9 The bottom caption reads “The Image of the persecuted Church” on the left and “The Image of the persecuting Church” on the right, which makes Foxe’s connection to Bale explicit. The caption at the top of the page provides a biblical precedent for this

6 Diehl 23.
7 J.F. Mozley, *John Foxe and His Book* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1940) 147. But see below, note 122, for more on this popular anecdote.
8 The second volume goes from Henry VIII to the reign of Elizabeth.
division from Matthew 25, “Come ye blessed” and “Go ye cursed.” The two differing churches in this picture are of course representative of the Protestant and the Roman Catholic churches. On the bottom left, the group of faithful is shown with bibles open and in discussion of the Word, whereas the lower right shows a group of people blinded by ceremonies, following a procession after a crucifix, and looking downward at their rosaries, with no bibles in sight. In the centre left, the martyrs are depicted, tied to stakes and blowing trumpets of glory to God. They have been placed on a stage here, as they are throughout the Acts and Monuments, but they are fully aware who the real judge and spectator is. By contrast, the Roman Catholic bishops across from them blow trumpets toward the elevated host, displaying their blindness to the Protestant message of truth because they are interested in the demonic spectacle rather than the heavenly one. The third row shows sainted martyrs on the left, blowing more trumpets, opposite a group of seemingly reprobate angels with twisted bodies, and three particularly beast-like figures, presumably to be identified with the antichrist. These creatures are not worshipping God, and their trumpets are facing downward upon the superstitious believers while they themselves seem to be about to fall from their elevated seat.

The very top section of the picture, however, overrides the sense of dichotomy that is presented in the lower portions. On both sides angels blow their trumpets toward the God figure seated at the top centre, who radiates sun-like light. God reigns on both sides of the picture, presiding over everything, including the division between the two churches; he sits in judgement, and this frontispiece makes it clear that both the story of the persecuted church and the story of the persecuting church are under his providential control. The structure of this frontispiece parallels the structure of Foxe’s entire work, and is an indication of the ways in which Foxe follows Bale in adopting Augustine’s
model of the two cities. The frontispiece and the title also predict the ways in which Foxe’s model diverges from Augustine’s—there is a greater emphasis on the apocalypse and on martyrs, and there is a nationalistic dimension to the model that was absent in Augustine. Foxe developed all of these points from what was overtly stated (such as the apocalyptic element and the interest in martyrs) or else suggested (such as the nationalistic element) in the work of Bale.

Like Bale, Foxe first experimented with these ideas in the form of drama. His Latin play *Christus Triumphans* (c. 1556) shows his interest in church history, apocalypticism, and the idea of drama itself as a vital component of the struggle between the two churches. My analysis of Foxe’s adaptation of the model of the two cities/churches will therefore include discussion of *Christus Triumphans*\(^{10}\) as well as of the *Acts and Monuments*. Foxe, like Bale, moved away from the actual genre of drama, while retaining the idea of drama and containing it within the more stable confines of a printed book. Thus this interplay between the idea of drama and the idea of the book which we noted in Augustine’s model is still an important characteristic of Foxe’s adaptation of it.

Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* attempts to be a “totalizing discourse” in a way that none of Bale’s works do. By drawing a massive amount of material together in the *Acts and Monuments* to elucidate the history of the two churches, Foxe creates a textual space for the readers in which they are taught to become part of a community of Protestant interpreters through a common understanding of Scripture and history. Foxe’s

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\(^{10}\) All references to this play are taken from *Two Latin Comedies by John Foxe the Martyrologist: Titus Et Gesippus and Christus Triumphans*, ed. John Hazel Smith (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1973). Smith provides a parallel translation; my citations include act and scene number, followed by the page number for the English translation.
willingness to be historically specific and his emphasis on Protestant martyrs takes Bale’s work one step further, creating a different notion of the City of God as a community of individual interpreters whose only guide is the Protestant exegetical text. But whereas this sense of community was developed in Bale through exegesis and a historical framework based on the book of Revelation, in Foxe the community is developed through the shared narrative experience that the *Acts and Monuments* creates for its readers.
I. Ecclesiastical History

"The Ecclesiastical History..."

Unlike the earlier Latin works that Foxe wrote, and unlike the 1563 edition of the *Acts and Monuments*, the enlarged and famous 1570 edition of the *Acts and Monuments* identified itself as an ecclesiastical history from the first words of the title. Like Bale, Foxe focuses his notion of ecclesiastical history upon a struggle between two churches: the false and the true. The emphasis on the division between the two churches permeates Foxe’s work at every level; as Kemp notes, “Every aspect of history is made to serve the rhetoric of division.”¹² The aim of Foxe’s history is to correct faulty histories written by the Roman Catholics such as Polydore Vergil, and to construct a coherent history for the Protestants in England that would give them a sense of antiquity and thus of authenticity. Although Foxe’s primary concern is the “true” church, in order to treat this topic fully he must discuss the “false” church as well. Just as Augustine “cannot refrain from speaking about the city of this world” (1.Pref, 5), so Foxe must discuss the false church as well as the true.

The development of Foxe’s historiography shows his dependence upon the work of Bale. Commenting on their historiographical methods, Happé notes that “Foxe seems to have followed Bale’s scheme of the chronology and structure of history, including the influence of Constantine and the degeneracy of the papacy, especially in the time of Wyclif, ‘the age of locusts.’”¹³ Foxe’s interest in ecclesiastical history is evident in *Christus Triumphants*, in which he traces the history of the two churches from the Fall to

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¹¹ The title of the 1563 edition reads: *Actes and Monuments of these latter and perillous dayes, touching matters of the Church wherein ar[e] comprehended and described the great persecutions and horrible troubles that have been wrought and practised by the Romish prelates, specially in this Realme of England and Scotland, from the yeare of our Lorde a thousande, unto the tyme nowe present.*

¹² Kemp 103.

¹³ Happé, Bale 139.
the Second Coming, but his use of ecclesiastical history becomes more pronounced in the
*Acts and Monuments*. It was not enough for Foxe to tell the story of the two churches—he
needed to *prove* it, and most especially to prove the identity of the Protestant church as
God’s church. Thus he begins with the Augustinian/Balean model of the two churches,
but adds to it a Eusebian tendency toward copious documentation. The result is a history
of the two churches with a peculiarly non-Augustinian emphasis upon individual heroes
of the faith.

*Christus Triumphans*: The Drama of Ecclesiastical History

In 1672, Thomas Comber of Sidney Sussex College produced an edition of *Christus
Triumphans*. Comber was happy to use this play as a school text for teaching Latin
grammar and for biblical knowledge, but he remarked that “the devout old author, who
penned the play while in exile for his beliefs, never intended anything so shocking as an
actual performance.”\(^{14}\) However, from what we now know of *Christus Triumphans*,
which was published in Basel in 1556, Foxe certainly *did* intend this play to be
performed. He includes both internal and external stage directions throughout, and
probably first wrote the play for a performance at the University of Basel. In 1562,
Foxe’s friend and fellow exile Laurence Humphrey\(^ {15}\) asked Foxe’s permission to perform

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\(^{14}\) Quoted from Blackburn 116.

\(^{15}\) Laurence Humphrey (1527?-1590) was an important English reformer who was in Basel and Zurich
during the Marian exile. He was strongly influenced by Calvinism, and brought many of the opinions of
the Geneva church back to England with him (his zeal against the Roman Catholics earned him the title
“Papistomastix”). He was elected president of Magdalen College, Oxford in 1561 (it was shortly after this
that he asked Foxe for the permission to stage a performance of his play). Humphrey was also dean of
Gloucester and then Winchester, despite the fact that he came into conflict with Archbishop Parker because
of his refusal to wear vestments. In 1565, Humphrey wrote to Foxe and asked him to intercede with the
Duke of Norfolk for him. (Information from the *Dictionary of National Biography*). J.W. Binns writes that
Humphrey was also interested in the fathers of the church: “Humphrey lies in the mainstream of
Elizabetan intellectual life, and it cannot be insignificant that amidst his numerous scholarly, theological,
and literary activities, he found time to engage in the Latin translation of Greek patristic texts.” J.W. Binns,
*Intellectual Culture in Elizabethan and Jacobean England: The Latin Writings of the Age* (Leeds: Francis
Christus Triumphans at Magdalene College, Oxford, and Foxe consented readily. Although no record of this performance survives, there is a record of a performance at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1572. Some critics have suggested that Foxe composed and printed the play as early as 1551, but Smith's evidence that the play was not written until 1556 is quite convincing. Whether Christus Triumphans was intended primarily as a performance piece or as a script for readers is difficult to determine, but most likely the play was (like Bale's plays) intended to serve both functions.

Christus Triumphans opens with a prologue in which two women—Eve and Mary—weep for their children. Eve explains that her children, Soma and Psyche (body and soul), have both been taken from her. Satan has carried Psyche off to hell, and the tyrant Nomocrates has made Soma his prisoner. Soma's children, Asia, Europus, and Africus, are left at home with their mother, Ecclesia. Their only hope lies in the promise of a saviour who will tread down the head of the serpent. The next scene shows Satan, who has fallen (a Fall from Revelation 12, not from Genesis), and the resurrected Christ leads Psyche out of hell and binds Satan for 1000 years.

The play then follows apostolic history—the spread of Christianity, the attempts by Jewish priests and Sadducees to stop it, the early life of Saul, and Peter's miraculous escape from prison. The main agents of evil at this point are Nomocrates, a tyrant who rules by false writ, and Dioctes, a persecutor of Christians. Nomocrates places Africus, Europus, and Asia in a pit, and Ecclesia is left alone as a widow who awaits her bridegroom—Christ. Nomocrates' writ is destroyed by the risen Christ, who frees Ecclesia's children. As a result, Nomocrates falls ill and goes to Babylon in order to recover. The trials of the Christians increase, however, because Dioctes arranges for ten

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16 Blackburn 116. Smith misdates this performance as being in 1562-63 (34).
17 Smith 31-33.
successive Caesars to lead persecutions against the faithful. The converted Paul and Ecclesia comfort one another in the midst of these persecutions, which last 300 years, until Constantine becomes Emperor, which is the end of Dioctes’ reign as well as the end of the 10 persecutions.

Ecclesia’s soliloquy in Act 4 briefly describes what has happened since that time—from Constantine to the year 1000, the Christians have enjoyed relative peace except for the fact that, according to Ecclesia, “the Turkish madness mars everything” (4.3; 307). Ecclesia knows, however, that it is time for Satan to be released, and the Apocalyptic beast is at hand. Upon his release, Satan immediately calls forth Pseudamnus (false lamb\(^\text{18}\)), whose job is to imitate Christ in every way while secretly furthering Satan’s agenda. His partner in crime is Pornapolis, the whore of Babylon. These two fool almost everyone, including Africus and Europus. Ecclesia is taken to Bedlam so people will believe that she is not the true church, and that Pornapolis is.

In Act 5, Satan urges his followers to wear various disguises because a preacher named Hierologus is beginning to expose them for what they are. Yet they continue to lose ground because, as Pornapolis laments, “The dregs of the people are starting to be wise now. What’s more, they’re even weighing our traditions in the scales of the gospel” (5.3; 347). Pseudamnus regains power for a time, but many, including Africus and Europus, begin to believe that Pseudamnus is the Antichrist. Reunited with their mother, Africus and Europus want to fight against the enemy, but Ecclesia insists that they must peacefully await the bridegroom, whose time is at hand. At the end of the play, a chorus of virgins dresses Ecclesia for the wedding, and they sing an epithalamion “to celebrate the coming nuptials” (5.5; 367).

\(^{18}\) See Smith’s footnote on Pseudamnus (227).
The main character of this play is undoubtedly Ecclesia, who is an allegorical representation of the true church. The fact that she can be portrayed by a single character underlines Foxe's belief in the continual presence of the true church throughout history, no matter how meagre her strength may have been. Her opposition is embodied in the character of Pornapolis, who attempts to play the part of Ecclesia, and very nearly succeeds.

This play is the first place where Foxe's periodization of history is evident, and it certainly seems to be derived from Bale. Like Bale, Foxe dates the binding of Satan from Christ's resurrection, thus suggesting that the widespread corruption of the church did not occur until the year 1000. Ecclesia's soliloquy in Act 4 speaks of the preceding time (especially since the reign of Constantine) as a time of relative peace, except for the Turks (the rise of Islam). Thus, in the play, the persecution does not really begin in earnest until after 1000, a date which Foxe associates with the rise of papal power over monarchical power, and with the increased ceremonies and superstitions of the Roman Catholic church. Although the persecutions increase after this, there is also a parallel development on the other side: the gospel is renewed. In the play, this is shown in the character Hierologus, who first seems to represent Wycliffe, and later Luther.

Throughout *Christus Triumphans*, Foxe presents history as a play that has been scripted by God from the beginning. Richard Bauckham explains that

Foxe, like Bale, presupposed that all the world was a stage and the principal actors were supra-historical principles who assumed historical roles from time to time. Allegorical figures, superhuman spirits, good and bad, and historical personages freely converse together and interact on Foxe's stage with no sense of incongruity.19
Because the focus of this history is the struggle between the true and the false churches, Foxe’s periodization serves to teach the play’s spectators how historical events themselves prove this view of history—a history that is (in some sense) circular, in that it repeats itself, but ultimately linear, because the trials of the true church increase and move toward an eschatological conclusion. Yet this periodization of history did not remain constant with Foxe, for he developed it much more fully in the following years. Foxe’s interest in ecclesiastical history needed a larger outlet than the dramatic medium could allow him. In the preface he acknowledges that the drama is not able to adhere to the classical unities: “It has gaps and bogs, I confess, but the nature of things does not allow such warring elements to be connected” (Prol; 231). Here Foxe acknowledges that there is a difficulty in his objective to “transfer as far as possible from the sacred writings into the theater those things which pertain primarily to ecclesiastical affairs” (Dedicatory Epistle; 209).

Foxe recognized that wherever there are “gaps and bogs,” there are spaces of uncertainty, and those spaces were dangerous in light of the intense debates between the Reformers and the counter-Reformers. Therefore, Foxe’s impulse was to fill these spaces with documentary evidence that would prove the authority and authenticity of the Protestant church. Because the question of authority in ecclesiastical affairs had become central for English Protestants by this time, Foxe’s contribution to these debates required a form that could allow more documentary evidence than drama.

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20 Foxe’s efforts were also enlisted by Archbishop Parker. In 1570, Parker asked for Foxe’s assistance with an edition of the proposals for a revised canon law, and for the Anglo-Saxon gospels published with the text of the Bishops’ Bible. See Warren Wooden, John Foxe (Boston: Twayne, 1983) 13.
Tradition, Authority, and the Reformation Debates

The question posed to the Reformers by the Roman Catholics was a question of authority and antiquity: “Where was your church before Luther?” Foxe alludes to this charge in the preface to the *Acts and Monuments*, where he writes: “‘What!’ say they, ‘where was this church of yours before these fifty years?’” and answers, “we affirm and say, that our church was, when this church of theirs was not yet hatched out of the shell” (1.9). Like many other Protestants, Foxe answered this question historiographically; as Avihu Zakai explains:

> In the ideological wars of the sixteenth century, Protestant historiography played a crucial role in the struggle between the forces of Reformation and Counter-Reformation. As a philosophy of history based upon an apocalyptic mode of historical thought, it attempted not only to demolish the historical foundation of the Church of Rome, but also to provide Protestants with a coherent view concerning the significance of the Reformation and their own actions in providential history.  

Bale had answered his opponents’ questions by tracing the origin of the English church in a way that showed its allegiance to the apostolic church; the reverse story he also showed: a story of the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church, which was an aberration that had long ago broken away from true doctrine. Bale’s evidence for this included the contentious assertion that Gregory’s celebrated pun when he saw the English boys (*non angli, sed angeli*) was evidence of the sodomistical tendencies of the papacy that was corrupted around the time of Gregory. This was the sort of contention that the Roman Catholics were most anxious to answer.

> Not all Protestant claims were as openly hostile as Bale’s, but in the ensuing decades the Protestants continued to argue against the Roman Catholic church on

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21 Zakai 53.
historical grounds. Perhaps most famously, John Jewel preached his “Challenge Sermon” at St. Paul’s cross in 1564. Jewel defended the church of England against the charges of its enemies by asserting that this church was much closer than the Roman Catholic church to the primitive apostolic church and to the fathers. Jewel’s “challenge” was for the Roman Catholics to show evidence from the fathers for the beliefs of their church. The next year, in 1565, the Roman Catholic Thomas Stapleton answered Jewel’s challenge by translating Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*; furthermore, he sought to offer proof against Bale’s assertions that the mission of Augustine of Canterbury had been the origin of papal corruption in England. As Allen Frantzen notes, “Stapleton was particularly upset by Bale’s version of the famous episode of Bede’s *History* that describes the origin of the mission from Rome to convert the English people and how the English came to be called by that name.” Stapleton dedicated his translation to Elizabeth, and explained his argument in a preface to her that was intended to show her the errors of Protestant doctrine. By using Bede as a church father and highlighting the importance and authenticity of the Roman Catholicism that was brought to England by Augustine of Canterbury, Stapleton gives his ecclesiastical history a particularly nationalistic colour. Stapleton expresses especial distaste for Protestant historiographers; in the preface to the reader he refers to Bale as “baudy Bale” and calls the *Acts and Monuments* “that dongell” (i.e. “dunghill”) which is heaped with “a number of miserable miracles to set forth the glory of their stinkinge Martyrs.”

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24 See Vessey, “English Translations” 809-12 for a discussion of Stapleton’s translation of Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*.
The Roman Catholic assertion that the Protestant martyrs were not authentic may have been one of the factors that caused Foxe to extend the historical scope of the second edition of the *Acts and Monuments* (1570) back from the year 1000 to the apostolic church. By expanding the historical framework of the *Acts and Monuments*, Foxe increased the number of martyr stories he could include, and this enabled him to show how the martyrs of the early church resembled the Protestant martyrs—both in the way they died and in the cause for which they died. Foxe's source and model for this kind of historical martyrology was Eusebius' *Church History*.

**Patristic Models for Historiography**

As the 1559 *Commentarii* grew into the *Acts and Monuments* of 1563, already Foxe's work was evolving in the direction of ecclesiastical history. He was interested in Eusebius' historical method, and also in his portrayal of Constantine, because Foxe himself, who was publishing the *Acts and Monuments* during Elizabeth's reign, needed to contemplate further the role of the Christian monarch within the course of history. In the preface to the 1563 edition of the *Acts and Monuments*, he begins by comparing Elizabeth to Constantine, and himself to Eusebius. Eusebius' interest in the Christian martyrs served Foxe's purposes well, especially in the 1570 edition when he used Eusebius as his primary source for the history of the early church, then made an explicit connection between Protestant martyrs and those of Eusebius' account. Foxe asks in his preface, "why should [the martyrs] now be more neglected of us in the latter churche, such as geve their bloud in the same cause and like quarell?... Is not the name of Christe as precious nowe, as then? were not the tormentes as great?" (1563 pref. viii).

Foxe also follows Eusebius in his habit of producing primary documents. An overwhelming percentage of the *Acts and Monuments* consists of letters, dialogues,
examinations, treatises, and other documents which Foxe lays end to end in order to construct his history. Thus Foxe casts himself in the role of one who collects and reveals information, gathering as much as possible.\(^{26}\) History, he says (echoing Cicero), is the “Witness of Times, the Light of Verity, the Life of Memory, Teacher of Life, and Shewer of Antiquity” (1.xix). In his Church History, Eusebius maintains an interest in both martyrs and emperors, and as Warren Wooden notes, Foxe also “develops a dual focus”: “the twin themes of the histories of martyrs and emperors opposing the papacy dominate. With his emphasis on the antiphonal opposition of godly monarchs and saintly martyrs to a corrupt visible church presided over by a power-mad papacy, Foxe brought his grand design to its final form.”\(^{27}\)

Although Eusebius was Foxe’s model for writing an ecclesiastical history, he was by no means the only one. Wooden notes that

Foxe is far more schematic than Eusebius. Within the history so starkly divided by the year 1000 into pure and corrupt, he further subdivides the history of the church into five eras: the birth and infancy in the time of Christ; the spread of the gospels by the apostles throughout the Roman empire; the flourishing age when the church grew through persecution until the Christianization of the empire under Constantine; the middle age... ending with the period of decay turning into rampant corruption; and finally the period of Foxe’s narration.\(^{28}\)

This division of history into periods is, of course, directly related to Bale’s adoption of (and modification of) Augustine’s periods of history in the City of God. Like Bale, Foxe adopts the language of the two cities but uses the term “churches” instead.\(^{29}\) Foxe’s

\(^{26}\) There is a complete study of Eusebius’ influence on Foxe in the dissertation by Thomas S. Freeman, “‘Great Searching out of bookes and autors': John Foxe as an Ecclesiastical Historian,” diss., Rutgers U, 1995.  
\(^{27}\) Wooden 21.  
\(^{28}\) Wooden 20.  
\(^{29}\) According to V.N. Olsen, “In his interpretation of ‘the city’ Foxe states that it ‘signifies the universal church of the Christians’ which although suppressed by the Gentiles ‘will emerge victorious from the inundation, in no part extinct’... The true church of Christ is here characterised as the city. When Foxe calls the church a city, which in spite of difficulties within and persecution without will emerge triumphant,
dialectical presentation of history suggests to Kemp that the entire structure of the *Acts and Monuments* is "a history against, echoing the titles of the apologetic histories of the early Church, though not against the Gnostics or the pagans, but against the church of Rome."\(^{30}\) The apologetic perspective of the *Acts and Monuments* has much in common with that of the *City of God*, though here the "contra paganos" has become "contra papistas" for Foxe. His main objective was to prove the authenticity of the doctrines for which the martyrs died. In order to prove this, he turns to the writers and theologians of the early church.

Just as Foxe establishes a connection between the martyrs of the primitive church and the martyrs of his own day, he also forges the same connection between writers of his own day (and himself) and the church fathers. Foxe does this not only with Eusebius, but with Jerome, Augustine, John Chrysostom, Cyprian, and others, all of whom he sees as valuable authorities in the true church before it was corrupted by the Roman Catholic church. Foxe's ecclesiastical history concerns not just the events and people of the church, but also its doctrines, and throughout the *Acts and Monuments*, one of his primary tendencies is to use events and people to discuss Protestant doctrine and to argue against what he considers the most misguided Roman Catholic beliefs.

Foxe is careful to differentiate his own use of the fathers from that of the papists:

Wherefore, to avoid this common error of the papists, we must beware, in commending the doctors and writers of the church; and so commend them, that truth and consideration go with our commendation. For though this cannot be denied, but that holy Cyprian and other blessed martyrs were holy men, yet notwithstanding, they were *men*; that is, such as might have, and had, their falls and faults; men, I say, and not angels, nor gods; saved by God, not saviours of men, nor patrons of grace. And though they were also men of excellent learning,

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\(^{30}\) Kemp 84.
and worthy doctors, yet with their learning they had their errors also annexed.
And though their books be (as they ought to be) of great authority, yet ought they
not to be equal with the Scriptures. (1.204)

The authority of these fathers, though fallible, is important because it is ancient.31 As
Foxe links the martyrs of his own day with the martyrs of the early church, so he
connects the Protestant writers of his own day with the church fathers.

Simeon Foxe claims that by the age of twenty-five, his father had “read over all
that either the Greek or Latine Fathers had left in their writings; the Schoolmen in their
Disputations; the Councils in their Acts; or the Consistory in their Decrees; and acquired
no mean skill in the Hebrew Language.”32 Foxe quotes Augustine, or has his martyrs
quote Augustine, regularly throughout the Acts and Monuments. The Augustinian corpus
on which Foxe draws includes On the Trinity, the Confessions, the Expositions on the
Psalms, the Sermons, and, of course, the City of God. The uses of Augustine are varied
and include such points as the primacy of the Scriptures (4.269), the difference between
spiritual and worldly riches (4.140), the early heresies (3.100), the interpretation of the
Psalms (3.613), the role of the martyrs (4.99-100), the stories of martyrs (4.266; re:
Vincentius), the question of order in relation to the church (4.51), and the subject of
Grace.

The “learned” subjects of the Acts and Monuments often quote not only the Bible,
but the fathers. And, as D.R. Woolf notes, “the church father to whom his more learned
martyrs appeal most frequently is none other than Saint Augustine himself.”33 A good

31 One of the fathers most often cited on the subject of ancient authority in the church is Vincent of Lerins,
because of his famous canon of orthodoxy (quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est), and
because of his emphasis on the importance of tradition in determining doctrine. See Vessey, “English
Translations” 801-4.
32 Quoted from Wooden 1-2.
33 D.R. Woolf, “The Rhetoric of Martyrdom: Generic Contradiction and Narrative Strategy in John Foxe’s
Acts and Monuments,” The Rhetorics of Life-Writing in Early Modern Europe: Forms of Biography from
Cassandra Fedele to Louis XIV, ed. Thomas F. Mayer and D.R. Woolf (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P,
1995) 258.
example of how Foxe weaves Augustine into the accounts of his martyrs is the story of John Philpot, a knight’s son who studied at New College, Oxford before being apprehended by the authorities and examined repeatedly because of his “heretical” Protestant beliefs. During his seventh examination, Philpot quotes Augustine in order to prove that Peter had no more authority than the rest of the apostles, and therefore the church should not claim such authority (7.641). Philpot continues to use Augustine in his later testimonies and to argue with the examiners on their misunderstanding of this father. After Philpot has corrected his examiners on what Augustine says (and means) about the sacrament of baptism, the examiners attempt to change the subject. One of them asks, “How say you, will you believe as we do, and all the learned of the realm, or no? and be of one church with us?” but Philpot answers this question by continuing his Augustinian line of argumentation:

My lords, it is not unknown to you, that there hath been always two churches....For I know there is but one true church; but always from the beginning there hath been joined to the same true church a false church, adversary to the true: and that was declared at the first in Abel and Cain, who persecuted and slew his brother, in whom (as St. Augustine witnesseth) is represented the false and true church. (7.657)

Clearly, Philpot has been reading the City of God, but he has also been reading Bale, for he makes no distinction between “church” and “city.” These arguments continue throughout Philpot’s examinations, and he is consistently shown to be the one who understands Augustine, as well as Scripture, in the plainest sense without using “subtlety” in his interpretations. Later, during another examination, the Protestant Bartlet Green

34 Another examples of an educated martyr who quotes Augustine at length is John Lambert, who was burned in 1538 (5.181-250).
35 The passage to which Philpot is alluding is City of God 15.15.
36 In another instance, the examiner Chedsey says, “I will prove that the evil and wicked men eat the body of Christ, as well as the good men, by St. Austin here” and Philpot reports that “in the beginning of his text St. Austin seemeth to approve his assertion, but I bade him read out to the end, and there St. Austin
makes the point that “St. Augustine wrote and commanded, that no man should be put to
death for his opinion,” and Bonner’s rebuttal makes it clear that he does not know his
patristic authorities nearly as well as his Protestant opponents do. 37 Foxe’s insistent
reference to Augustine and other fathers in his own writing and in the accounts of the
martyrs is an attempt to connect the people (and doctrines) of the Reformation to those of
the early church.

Luther’s Place in Foxe’s Ecclesiastical History
One of the places where Augustine becomes central to Foxe’s connection between the
primitive and the Protestant churches is in his presentation of Luther as a key figure of
the Reformation. Foxe discusses Luther at length, putting him in the centre of the
Protestant reformation which is, of course, where he belongs. William Clebsch suggests
that Luther is also the central character of the Acts and Monuments itself:

In all editions and through all its expansions, the martyrrology remained a unified,
well-constructed story, at the heart of which stood Luther…. The chief interest
was always in persecutions, ecclesiastical and civil, against pure, evangelical
faith, and Luther who himself marvelled at the mildness of his own sufferings on
behalf of ‘my gospel’, was no ready-made Foxean hero. Yet by placement and by
attention he was skilfully made the hero. For Luther was the rod by which Foxe

37 “Then Bonner said, that when St. Augustine saw what inconveniences followed of that commandment
[that no man should be put to death for his opinion], he wrote again to the temporal rulers, commanding
them to punish their bodies also. ‘But,’ said Green, ‘he bade not put them to death.’ ‘He bade punish
them,’ quoth Bonner. ‘Yea,’ said Green, ‘but not put them to death.’ ‘That they should be punished,’
quoth Bonner again” (7.741).
measured the faith of his proper English martyrs—explicitly in the case of such men as Bilney, Frith, Tyndale and Barnes, and implicitly in all the rest.\(^{38}\)

Foxe presents Luther as a microcosm of the Reformation, embodying all of the history and doctrine that the Protestants hold dear. He is a “type” of the preacher (like Christian Faith in *Three Laws*), and because of this Foxe equates him with John the Baptist:

as John Baptist demonstrated the Lamb of God that took away the sins of the world; even so Luther, shining in the church as the bright daylight after a long and dark night, expressly showed, that sins are freely remitted for the love of the Son of God, and that we ought faithfully to embrace this bountiful gift. (4.261)

Luther is also portrayed as a scholar and linguist in the Erasmian humanist mode which became so important to the Reformation:

It happened, moreover, about this time, that many were provoked by Erasmus’s learned works to study the Greek and Latin tongues; who, having thus opened to them a more pleasant sort of learning than before, began to have in contempt the monks’ barbarous and sophistical learning; and especially such as were of liberal nature and good disposition. Luther began to study the Greek and Hebrew tongues to this end, that after he had learned the phrase and idiom of the tongues, and drawn the doctrine of the very fountains, he might form a more sound judgment. (4.262)

Although Foxe does mention the debate between Luther and Erasmus on Free Will, this portrait of Luther as a humanist scholar is probably more than anything an attempt by Foxe to reconcile his two heroes and to portray them as part of the same historical movement.\(^{39}\) In addition, like most of Foxe’s learned subjects, Luther is well-acquainted with Augustine’s works, and, because of his beginnings as an Augustinian monk, better acquainted than most:

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\(^{39}\) Foxe seems to have gained a respect for the humanist scholarship of Erasmus early in his Oxford years; when Foxe went to the continent in 1554, he made a special trip to Rotterdam to visit the house where Erasmus was born (see Wooden 2, 6).
Then began he to read St. Augustine’s books, where he found many comfortable sentences (among others, in the exposition of the Psalms, and especially in the book of the ‘Spirit and Letter’), which confirmed this doctrine of faith and consolation in his heart not a little... above all the rest, he perused all over St. Augustine’s works with attentive cogitation. (4.260)

Understandably, Foxe focuses on what he considers Luther’s most important contribution to the Protestant cause—his understanding of the doctrine of Grace, taken directly from the teachings of Augustine on St. Paul. Foxe uses this opportunity to tell the history of this doctrine:

it seemeth unto me that since the apostles there have been four notable alterations after the first purity of the gospel. Origen had his time... That age almost lost the whole difference of the law and the gospel, and forgot the words of the apostles; for they understood not the natural signification of these words: Letter, Spirit, Justice, Faith. Now when the propriety of words was lost, which be notes of the very things, it was necessary that other things should be contrived. Out of this seed sprang the Pelagius’ error... Then, to correct the errors of that time, or at the least some part of them, God raised St. Austin, who purged in some part the fountains; and I doubt not, if he were judge of dissensions at this day, but he would speak for us, and defend our cause. Certainly, as concerning free remission, justification by faith, the use of the sacraments and indifferent things, he consenteth wholly with us. (4.267; my emphasis)

Foxe once again acknowledges that Augustine was not perfect, but it is nonetheless very important for him to connect the teachings of Luther to the teachings of Augustine—to show how both of these men contributed to a proper understanding of the Word. The entire purpose of telling Luther’s story, Foxe explains, is

not... to defend Luther and his auditors, but [so] that the faithful may consider now, and in time to come, what is the governance of the true church of God, and what it hath always been: how God hath gathered to himself one eternal church, by the voice of the gospel, of this lump of sin, and filthy heap of human corruption; among whom the gospel shineth as a spark in the dark. (4.265)
The Augustinian terminology “lump of sin” works to lessen the role of Luther as an important or heroic individual; if humanity is all part of the same sinful mass and therefore deserving of death, there is little room for heroism. All salvation and heroism come not from individual strength, but from God’s grace. Whereas in the quotation above (4.261) Foxe says that it is Luther who “shin[ed] in the church as the bright daylight after a long and dark night,” later it is the gospel which “Shineth as a spark in the dark” (4.265). Although Luther is seen as a “living martyr,” the strength of his character rests upon the truth of the message which he represents. Therefore, even though Foxe acknowledges Luther’s importance to the Reformation and uses him as a prime example, he also stresses the idea that Luther was an agent in a history that was always already prescripted by God.

The Emergence of the Protestant Hero

Despite this attention to Luther and other continental Reformers such as John Huss and Jerome of Prague, the English leaders of the Reformation are Foxe’s primary concern, from Wycliffe to Tyndale and Cranmer. This ecclesiastical history must focus on the leaders of the true church, who were, like Eusebius’ subjects, bishops and monarchs. But Foxe is able to combine an interest in the bishops with his interest in martyrs; as Christianson notes, “The bishop martyrs played an important part in the persecutions of Mary’s reign, sealing the Established Church with their blood.” Foxe also takes a special interest in the succession of monarchs: “By using the imperial tradition as one of the main themes of his history,” explains Christianson, “Foxe joined the ranks of Tyndale, Cranmer, Aylmer, Jewel, and Sandys.”40 This tendency to underline the importance of the monarchs and the rulers of the Church is not completely foreign to Augustine, but we

40 Christianson 42.
certainly associate it more with Eusebius. When Augustine wrote “ecclesiastical history” he was engaging in exegesis, but he was not particularly concerned with the role of individuals in post-apostolic history. Although Eusebius included the stories of martyrs, his main objective was to assemble these parts in order to weave them into a unified history of the church. Kemp suggests that “Eusebius’s task is to assemble his sources into a coherent whole” while “Augustine’s is to perform a work of structural-literary analysis on his sources, to make explicit the structures implicit within them.”

Foxe performs a synthesis of these two practices—he combines the dualistic framework and interest in literary analysis of Augustine with the Eusebian tendency to gather material and to document church history.

Yet there is something in Foxe’s particular brand of ecclesiastical history that belongs to neither Eusebius nor Augustine—the increasing emphasis on the common people and their testimony to the faith. This may be related to Eusebius’ stories of the martyrs, or to Augustine’s defense of Christian “mediocrity,” but this particular combination of the two is new. Although Bale had told the stories of Askew and Oldcastle, he never connected these stories explicitly to his historical framework in the

Image. What we notice in the *Acts and Monuments*, however, is that

Out of this flux of human history arises a group of people who emerge from obscurity to strike blows for the neglected true faith and against papal claims of dominion. The meaning of the fragmentary stories of these people, martyrs and witnesses whom Foxe chronicles as a true thread through the tangle of history, becomes clear in the full-scale treatment accorded the major figures in the narrative.

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41 Kemp 22-23. Cited and discussed above, Chapter 1, section III.A: “Sacred versus Secular History.”

42 Markus explains that Augustine’s re-reading of Paul in the 390s caused him to emphasize the essential depravity of humans. The result of this change in perspective was that “assigning the disgrace to himself, the glory to God” became “the bedrock of Augustine’s tolerance of mediocrity, of unresolved tensions, both in the individual Christian and in the Church” (*End* 45-62). This is also discussed in Chapter 1, section III.B: “Exemplary Stories.”

43 Wooden 51.
Foxe’s emphasis on individual people causes critics like Hugh Massingham to argue that “in the main, the Book of Martyrs is the story of how the ordinary man defied his oppressors, revealed unsuspected heroic qualities, and eventually won immortality.”

Considering Foxe’s interest in writing specifically an ecclesiastical history, this may be a misrepresentation of his focus in the Acts and Monuments. Nonetheless, the portrait of the individual poor martyr whom Foxe uses to support his overall structure of ecclesiastical history becomes one of his most identifiable literary characteristics. Indeed, there may even be something about this method that works against Foxe’s concurrent presentation of bishops and martyrs, namely, the power of the martyrs’ stories themselves. Woolf suggests as much:

The 1570 edition is also, perhaps significantly, the last edition to be billed explicitly as an “ecclesiastical history.” As the book grew larger and larger, and included more and more detailed accounts of the martyrs of his own time, the Eusebian paradigm became increasingly difficult to sustain. So, too, did Foxe’s sense that he was telling a single-threaded story, imitating Eusebius’s claim, with regard to his own predecessors, that he was endeavoring to “give them unity by historical treatment.”

Thus, although the Acts and Monuments began as an ecclesiastical history modeled on Eusebius, Foxe became distracted by his martyr stories in a way that his fourth-century Caesarean predecessor did not. As a result, Foxe’s presentation of history became dominated by a martyrological narrative that focuses on individual actors in history more than it does on history’s grand design. Throughout the enormous scope of the Acts and Monuments, the cries of the multitude of martyrs struggle to be heard above the din of history.

45 Woolf 245.
II. Martyrs

"with a full discourse of such persecutions, horrible troubles, the sufferyng of Martyrs, and other things incident..."

Posterity has come to know the Acts and Monuments as Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, despite the fact that he himself said, “I wrote no such book bearing the title of the ‘Book of Martyrs’” (3.392). Indeed, Foxe is known principally not as a historian, but as a martyrologist. The Acts and Monuments grew out of Foxe’s interest in martyrs, first in the Lollards, then in those martyred during Henry’s reign, and finally in those who were executed under Mary. When Foxe resided on the continent between 1554 and 1559, the stories of the Marian martyrs were in circulation, and he collected as much information about these people as he could. He incorporates his interest in each individual martyr into the larger framework of his grand narrative of history. As Levy astutely comments,

The history of each man paralleled the history of all men: the drama of salvation in which each individual starred was the same drama for all mankind collectively. Each martyr, similarly, was a paradigm of all church history, and each triumph over the flames was a victory for the true church.... The stories of the martyrs, separated from the whole history of the greatest of all human wars, made no sense. Each story was, of course, inspirational, but, more than that, it was symbolic as well. Foxe was right when he denied that his martyrology was no more than a Protestant continuation of a Roman model. There was thus a kind of grand dialectic in the Acts and Monuments, and it can be seen to operate in great and in little.46

This relationship between the individual and the communal level is reminiscent of Augustine’s movement from the story of himself in the Confessions to the story of the community of believers in the City of God. What becomes clear in the City of God is that Augustine is more interested in the community than in the individual—thus he does not (as a rule) identify post-apostolic individuals specifically. Similarly, Foxe’s first impulse

46 Levy 100.
was to subordinate the role of the individual to the role of the community in his presentation of Providential history. However, as his project grew, and he collected more information about specific martyrs, his work began to reflect a greater interest in Protestant “heroes” of the faith. This is a tendency apparent mostly in the latter editions of the *Acts and Monuments*. In *Christus Triumphans*, Foxe was only beginning to move away from Augustinian abstraction to historical specificity.

**Allegory and the Individual: Marking the Martyrs**

Foxe’s characters in *Christus Triumphans* are allegorical abstractions, standing for various forces of good and evil, not unlike the characters in a medieval morality play. One of the most important characters in the first part of *Christus Triumphans* is Dioctes, the persecutor whom Satan orders to counteract the power of Christ’s resurrection. Despite the doubts of his companion Anabasius, Dioctes asks, “why do we fear that miserable and worthless king, actually a pauper who can do nothing except endure injuries?” (3.4; 285). This typical comment about the poor state of Jesus and his followers holds an irony for any Christian reader who knows “the whole story,” and whose belief is centred upon the omnipotence of this humble king. It also serves to highlight Christ’s role as the first and ultimate martyr, who set a precedent of strength by being able to do “nothing” other than endure injuries. Thus the position of the Protestant martyrs in Foxe’s day is explicitly connected to the example of Jesus, and the act of dying for belief in Him is interpreted as the ultimate act of faith.\(^{47}\)

\(^{47}\) And, by imitating Christ, these Protestant martyrs were following the example of the earliest Christian martyrs, who also patterned their actions on Christ’s. Robin Lane Fox explains that “In Jewish history, martyrs died for the Law and its observance. Among Christians, martyrs died because they refused to honour the pagan gods. Before them lay the example and promises of Jesus, who had gone passively to his death, refusing to explain to his judges the truth, in his view, of his mission. The element of personal surrender was not lost on some of his heirs…. [the Jewish texts] lack the detail and courtroom protocol which the best Christian narratives deploy.” Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Viking
Dioctes calls forth some assistants to aid him in persecuting the Christians:

"summon Nero here, and Domitian, Trajan, Verus, Aurelius, Maximinus, Decius, Valerianus, Diocletian, and Constantius—For these ten rulers I will commission ten diadems that they may work vigorously against this Christ" (3.4; 287). This role call of historical persons shows how individuals reenact the primal struggle between good and evil, between God and the Devil, between the church of the persecuted and the church of the persecutors. And this is why Ecclesia, the symbol of the true church, is cast in the role of a martyr. Her trials include the death of her husband, the loss of her children, and her condemnation as a heretic (which results in her being sent to Bedlam). She is ridiculed in the same way that Christ was, and she maintains her purity by being steadfast in faith and not ever denying her God or her position. Her sufferings are imprinted physically on her body as well, for when she is reunited with her children in 5.4, she is scarred, and says, “I know you’re quite surprised to see me so battered and scarred all over. But none of this is my shame, since I endure it for the sake of my bridegroom, Christ….I’m a widow, bereft of all my goods, and an exile cut off from my country” (5.4; 357). This theme is repeated in the next scene, when the chorus of virgins asks Ecclesia, “mistress, why is your body red all over with stripes?” and she answers, “These stigmas, if you don’t know, are my jewels, my only pearls, which I wear for the sake of my bridegroom” (5.5; 361).

This view of the scars of martyrs is strikingly similar to Augustine's in the *City of God*. Although not labeled a "martyrologist" like Eusebius, Augustine does honour the martyrs; he even considers what their position in heaven would be, and how their restored bodies would look:

Now we feel such extraordinary affection for the blessed martyrs that in the kingdom of God we want to see on their bodies the scars of the wounds which they suffered for Christ's name; and see them perhaps we shall. For in those wounds there will be no deformity, but only dignity.... But if it will be right that in that new age the marks of glorious wounds should remain in those immortal bodies, for all to see, then scars of the blows or the cuts will also be visible in places where limbs were hacked off, although the parts have not been lost, but restored. And so the defects which have thus been caused in the body will no longer be there, in that new life; and yet, to be sure, those proofs of valour are not to be accounted defects, or to be called by that name. (22.20; 1061-62)

These same martyr scars are the ones that Ecclesia displays as a sign that she is the true church. Throughout *Christus Triumphans*, Foxe identifies the true church as a "persecuted remnant" that exists continually, if meagrely, at all times. The historical identification of persecution is evident in the frontispiece, where the true and false churches are labeled according to their roles as persecutors or the persecuted. It is within this larger framework of diametrically opposed forces that individuals exist, as members of one church or of the other. Although Foxe does not name the individuals in *Christus Triumphans*, he does imply that Hierologus stands for Luther or Latimer and Ridley. 48 Warren Wooden's complaint that "There is a surplus of characters, most of them flat and colorless, and, more disturbing, allegorical equivalents are not always firmly fixed" 49

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48 Smith explains that "Continental readers would probably have identified Hierologus with Martin Luther, like Theophilus in Kirchmayer's *Pammachius*" (339, n1) because he plays the role of the first reformer. However, later in the play (5.2), the description of the place in which Hierologus is in prison is clearly a topographical reference to Oxford, and thus he becomes associated with Latimer and Ridley, who were in the Oxford prison at the time that Foxe was writing the play (see Smith 345, n2).

49 Wooden 82.
reflects the same misunderstanding that many people have about Bale's work. In both cases, scholars often fail to realize that, if all history is divided into a struggle between two opposing forces, then of course one allegorical figure can easily represent several historical personages. This is the sort of convention that we are more accustomed to seeing in romance narratives such as the *Faerie Queene*, where various characters represent allegorical abstractions as well as historical individuals. Perhaps Foxe found that the move back and forth between allegorical and historical personages was too difficult for the medium of drama, for while actors on stage can play the parts of either allegorical or historical figures, it is difficult for them to represent both. Thus the *Acts and Monuments* adopted many romance conventions that enabled it to serve these functions more readily than the medium of drama could. As Foxe's narrative romance developed, the roles of the heroes became increasingly important.

**Naming the Martyrs**

Naming these historical figures, both of regal and mean estate, became Foxe's growing concern as his work on martyrs developed. Augustine had also emphasized the importance of naming martyrs:

> we Christians construct, in honour of our martyrs, not temples, as if to gods, but memorial shrines, as to men who are dead, but whose spirits are living with God. We do not in those shrines raise altars on which to sacrifice to the martyrs, but to the one God, who is the martyrs' God and ours; and at this sacrifice the martyrs are named, in their own place in the appointed order, as men of God who have overcome the world in the confession of his name.

(22.11; 1048-49; my emphasis).

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50 As Woolf notes, "Romance cuts back and forth between story lines, and from one character to another, though generally these are set against a common foe who takes many shapes and appears in several places.... What [Foxe] did was...[to bring] the narrative looseness of the romance story form to bear on what was a tremendous organizational challenge, without tying himself to the limitations or the subject matter of the romance genre" (249).
Here Augustine is concerned with differentiating between Christian martyrs and pagan gods, and this differentiation is replayed by Foxe when he carefully distinguishes between Protestant martyrs and Roman Catholic saints. Yet even though Augustine talks about naming the martyrs, it is not a project which concerns him in the *City of God*, where he is much more interested in describing the “big picture.”

In the prefatory material to the 1570 *Acts and Monuments*, Foxe includes a statement to the believers, as well as a statement “to the persecutors of God’s truth, commonly called Papists,” in which he admonishes the latter to

See, I say, and behold, here present before your eyes, the heaps of slain bodies of so many men and women, both old, young, children, infants, new born, married, unmarried, wives, widows, maids, blind men, lame men, whole men; of all ages, of all degrees; lords, knights, gentlemen, lawyers, merchants, archbishops, bishops, priests, ministers, deacons, laymen, artificers, yea, households and whole kindreds together; father, mother and daughter; grandmother, mother, aunt, and child, etc.; whose wounds, yet bleeding before the face of God, cry vengeance! For, whom have you spared? (l.xii)

Throughout the *Acts and Monuments*, Foxe faithfully gives names to all of these people, telling their stories and providing a voice for those who can no longer speak. In his address to the Protestant readers, after a lengthy list of martyrs’ names, Foxe protests, “But what do I stand upon recital of names, which almost are infinite?” (1.xxiii). Of course the list of names is central; compiling lists of names and dates is a way of reflecting the order of God’s design as he works in and through time. This method results in a certain blurring of distinctions between the martyrs; as Wooden comments, “the reader can place the individual martyr into a proper context, elevating the quotidian to the eternal, as such differentiae as age, sex, and geography melt away and as all are divided into one of two camps, shoulder to shoulder with their comrades of other eras and
climes.” Rather than emphasizing the opposition of the two churches by an exegetical dualism (as Bale did in the *Image*), Foxe uses a narrative dualism, showing how the stories of individuals fit into the greater plot of history. In this way, Foxe creates his community of readers out of a shared narrative experience.

Woolf argues that Foxe invested his subjects with limited individuality without making them seem essentially different by “superimpos[ing] on his romance skeleton some comic flesh and blood,” thereby making his Reformers and martyrs “seem more human, less extraordinary, and more immediate to the reader.” When concentrating on specific martyrs, Foxe is careful to use these stories in order to discuss the larger issues which the *Acts and Monuments* attempts to present exhaustively. For example, in his treatment of Wycliffe, Foxe digresses from the biography of Wycliffe’s early life to discuss the nature of the errors in the church at the time, placing him in a similar historical context as he did Luther: “Thus, in these so great and troubulous times and horrible darkness of ignorance, what time there seemed in a manner to be no one so little a spark of pure doctrine left or remaining, this aforesaid Wickliff, by God’s providence, sprang and rose up” (2.796). When Foxe finally returns to his subject, he is most concerned with discussing Wycliffe’s view of certain issues which became central to Reformation debates; the most common of these are the Eucharist, justification by faith, and auricular confession. Because doctrine was central to the issue of martyrdom for Foxe, he used these stories of martyrs to further the doctrinal views of his Protestantism.

Thus, even though Foxe’s use of individual Protestant martyrs increases from *Christus Triumphans* to the *Acts and Monuments*, he is still, for the most part, interested in fitting these individuals into the overall scheme of the two churches. Yet, as each

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51 Wooden 52.
52 Woolf 251.
edition of the *Acts and Monuments* grew, and as Foxe added more material to each, the documentation of church history diminished in deference to the increasingly spectacular tales of Protestant heroes. It was stories such as this that became the most well-known sections of the *Acts and Monuments*. Because of Foxe's historical specificity, and because of the way people read his book, the *Ecclesiastical History* became the *Book of Martyrs*.

**Martyrs in Court and on Stage**

Part of what made the martyrs authentic in Foxe's account is their steadfast faith and constancy even at the point of death—their *apatheia*. Yet the Catholics would also claim that their martyrs died with the same resolve, so the Protestants needed a way to distinguish between "true" and "false" martyrs. One of the main arguments that the Protestants used to distinguish true from false martyrs came from Augustine. Freeman explains:

> Faced with heretics [the Donatists] at least as willing to die for their faith as the Catholics were, Augustine formulated what would become the classical arguments which the Christian church would deploy against heretical martyrs. Above all, Augustine insisted that *non poena, sed causa martyrem facit*, not the punishment suffered, but the cause for which the punishing was suffered, made the martyr.\(^{54}\)

In order to prove that the Protestant "cause" was the correct one, and therefore that the martyrs were authentic, Foxe often emphasized the legal aspect of the martyr trials, and constructed a court of justice that went beyond the ecclesial authorities of Mary's reign and the Pope to the ultimate judge who presides over all cases. This dramatistic portrayal

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\(^{53}\) See Freeman 115-50 on *apatheia* in the *Acts and Monuments*.

\(^{54}\) Freeman 145. This use of Augustine is also noted by Knott (23, n40).
of the trials and the deaths of the martyrs showed the difference between the two churches in the language of drama, and in the language of the law.

Warren Wooden accurately describes the general structure of the martyr stories in the *Acts and Monuments* as a three-part pattern. First, there is the “martyr’s initial conflict with the authorities, his apprehension, and the physical oppression or torture.” Second, there is the examination “on the grounds of his belief by a clerical court or committee made up of the bishop of his diocese and various other inquisitors drawn from the ranks of the clergy.” Finally, the “scene at the stake completes and justifies the three-stage pattern.”

Foxe uses the term “martyr” after its original meaning, “witness.” This meaning becomes more evident because he presents so many of the martyrs on trial in courtroom scenes. There are examinations and defenses which Foxe reports at great length. These, too, often focus on doctrinal issues, but they also serve to show that each martyr is quite literally witnessing for his or her true faith. The “acts” of these martyrs are revealed not just in their general actions, but in their given testimony in a court. The court of the English Roman Catholics is also contrasted with the greater court, which is, of course, God’s.

In *Christus Triumphans*, Foxe uses legal terminology to describe the plight and the promise given to humans. Nomocrates is the power of the law, and Thanatos is the power of death over people; these laws are a result of the sin in the garden of Eden. Yet Christ’s resurrection allows for a new law; thus he demands that Satan “return that binding writ” to him. Satan immediately wants to know “Under what law?” (1.4; 251), and Christ explains that because his was an innocent sacrifice, he now has a right to the law; after his work on earth is done, he ascends to heaven in order to sit in the seat of the

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55 Wooden 60-61.
ultimate judgement. Therefore, it is evident that the court of the Roman Catholics is merely temporary, and that the ultimate court of judgement presides above this transitory court. Foxe contrasts his Protestant martyrs with the false Roman Catholic saints because, as John King points out,

Foxe designed the *Book of Martyrs* in particular to supplant medieval hagiographies, which celebrated the alleged ability of the saints to work miracles, cures and magical feats. Thus he participates in the Protestant campaign to identify sainthood with the early Christian conception of martyrdom as an act of witnessing to religious faith. Accordingly, Foxean martyrs need not die so long as they testify to faith in Christ at the risk of death.56

This practice is evident when, after discussing so many stories of people who were burned at the stake, Foxe includes a section on “divers saved by God’s Providence from burning, in Queen Mary’s Days” (8.548-83) whom he also considers martyrs. On the other hand, Foxe includes many accounts of the strange and miraculous deaths of several of the persecutors, in order to remind the reader that God’s judgement is just and that the persecutors do, and will, get what is coming to them.57

The legal aspect of Foxe’s martyr stories creates a courtroom staging that allows the readers to view the conflicts between the Catholics and the Protestants, thereby gaining a heightened awareness that God is the ultimate viewer. The courtroom staging recalls patristic accounts of Christians appearing before Roman magistrates, especially in

57 The example of Gardiner’s death is perhaps the most striking: “The bloody tyrant had not eaten a few bits, but the sudden stroke of God’s terrible hand fell upon him in such sort, as immediately he was taken from the table, and so brought to his bed, where he continued the space of fifteen days in such intolerable anguish and torments, that all that meanwhile, during those fifteen days, he could not avoid, by urine or otherwise, anything that he received: whereby his body being miserably inflamed within (who had inflamed so many good martyrs before), was brought to a wretched end. And thereof, no doubt, as most like it is, came the thrusting out of his tongue from his mouth so swollen and black, with the inflammation of his body. A spectacle worthy to be noted and beholden of all such bloody burning persecutors” (7.593).
the work of Cyprian and Tertullian, both of whom Foxe mentions. This legal aspect permeates the actions of these faithful actors on God’s stage.\footnote{On martyrdom and law, see Lydia Whitehead, “A Poena et Culpa: Penitence, Confidence and the Miserere in Foxe’s Actes and Monuments,” Renaissance Studies 4.3 (1990), who argues that the martyrs’ recitation of Psalm 51 is connected to their sense of being part of a divine court of law. Whitehead explains that “The recitation of Psalm 51 places the martyrs firmly in the context of the obedience cult: the submission to God’s judgement is clear, unequivocal…. The divine court of law, Wyatt’s translation [of Psalm 51] asserts, has no need of the swift vindictiveness of Tudor justice whose effects Wyatt feels at the time of writing. The comparison must surely have been clear to Foxe, as editor of the art of dying, if not to his actors. In the theatre of powerlessness which Foxe’s narrative creates, Wyatt’s redirection of submission is vitally important, as it redefines the penitent and relocates the court of law” (295).}

In \textit{Christus Triumphans}, Foxe had experimented not only with the dramatic medium itself, but also with meta-dramatic moments which highlight the importance of the \textit{idea} of drama in his scheme. The scene in which Satan insists that his assistant vices dress in certain costumes in order more easily to deceive the people is reminiscent of similar scenes in Bale’s \textit{Three Laws} (such as Infidelity’s change from a peddler to a grey friar). The fact that they do not do a very good job of counterfeiting is immediately evident when Dioctes initially introduces the newly costumed Pseudamnus by that name, and when Europus becomes confused, asking, “Pseudamnus? What sort of name is that?” Dioctes corrects himself, “What did I say? I should say Eudamnus, for nowhere is there a lamb more lamblike” (4.6; 323). Foxe juxtaposes the subversive (and inadequate) playing of these vice figures with the pious actions of Ecclesia and her children. This contrasting presentation of good and bad theatre continues in the \textit{Acts and Monuments}, where the \textit{idea} of drama remains central even though the presentation is in narrative form.

Many critics have noted the highly charged drama of both the courtroom scenes and the burning at the stake in Foxe’s narratives.\footnote{See especially Knott, Ch. 1: “John Rogers and the Drama of Martyrdom” and Diehl, Ch. 1: “The Drama of Iconoclasm.”} Wooden observes that, throughout the \textit{Acts and Monuments}, “stage metaphors are so frequent…that they ultimately suggest a
way of looking at history as pageant, with the author instructing the reader especially on how to recognize a good performance and appreciate the continuity of theme through changes of scene and cast. One example of a particularly dramatistic presentation of a trial is the case of John Philpot. Foxe prints Philpot's own written account of these events, and presents each trial scene as another 'act' or 'fyte' (7.613). The fourth trial concludes with the words: "Thus endeth the fourth part of this tragedy" (7.619). These trials are "tragedies" because they are ruled by the Roman Catholics. Like the vice figures in Christus Triumphans, the persecutors are shown as "bad actors, their 'tragical voices' hollow and unconvincing." Ultimately, the overall pattern of Acts and Monuments, like that of Christus Triumphans, is comic, because the martyrs die in righteousness and look forward to eternal glory with God. Antithetically, the wicked persecutors get what they deserve; for instance, John King notes that the "account of Gardiner's death furnishes a contrast to the repetitive 'comedic' pattern of the innocent suffering and martyrdom of Protestant witnesses."

Wooden 66-67. More specifically, Wooden notes that "Latimer and Ridley both treat and describe the disputations at Oxford as a farce, an interlude, and the like, while Foxe describes Latimer's makeup and appearance, as a semisenile old preacher, in theatrical terms; the burning of martyrs is repeatedly described in the language of the theater, as the martyrs try to win over the audience by their behavior at the stake" (222).

Knott observes that "The case of John Philpot offers the richest example of the drama of the examination to be found in the Acts and Monuments" and that this "narrative presents a strongly dramatic contest of wills between Philpot and his examiners, Bonner in particular" (63-64).

The editor notes that "The expression fyte was anciently applied to the cantos or divisions of a poem which was sung or recited" and that "Philpot, or whoever first printed these Examinations, has regarded them as the successive Acts of a Tragedy" (7.780-81).

Paul Budra examines this same dramatic quality of narrative in the Mirror for Magistrates. Paul Budra, Sad Stories: A Mirror for Magistrates and the de casibus Tradition (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1999). Because the ghosts speak in the first person rather than through a narrator, argues Budra, the Mirror is inherently dramatic, and "the book may be considered a collection of soliloquies." Furthermore, "there are moments in which the contributors make gestures at the tradition of theatrical representation" (134). Specifically, Budra argues that "Sackville swings the Mirror in the direction of tragedy, placing more emphasis on the fear and pity of the narrative of decline than on its historical/political implications" (97) and that "Higgins, in the introduction to the First Part of the Mirror for Magistrates, repeatedly makes use of the term tragedy to describe the biographies in his book" (98).

Wooden 66.

King, English Reformation 443. See note 57 for the description of Gardiner's death.
Bale had also dwelled on the courtroom drama in the trials of Oldcastle and Askew, using the latter's humility as a dramatic contrast to the arrogance of her examiners. Foxe repeats this account in the *Acts and Monuments* and adds many others like it. He uses the number of women and common people who were burned as a testimony to the difference between the true piety of the Protestants and the ceremonial pomp of the Roman Catholics. Like Bale, Foxe was interested in drawing out the difference between two kinds of theatre. Diehl has elucidated this distinction, showing how Foxe “denoun[es] the images, spectacles, rituals, and ceremonies of the Roman Church as fraudulent theater” while at the same time he “champions another kind of theater, substituting the theatrics of martyrdom for traditional pomp and pageantry.”

This dialectic between the fraudulent theatre of the Roman Catholics and the grand heroic theatre of the Protestants becomes central to Foxe's presentation of dramatic scenes throughout the *Acts and Monuments* that are intended to show the clear difference between these two plays. This tactic follows Bale’s practice as a dramatist and as a martyrrologist closely, but what remained a courtroom drama in Bale reaches its climax for Foxe not during the trial, but during the scene of burning itself. It is here that the martyrs perform their most powerful gestures; Diehl points out that

Many of the illustrations in *Acts and Monuments* show martyrs at the moment of death, surrounded by spectators who stand or sit around the scaffold, watching the proceedings like the audiences of a stage play. Displays of power, gestures of defiance, spectacles of suffering and death: all are recorded as high drama, played out on public stages, watched by crowds of spectators.

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66 Diehl 14 (my emphasis), 24.
67 Diehl 186-87.
The martyrs often embrace or kiss the stake, clap their hands, or continue to witness to their faith with words. John Hooper continues to prove a dramatic spectacle for the audience even after he has lost the ability to speak:

But when he was black in the mouth, and his tongue swollen, the he could not speak, yet his lips went till they were shrunk to the gums: and he knocked his breast with his hands, until one of his arms fell off, and then knocked still with the other, what time the fat, water, and blood, dropped out at his fingers’ ends, until by renewing of the fire his strength was gone, and his hand did cleave fast, in knocking, to the iron upon his breast. So immediately, bowing forwards, he yielded up his spirit. (6.658)

This graphic representation of Hooper’s death, accompanied by a woodcut (see Figure 4), emphasizes the visual nature of this event, showing that Protestant theatre offers a more spectacular (and more “true”) drama than the Roman Catholics with their empty ceremonies ever could.

The woodcut from the *Acts and Monuments* which perhaps best illustrates the combination between legalistic and dramatistic ways of looking at martyrdom is the burning of Anne Askew with John Adams, John Lacels, and Nicholas Belenian (see Figure 5). In this picture, the crowd forms a circle around the martyrs, the preacher Shaxton, and the executioners. This is the main stage, and it is surrounded by a variety of spectators who are reacting in noticeably different ways. Yet we can note as well that there is another stage, a bench on which “Wriothesley, chancellor of England; the old duke of Norfolk, the old earl of Bedford, the lord mayor, with divers others” (5.550) all sit in order to watch the execution. Foxe even tells us that these spectators are anxious, lest the gunpowder on the martyrs’ bodies ignite too quickly and get out of control. These spectators seem to believe that this stage of martyrs and executioners was erected for them, but the fact that the viewer of the picture sees the event from a different
perspective as well as the fact that they are sitting on a platform creates the distinct impression that these viewers, too, are on a stage. The ultimate surveyor of the situation is implied by the angry-looking clouds at the top, one of which seems to be shedding rain.\(^6^8\) It is apparent that, although we see a stage of persecutors and the persecuted below, the ultimate control of this divine spectacle is in the hands of the universal director, who is also the universal judge. Thus, this scene parallels the structure of the frontispiece, in which God reigns on both sides of the picture, presiding over everything, including the division between the two churches. Like Bale and Augustine, Foxe views all evil actions as not substantive in themselves, but merely as a turning away from God. This conception of evil makes it less threatening than a Manichean view of evil as a separate substance, and thus evil can be contained, as it is on the frontispiece, under the controlling gaze of God.

The Body and the Word

The very fact that Foxe’s “theatre” of martyrs comes to be represented most strongly through the written word and the static picture, however, shows his partial discomfort with the body. Presenting the characters of this drama on the page rather than on the stage allows Foxe to control what these bodies represent. Katharine Randall Coats suggests that Foxe’s martyrrology differs from Roman Catholic hagiography because rather than presenting the “integral presence” of the saint’s body, Foxe concentrates on

\(^6^8\) Although it is difficult to discern from the picture whether it is rain that shows God’s anger or sunlight (as in the frontispiece) to show that he is pleased with his martyrs, Bale’s account of Askew’s death mentions the rain, so the intent of the picture is probably to show rain as well. Bale writes in the conclusion to the Second Examination of Askew: “Credibly am I informed by divers Dutch merchants which were there present, that in the time of their sufferings the sky, abhorring so wicked an act, suddenly altered colour, and the clouds from above gave a thunder-clap, not all unlike to that is written Psalm lxvi. The elements both declared therein the high displeasure of God for so tyrannous a murder of innocents, and also expressly signified his mighty hand present to the comfort of them which trusted in him, besides the most wonderful mutation which will, within short space, thereupon follow” (243).
the meaning of the martyr's body on many levels. Like Augustine, Foxe "reads" the bodies of the martyrs, and through an allegorical movement from body to Word, encases events and people within an arena defined by Scripture. Foxe's martyrs, like Augustine's, are named, memorialized and texto-remembered. His usual habit of printing the martyrs' letters to their loved ones after he has described their deaths reinforces the textual stability of the martyrs: the story of their suffering bodies is surrounded by narrative, epistles, and documents which ensure the primacy of the text over the body. Thus we can see how Coats misrepresents Foxe's practice in the Acts and Monuments when she argues that "Foxe does record a process of oscillation between body and word in his text; the emphasis moves back and forth between the two, leaving the reader to determine which is the most significant."71 Foxe is interested in the relationship between the body and the text, certainly, but the process of "oscillation" that Coats describes would leave much more to the imagination of the reader than Foxe actually allows. Through marginalia and consistent explanation of the significance of each event that he describes, Foxe moves toward an arena of controlled interpretation, so it is misleading to discuss whether the body or the text is the more important, because Foxe is not concerned with one or the other, but the very specific relationship between them. He uses the bodies of the martyrs in order to signify their

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69 Catharine Randall Coats observes that "Textual resurrection does not aim at constructing an anatomically-correct physiology of the martyr. What is significant is the use of reference to the body as a path to the word. In like fashion, many of the descriptions of martyrdoms effectively turn the martyr's body into a text." Catharine Randall Coats, (Em)bodying the Word: Textual Resurrections in the Martyrological Narratives of Foxe, Crespin, de Bèze, and d'Aubigné (New York: Peter Lang, 1992) 39.
70 Coats 53.
71 Coats 46.
meaning in accordance with the word, just as Augustine notes that the scars of the martyrs signify their glory in heaven.\textsuperscript{72}

In Foxe's narrative, the martyrs can be transformed into the Word because they act in accordance with the Scripture. Knott observes that Foxe's martyrs "often appear to be acting out a drama learned from the New Testament, repeating key texts to reassure themselves to justify their actions, as by invoking the example of the protomartyr Stephen denouncing his accusers or that of Paul and Silas singing in prison."\textsuperscript{73} By acting out the drama of the first martyrs, these Protestant martyrs became an integral part of God's plan; as Breitenberg remarks, "So often in Foxe's accounts, the martyrs die with a book in their hands, reading their last words from the Bible."\textsuperscript{74} At the moment of their deaths, it seems that these Protestant martyrs have become the proto-martyrs whom they represent. The exemplary stories of the Bible provide a script for the martyrs to follow, and the promise of Scripture assures them of their eventual reward. Knott argues that to understand the drama that Foxe represents, one must appreciate the kind of reality that biblical texts could have for its protagonists and for Foxe himself. Philip Hughes says of the ordinary Marian martyrs, those with relatively little education, that they are people who have "become transformed into Scriptural figures, and all the drama of their lives has become, in a way, a Scriptural event, itself a part of, and a continuation of, the sacred story."\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{72} This marking becomes literalized in the woodcut that accompanies Foxe's story of a converted Jew who died for his Christian beliefs. There are marks all over him which can be "read" as a testimony to his faith in Christ.
\textsuperscript{73} Knott 7.
\textsuperscript{75} Knott 31. This is also a strong element of the desert-ascetic tradition of early Christianity. Douglas Burton-Christie explains that the desert monks interpreted Scripture by putting it into practice, thus transforming Word into event. Douglas Burton-Christie, The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993). See especially Section II: "Approaches to the Word in the Desert."
Just as Augustine uses the martyrs of *City of God* 22.8 as immediate examples for his congregation to follow, so Foxe uses the Marian martyrs. The objective in both cases is a pastoral one; the point is not to emphasize that miracles will happen to the average person, but instead to emphasize faith and belief, and to hold up these extraordinary events as lessons. When the bodies of the martyrs and the age that produced them have passed away, the stories and the words remain. The move from a physical body to a textual one is a sort of immortality that foreshadows the glory of incorruptible bodies in an Augustinian post-apocalyptic world.

These martyr stories and the meaning with which Foxe invests them serve to unite the readers of this work as part of a common interpretive group much like the one Bale attempts to create through the character of Christian Faith in *Three Laws*. Foxe’s narrative impulse, as Helgerson argues, “is the product of an enormous communal effort to record the sayings and doing of the martyrs and their persecutors” and it resulted in a narrative that enabled the English Protestants to “feel themselves part of an invisible church that stretched back to the beginning of human history and that would triumph with the end of time.”76 Yet Foxe feels that his own textual contribution to this narrative-based imagined community falls short. He says of his own play *Christus Triumphans*, “Would that the same Christ Triumphant might come to us all, not in the theater but in the clouds, not in allegorical representation but in the conspicuous majesty of his father, visible to all” (Dedicatory Epistle; 207). Both the promise of an incorruptible body for individual people and the promise of the ultimate membership in the heavenly city/church must await the coming of Christ; until then, the answers will be obscured in the dark prophecies relating to the End Times.

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76 Helgerson 267.
III. Apocalyptic Exegesis

"These latter and perillous days" (1563)

As each edition of the *Acts and Monuments* was produced, the title page would alter slightly, reflecting the nature of the changes that had been made, or the points which the printer wanted to underline. The title of the 1563 *Acts and Monuments* began “The Actes and Monuments of these latter and perillous dayes” in order to emphasize Foxe’s view that the events of the sixteenth century were evidence that the end of the world was nigh. In the seventeenth century, one of the most consistent additions to the title page is a reference to the book of Revelation. In the 1632 printing, for example, the title page includes a reference to Apocalypse 7:15, “Solus sedenti super Thronum et Agno” (sitting alone before the throne and the Lamb). This passage was included in the later printings of the *Acts and Monuments* in the seventeenth century by the Company of Stationers in 1641 and 1684. While this explicit reference to the Apocalypse on the title page may be new, the impulses which drive it were part of the *Acts and Monuments* since the 1563 printing.

William Lamont says that, more than any other English writer, it is Foxe who “made the pursuit of the Millennium respectable and orthodox…who domesticated the Apocalypse.”\(^77\) This “domestication” of the apocalypse is, most critics agree, a continuation by Foxe of the process which Bale had begun.\(^78\) Firth, for example, says that “During those years from the return of the exiles to his death, Foxe was the single

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\(^78\) Christianson argues that the result of Bale’s influence was that the *Acts and Monuments* “provided both the most popular lengthy version of the mainstream apocalyptic interpretation of the reformation and a mighty reservoir of explosive examples of the godly to follow whenever the beast of Babylon appeared to threaten God’s chosen people in England” (46). And Fairfield concurs, “With the first edition of *Acts and Monuments* (1563), to be sure, the impact of Balian ideas on Foxe’s thought is quite apparent. Foxe assumes the authority of the Apocalypse as the key par excellence to Church history” (152).
most important contributor to the establishment of the apocalyptic tradition in English Protestant historiography," but she also notes, importantly, that Foxe's interest in the Apocalypse was not apparent until his exile. She points out that the 1554 *Commentarii* was more an essay on the life and doctrine of Wyclif in relation to the Reformation than the beginnings of an extensive history of martyrdom, contained very few references to the apocalyptic tradition and quoted the Book of Revelation only once as an end-piece.... Thus Foxe's use of the Apocalypse in 1554 followed more nearly the example of Erasmus and Calvin than that of Bale.

Apocalypticism became more and more central to Foxe's work, beginning with the "apocalyptic comedy* Christus Triumphans*, and developing into the 1563 edition of the *Acts and Monuments*, which was, in the words of Haller, "the most elaborate expression of the apocalyptic expectancy with which the returned exiles and their party greeted Elizabeth and her accession." Others have argued that the 1570 edition, with its expanded scope, is even more "apocalyptic" in its message. At the time of his death in 1587, Foxe was working on a Latin commentary on Revelation, entitled *Eicasmi seu Meditationes in Sacram Apocalypsin*, which his son Samuel published after his death. This work reflects Foxe's most mature apocalyptic theology, but its impact upon the apocalyptic imagination was far less extensive than that of the *Acts and Monuments*. The

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79 Firth 84.
80 Firth 77. P. Olsen agrees that there is no apocalyptic framework in the 1554 and 1559 Latin works, but notes that they do nonetheless contain apocalyptic ideas: Palle J. Olsen, "Was John Foxe a Millenarian?" *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 45.4 (1994): 602.
81 Haller 124.
82 Tom Betteridge's argument is that the 1563 edition of the *Acts and Monuments* is "prophetic," the 1570 "apocalyptic," and the 1583 "monumental." Tom Betteridge, "From Prophetic to Apocalyptic: John Foxe and the Writing of History," *John Foxe and the English Reformation*, ed. David Loades (Aldershot: Scolar P, 1997) 211. According to P. Olsen, "The literary growth of *Acts and Monuments* is closely related to the development of Foxe's apocalyptic view of history.... In the first English edition, and even more so in the second, the wealth of apocalyptic superstructuring reflects Foxe's attempt to come to terms with the meaning of his subject" (602).
Acts and Monuments did more than provide an apocalyptic framework for history—its very structure enabled his readers to understand themselves as an integral part of this struggle between the two churches. Helgerson notes that

Foxe’s storytelling and the storytelling of the community to which he belongs, including their telling and retelling of biblical story, do constitute an active intervention in the apocalyptic struggle they claim only to observe.... Despite its passivism and its professions of obedience, Acts and Monuments...becomes part of the double apocalyptic story it tells. It is both a product of persecution and an instrument of divine retribution.83

Foxe both interprets the apocalypse for his readers and opens up the possibility for them to participate in it as a community. Like Augustine and Bale, Foxe presents the apocalypse as a drama—an exciting spectacle in which his readers can participate through a shared experience of interpretation. Yet Foxe, like Bale, but to a greater extent, diverges from Augustine in his willingness to make specific identifications between historical individuals and the prophecies of the Apocalypse.

Apocalypse as Drama in Christus Triumphans

The first time Foxe presented his apocalyptic framework for an audience (whether of readers or spectators) was in Christus Triumphans, a work in which his “apocalyptic view of history is worked out...in dramatic terms on the same model as...would appear in narrative form in the Acts and Monuments.”84 From a biographical point of view, it makes sense that Foxe would have been most interested in the book of Revelation after his exile, for, as Bale noted in the Image, “Of such a nature is the message of this book with the other contents thereof, that from no place is it sent more freely, opened more clearly, nor told forth more boldly, than out of exile” (254). The apocalypse is also

83 Helgerson 268.
84 Wooden 81.
predominantly concerned with persecution, so Foxe's interest in martyrs, combined with his own exile, and the fact that he was at this time living in Basel in the same house as Bale, could have only led Foxe in the direction of the Apocalypse. Thus, when he wrote *Christus Triumphans*, he called it an "apocalyptic comedy" and announced his purpose: "It was enough for me, following only the Apocalyptic history, to transfer as far as possible from the sacred writings into the theater those things which pertain primarily to ecclesiastical affairs" (Dedicatory Epistle; 209). The general structure of the play is apocalyptic, both in its interest in the End Times in general, and in its interest in the book of Revelation in particular. Although there is material mixed into this play from the Acts of the Apostles, and references made to other biblical texts, all of these components serve to support the overriding structure, which is based on Revelation, especially chapters 12-13 and 17-21.  

Because apocalyptic symbolism is so full of dramatic metaphors, Foxe's presentation of an apocalyptic subject within the dramatic medium foregrounds and literalizes the theatrical aspects of these ideas. In this play, God is the controlling force behind the human actors in this divine comedy, but the control is not limited to the scope of the play itself, for the audience is implicated in the action, which is a defining feature of apocalyptic writing. As Maier notes, apocalyptic literature "repeatedly presents humans as spectacles, actors under God's eye, whose deepest thoughts and most secret actions are visible to the divine speculator or surveillant." Thus this literature "stage[s] a divine gaze in a textual theater in which audiences encounter themselves stripped and dressed to play various roles and thus to embrace the ideals of the apocalypticist." In the book of Revelation, John of Patmos at first watches the unfolding drama of the

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85 For more on this point, see Smith's introduction, 38-39.
86 Maier, "Staging" 132-33. See Chapter 1, section IV.D: "The Apocalyptic Ambiguity."
apocalypse, but soon he becomes a participant who records and acts in this drama. The emphasis on role-playing and costuming in Foxe’s apocalyptic foregrounds the idea that everyone is playing a “role” in God’s drama, either as part of the true church, or as part of the reprobate group that attempts to subvert the true church. These villains include the deceptive vice characters such as Pseudamnus and Pornapolis, who are wolves in lambs’ clothing. When Satan insists that his followers dress in certain costumes in order to augment their deception, Foxe is clearly pointing out the dangerous nature of theatrical illusion. Like the vices in Bale’s Three Laws, these characters embody all that is dangerous about dramatization, but Foxe’s drama, like Bale’s, controls this dangerous free play and purports to use theatrical spectacle to unveil/reveal God’s cosmic drama. The literal stripping of Ecclesia allows the audience to see the scars imprinted on her body, and the re-dressing of her in the marriage garments is a powerful moment of theatrical spectacle which allows the audience members (as supposed members of the true church) to associate themselves with this final triumph.

Yet Foxe deliberately leaves this drama unfinished, for only God could bring about the concluding spectacle. Therefore, when Foxe chooses to put this material on an actual stage, he does not claim that his drama is the same as God’s at all. Instead, he presents Christus Triumphans as merely a dim reflection of what will come; however, even a dim reflection can hold a very useful educational purpose. After summarizing the action of the play in the prologue, he exclaims,

Would rather that we could see [Christ] coming from heaven in triumph in the clouds. Perhaps it will not be long before stage representations will lie neglected; then indeed we will see all with our own eyes, when God sends in actual fact what he now only promises. For now, do not be ashamed to view through a netting the images of things, which is all we play. (Prologue; 229)
In the *mean time*, Foxe does present his own drama as a tool that helps people to learn, and like Bale he presents two differing notions of drama. The opposition between Satan's sense of drama and God's manifests itself most clearly through Foxe's labeling of *Christus Triumphans* as a comedy. Foxe's play is a comedy because the final resolution is a happy one for the Christians. Several critics have referred to it as a "tragicomedy," attempting to account for the tragic elements inherent in any play about apocalyptic destruction and persecution. However, it is important to note that the tragic elements are all associated with Satan. He is able to construct a tragedy in opposition to God's comedy, but this tragedy does not successfully undermine God's plan at all. Instead, it is *part of* God's plan. He incorporates Satan's tragedy as part of the history of the church, using persecution and destruction to test His people. Thus, the tragedy eventually loses its force because it is contained within the scope of the comedy. Unlike God's history, the history of Satan and of mankind under Satan is a finite story.

**Apocalyptic and Exegesis**

The final scene of *Christus Triumphans* combines visual apocalyptic elements with the scriptural precedent for them. When Ecclesia prepares for the wedding at the end of the play, the stage direction reads:

> Here from the upper part of the theater, when the curtains open, are shown as if from heaven thrones with books placed upon them. At the same time garments are lowered in which Ecclesia is dressed and prepared for the wedding. (5.5; 363)

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87 For example, John King suggests that "The author's conviction that Princess Elizabeth's sufferings constitute a trial of religious faith contributes to the shaping of her experience along the lines of a well-crafted tragicomic romance that moves from initial adversity and danger of death to a triumphant conclusion based upon repeated interventions of divine providence" ("Fiction and Fact" 27-28).
The scene reveals a central tenet of Foxe’s apocalyptic historiography—the integral relationship between the Word and dramatic action. Although the ceremony described in this stage direction is undeniably “dramatic” in nature, it is also the fulfillment of the prophecies described in Revelation. The books on the thrones are left open to be read by Africus and Europus, who find the crucial verse from the book of Revelation written there: “I saw the new Jerusalem descending from heaven, prepared by God as a bride adorned for her husband. And to her it was granted that she be arrayed in the linen shining and pure” (5.5; 365). Foxe insists on the Scriptural origin for the history he presents on stage. Sacred history is part of a script ordained by God, and it is always the story as prescribed by the Word.

In place of Roman Catholic ceremony and icons, Foxe presents a spectacle in which the centre is the Word itself.\(^88\) The entire course of history as Foxe describes it involves one group of people that follows the Word, and one group that corrupts the Word. Christ, the Word of God, rescues Psyche, and she is then allowed to beat Satan with a book. Christ’s power after his resurrection is described by an image that combines physical and spiritual prowess: he is an athlete with garlands of Scriptures. The power of the Word of the true church is set in opposition to the power of Nomocrates’ false writ—Roman law. Pseudamnus, rather than having a different writ, operates by corrupting the Word of God, attempting to undermine it through exegetical control and by not letting the people read the Bible, like Bale’s characters Infidelity in *Three Laws* and Satan in *The Temptation*.

In the matter of the Antichrist, as with most of the allegorical apocalyptic figures in *Christus Triumphans*, Foxe repeatedly shows a concern for correct interpretation. He

\(^{88}\) A common practice at this time: see also the Holbein title page of Cranmer’s Great Bible (1539), which shows an elaborate scene, with Henry VIII at the centre, dispensing the Word to his subjects.
illustrates the dangers of the deceptive nature of Satan and his followers by showing Africus and Europus fooled by the schemes of Pseudamnus. Hierologus, who has excellent interpretive skills, shows them their error. Although the viewers of the play may find it easy to distinguish between the true and false lambs, this portion of the drama illustrates the necessity of a proper understanding of Scripture. Thus Foxe transfers the exegetical imperative to the audience, who, having access to all of the available information, must be able to interpret history in terms of Scripture, and therefore correctly to identify Ecclesia over Pornapolis, and Christ over Pseudamnus.

The audience members of Christus Triumphans are often addressed as readers. They are expected to interpret the play as they would a biblical passage. In an introduction to the play, Laurence Humphrey writes, “Reader, if you would like to see this idea, behold, Foxe’s stage presents it to your eyes” (217, my emphasis). This statement combines the act of interpretation with the visual representation of images on a stage. Foxe himself asks in the prologue, “For why is it less fitting for the eyes than for the ears to be trained on sacred objects” (Prologue; 229). Foxe believed in the educational value of theatre as a tool for spreading the Protestant message, just as Bale did. Yet there are important differences between the way that the two men applied their interpretive theories to the Apocalypse. These differences are best illustrated through a more detailed look at how they viewed the apocalyptic beast and/or the antichrist.

Naming the Antichrist

In Christus Triumphans, Foxe explicitly identifies the character Pseudamnus as the antichrist, both in the dramatis personae, and in the play itself. Hierologus’ revelation that this false lamb is indeed the antichrist is the revelation that signals the beginning of
the Reformation. Pseudamnus' counterpart is Pornapolis, who is the whore of Babylon described in Revelation 17. She seems to be the lover of both Pseudamnus and Dioctes, and her job is to confound the monarchs. She is absolutely giddy in Act 4 when she tells Pseudamnus of her success:

the people crowded all around me as if I were a god. The forum and all the streets were blocked by the mob. They stood in wonderment....they all fell down and adored me exceedingly.... Soon three kings came to meet me. I toasted them with this cup of fornication. When the wine grew warm in us....they asked me to send my servants away.... When I saw that they were serious about it, I began to be a little coy, as we courtesans usually do when we want to make our eager clients more eager. Finally, when I saw that they were on fire, I began to appear more friendly to them. At last, to be brief about it, I consented. (4.8; 327, 329)

This passage literalizes the position of the Roman Catholic church as a “whore,” but it also highlights the dangerous power that the church has over earthly monarchs. The lure of the Roman Catholic church in Foxe’s identification seems to be divided between Pseudamnus, the pope figure who is a parody of the true Lamb, and Pornapolis, who stands for the ceremonial, idolatrous, and lurid elements of the Roman Catholic church. She proclaims herself “orthodox Ecclesia,” but she is to Ecclesia as Pseudamnus is to Christ—a parody. Foxe highlights the distinction in Revelation between Jerusalem and Babylon, and the fact that she is called “Pornapolis” identifies her specifically as a heathen city—the same city to which Nomocrates goes to recover his health in the impure air.

The tactic that Satan’s followers use throughout the play to convince others that they are not the antichrist is to label the Turks as such. Ecclesia, however, knows better. She tells Europus that the Asian Mohammud is an antichrist, “but he isn’t the one. There are as many Antichrists as there are enemies of Christ. But these confessed ones are less
troublesome since we can take better precautions against them” (4.5; 319). This identification of the antichrist not so much with a historical personage as with any person who is an enemy of the true church follows Bale’s scheme in the *Image* quite closely, and it also recalls Bale’s warnings about two kinds of enemies—the visible and the invisible. However, there is another strain of ideas in *Christus Triumphans* that seems to run counter to this more abstract interpretation. When Europus asks Hierologus how he knows that Pseudamnus is *the* Antichrist, Hierologus answers, “The circumstances, the timing, his life, his doctrine, and even his office prove it” (5.1; 339). Here Hierologus is interpreting historical circumstances in light of Scripture, and coming to conclusions based on the intersections between prophecy and history. This revelation is made possible by the availability of the Scriptures to the people at large. Later, in 5.3, Anabasius explains in more detail to Pseudamnus why people have begun to reject the idea that the beast symbolizes the “Mahmmedan Turk”:

First, because scripture foretells that its power will be overshadowed, and I confess that has happened to you, not to the Turks, since it’s certain that the Turks’ interests grow brighter every day. Then again, it couldn’t be denied that the beast is to be struck with one deadly wound and that, recovering from the blow, he’ll regain his strength, and that’s too clearly true with the thrice-suffering people, who now reassert the faith which, through the effort of our Nesophilus, they formerly denied; so they take him for the second beast which the prophet also foretold.... And they say the fact proves itself: these things don’t fit the Turks at all, unless you are the Turks. (5.3; 353)

Thus, in these passages Foxe seems to reject the Balean notion that the Turk as well as the Papacy embody the antichrist, in favour of a more explicit connection with the Pope alone. Or perhaps it is that Foxe is merely making a distinction between “antichrists” in the general sense from John’s epistles and Thessalonians, and “Antichrist,” another term for the beast of Revelation. If this is the case, the device allows Foxe to continue to
divide all of history into two camps, while at the same time allowing a prominent place to
a historical personage (or office) to be identified with the most evil power at the end of
time.

Katharine Firth suggests that

in his adoption of the full Protestant apocalyptic tradition [Foxe] left Bale far
behind. Despite Bale’s fascination with the historical content he found in
prophecy, his interpretation was still largely spiritual. His reserve when faced
with the comparison of prophecy with dates and specific durations of ages was
never entirely broken down by his love of the neatly dramatic scheme.\(^{89}\)

The differences between Bale and Foxe that begin to be evident in *Christus Triumphans*
become clearer in the *Acts and Monuments*. Although Foxe had followed Bale’s
interpretation of the tying down of Satan between the ascension of Christ and the year
1000 in *Christus Triumphans* and in the 1563 *Acts and Monuments*, by the time of the
1570 edition, Foxe had altered this scheme, positing instead that Satan was not tied down
until Constantine’s reign,\(^{90}\) and therefore was not released until the fourteenth century,
which corresponds to the persecution of the Lollards. It is Foxe’s particular concern with
the martyrs that causes him to change this scheme, because he could not believe that
Satan was tied down during the persecutions of the early church. In this matter as in his
other apocalyptic ideas, Foxe began to diverge more from Bale in the *Acts and
Monuments* than he did in *Christus Triumphans*.

The differences between Bale’s and Foxe’s methods of apocalyptic exegesis can
be seen most clearly in Foxe’s further drawing out of the position of the Turk in the *Acts

\(^{89}\) Firth 90.
\(^{90}\) P. Olsen observes that “according to Foxe, [Satan] was bound ‘spiritually’ at the Passion, i.e. at the
Passion Satan lost power over the souls of men (in line with Augustine), but, he insists, Satan was not
bound as regards ‘the outward bodies of Christes poore saintes’ until the persecution of the primitive
Church ceased. The ‘binding’ and the ‘loosing’ of Satan are the turning points in the apocalyptic schema”
(608).
and Monuments from what he hinted in Christus Triumphans. He suggests that this project is a valid part of his ecclesiastical history:

If it were not that I fear to overlay this our volume with heaps of foreign histories, who have professed chiefly to treat of Acts and Monuments here done at home, I would adjoin after these popes above rehearsed, some discourse also of the Turks' story; of their rising and cruel persecution of the saints of God, to the great annoyance and peril of Christendom. (4.18)

He announces his project as an exegetical exercise which will help to enlighten the dark conceits of Daniel, Thessalonians, and especially Revelation. Foxe separates the great adversaries of the true church into three categories: the heathen beast (non-Christian emperors), the false lamb (the pope), and the false prophet (the Turk). He also identifies the number 666 emphatically with the Turks. Foxe's specific interest in the role that different nations play in the course of history can be seen as a sort of apocalyptic expansion of Augustine's synoptic treatment of "national" histories in the City of God Book 3.

The antichrists can, as Ecclesia had suggested in Christus Triumphans, prefigure one another, but Foxe, like Augustine (and unlike Bale), differentiates between general enemies of the true church and a specific Antichrist prophesied to come near the end of the world: "Although, as St. John saith, there have been, and be many Antichrists, as parts and members of the body of Antichrist, who are forerunners, yet, to speak of the head and principal Antichrist, and great enemy of Christ's church, he is to come in the latter end of the world" (4.98). The smaller antichrists can prefigure one another, and point toward the larger one; as Foxe explains,

in considering with ourselves both the testaments and churches of God, the first of the Jews, the second of the Christians, look what time the Syrian kings had to rage then in Jerusalem, the same proportion of time hath now the tyranny of the Turks
to murder the Christians; so that the one Antichrist may well represent and prefigure the other. (4.97)

Foxe’s exegetical method searches for historical examples that will bear out prophecy, and in this way he “proves” the identity of each figure from the book of Revelation.

Bale had interpreted the sea beast with seven heads and ten horns as the entire body of unbelievers, and had identified the earth beast with two horns as the general corruption of the old and new testaments by enemies of the faith. It was in discussing Gog and Magog that Bale referred to the hypocrites or invisible enemies of the church (the papacy) and the open enemies (the Turks). These more abstract interpretations do not satisfy Foxe. He is certain that the beast refers to the Turk rather than to anyone else; he is equally emphatic on the identity of the false lamb:

if we consider all the circumstances of that beast, and mark the consequence of the text, both of that which goeth before and followeth after, we must needs grant…that the description and interpretation of that false horned lamb must necessarily be applied only to the bishop of Rome, and none other; which is to be proved by six principal causes or arguments. (4.103)

Apocalyptic exegesis is a matter of finding clues in the text, attempting to unravel the mysterious equations of the Apocalypse by plugging historical numbers and events into them. Foxe’s exegetical style in the Acts and Monuments, like his historical and martyrological style, is to argue by exhaustion, hoping to pile up so much evidence that any reader must understand and believe as he does. Through his exegesis, Foxe attempts to infuse history with meaning—to account for the persecutions of the faithful and to give

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91 P. Olsen explains that “Foxe was in need of a date around AD 1300 that would mark the beginning of a second period of persecution, and would correspond to the first by the heathen emperors of Rome. He finds this in this rise of the Turks, rather than in the history of the papacy and in spite of the fact that the persecution he describes is that of opponents of the papacy and of dissenters from the Church of Rome. However, the link between the second period of persecution and Turkish history was made possible by Foxe’s belief in a dual AntiChrist, and may have been dictated in part by his identification of Gog and Magog (Rev. XX.7-9), the post-millennial enemy of the people of God, with the Turks” (608-9).
them hope for the future. In this way, Foxe became a key player in establishing an interpretation of the Apocalypse that could make sense of the place of the English people, nation, and church in the "latter and perilous days."

The Body of Believers
Like Bale, Foxe is positing a view of the two churches that, while it is certainly not identical to Augustine's model of the two cities, has basic similarities to Augustine's model that medieval adaptations did not possess. One of the similarities between Foxe and Augustine can be located in the view they share about a body of believers that is eschatologically oriented. The children of Adam and Eve are Psyche (soul) and Soma (body). These are the offspring of the parents of humans, separated because of the first sin, and this sin causes the tragic course of history within God's comedy. Neither the body nor the soul is good or bad in and of itself. Instead, Eve explains that Psyche's plight (her bondage to Satan) is caused by the apple, and Soma's plight (death) is caused by the same. The possibility of union is realized in the Incarnation of Christ, one man. As he shared his body with his followers, so they are granted renewed bodies during the final resurrection as they become part of Christ's body of believers—the ultimate gift of participation. This is the Christian doctrine (thoroughly Augustinian in its theology) that Foxe attempts to present in a drama that does not deny the body, but denies the corrupted body, and thus uses characters as ideas—vessels which can be infused with exegetical value, both positive and negative. But precisely because these characters are ideas, they remain, like Foxe's martyrs, always one step removed from corporeal existence.

92 V. Norskov Olsen notes that in Christus Triumphans there is "a threefold background... for the historical drama in which the church is placed: the Fall, the Incarnation, and the Second Advent" (66). I would argue that it is this view of sacred history which forms the basis for Foxe's centring of the body on his stage.
Because the character of Ecclesia is only a "representation," the drama that Foxe presents allows her body to be a dim reflection of the promised (for martyrs) post-resurrection body to come. The hope that Foxe expresses at the beginning of the play ("Would rather that we could see [Christ] coming from heaven in triumph in the clouds... then indeed we will see all with our own eyes, when God sends in actual fact what he now only promises" [Prologue; 229]) is turned into a true sense of expectation at the end of the play. Foxe has created an arena of history and exegesis, and his spectators have engaged in a process of reading that leads them to a sense of belonging in the community of believers, and also urges them to "be warned, be on your guard with prudence" (371). This message is presented in a theatre of exegesis and history, which engages the audience in acts of interpretation that always begin with the individual body and the individual word, but end with the body of the church, and the Word of God.

In order to construct his exegetical lessons, Foxe employs a myriad of prefaces, marginal notes, pictures, and indices which help to alleviate what Susan Felch calls the "anxiety [that] remained regarding the issue of interpretive coherence"93 despite the Protestant insistence upon the pure and unadorned word. The structure of the frontispiece, with its trumpets and grand schemes, suggestive of life, death, damnation, and heavenly bliss, shows at a glance how central the idea of the apocalypse had become to Foxe’s dialectical thinking in the Acts and Monuments; but it is his interpretation of apocalyptic elements within the Acts and Monuments that shows how Foxe “proposed a more strictly historical approach [than Bale] and announced that whenever possible he would avoid the allegorical and seek the historical.”94 In Christus Triumphans the allegorical character Ecclesia may suggest that Foxe’s identification of the true church is

94 Firth 91.
an abstract notion like Bale's. However, each character in *Christus Triumphant* can represent a living or historical individual, as well as the community of individuals of this type. Of course Ecclesia is an allegorical figure who represents the church, but her physical body on the stage suggests that she is an individual as well as a symbolic entity.

Just as Foxe insists on a more historically specific identification of the apocalyptic elements of the beast and the false prophet than Bale, so he also moves toward a more specific identification of the church of God with an institutional Protestant Church. More so than Bale, Foxe is imagining a community of believers that can be discerned and even identified. This connection between the Apocalyptic and an identifiable body of believers is what led William Lamont to talk of Foxe as a spokesman of the "godly rule" in England and to say that Foxe domesticated the apocalypse. But what does this "domestication" imply? Because he identifies the prophecies of Revelation in explicitly historical terms, he is able to assign specific roles to people living in his own day. This happens when the role of John the Baptist is replayed in the characters of Wycliffe, Luther, and others, but it also happens in the role that Foxe assigns to his monarch. Christianson notes that "By comparing Elizabeth to Constantine who bound Satan and by dating the opening of the last age of the earth to the beginning of her reign," Foxe gave later writers the tools to transform his internationalist outlook into a "more narrowly nationalistic" one.

Even when writing to Elizabeth at the conclusion of the *Acts and Monuments*, however, Foxe insists that "the elder the world waxeth, the longer it continueth, the nearer it hasteneth to its end, the more Satan rageth" (8.754). Foxe's persistent belief in an imminent apocalypse, even during the promising reign of Elizabeth, puts into

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95 Christianson 41.
96 Christianson 41.
perspective the occasional allusions to ecclesiastical reform that critics such as P. Olsen have noted in Foxe’s work. Certainly Foxe wanted to see the church reformed, but there is insufficient evidence that he believed in a millennium on earth achieved through ecclesiastical reform. Never does Foxe move away from an apocalyptic view that expects the imminent end of the world (as is evident in his last work, the Eicasmi). However, Foxe’s particular interest in England does leave open a space for a “more narrowly nationalistic” interpretation of ecclesiastical and apocalyptic history.

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98 For a discussion of this tradition of English apocalypticism and nationalism in the seventeenth century, see Hugh Trevor-Roper, Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans: Seventeenth Century Essays (London: Secker and Warburg, 1987), Ch. 5: Milton in Politics.
IV. England

"especially in the Church of England principally to be noted…"

The most consistent point of debate among Foxe critics in the last 35 years has been the question of England—what special place, if any, does Foxe assign to England, the English Church, the English nation? The catalyst for this debate was William Haller’s 1963 book, *The Elect Nation: The Meaning and Relevance of Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*. Haller argues that Foxe assigns a special place to the English nation, and that in the *Acts and Monuments* he consistently and systematically attempts to further this agenda. Haller has certainly had his supporters, but he has also been attacked by a variety of critics. His most vehement opponent is Katharine Firth, who argues that, not only is Haller’s theory of the elect nation in regard to Foxe off target, but that “no such interpretation existed either before Foxe, in Bale or elsewhere, or in Foxe’s own work, or in the work of his contemporaries or immediate successors.”

The emphasis on England in the *Acts and Monuments* is, according to Firth, merely due to his intended audience. Her main evidence for this rests upon a detailed examination of the *Eicasmi*, in which she shows that Foxe was writing this work for an international audience and therefore did not make any special reference to England at all. Patrick Collinson also agrees with Firth, noting that “In *Acts and Monuments*, Foxe’s subject was not so much England as the Church, to which he attributed a universal and mystical identity, the whole body of the elect scattered over the face of the earth.” In this case, Foxe follows Bale in viewing the “true” church as a universal body of believers—as Bale puts it, “some [of the faithful] do reigne in every nacyon” (*Three Laws* l.1332; my emphasis). However, Haller was not

99 Firth 107.
without his supporters thirty years ago, and he is not without his supporters today. Zakai corroborates Haller’s argument: “Above all, Foxe’s Acts and Monuments reflects the supreme achievement of Protestant historiography, the shaping of English history to its own ends, and the creation of a new historical consciousness among Englishmen.”

Andrew Hadfield summarizes the disagreement between Haller and Firth, but argues that Firth “has demolished very little of importance in Haller’s thesis.” Helgerson’s compromise between the two sides is helpful:

On the issue of Foxe’s apocalyptic nationalism, Haller’s critics are certainly right. Foxe does say that the church is “universal and sparsely through all countries dilated”, and he reads the Book of Revelation with reference to that universal church rather than to the particular nation of England. But he also grants England a quite extraordinary place in the universal scheme.

A look at Foxe’s attention to the English nation in relation to his use of Augustine reveals that Foxe does maintain a “universal” understanding of the church, but his concentration upon English matters in particular inevitably opened up a space for the nationalistic interpretations that have long been associated with the Acts and Monuments.

Universal or Particular History?

In many of the editions of the Acts and Monuments, the title explicitly calls it a “universal history.” For example, the beginning of the title for the 1583 edition reads, Acts and Monuments of Matters most speciall and memorable, happening in the Church, with an universall Historie of the same. The proposed universality of the Acts and Monuments is often reflected in Foxe’s interest in continental martyrs and happenings; for instance, after his discussion of Luther, he includes “A table of the names and causes of such

101 Zakai 36.
102 Hadfield 57-59.
103 Helgerson 263.
martyrs, which gave their lives for the testimonie of the gospell, in Germany, France, Spain, Italy, and other foreign countries, since Luther's time" (4.379). It is true, however, that Foxe spends much more time talking about England and English martyrs than he does about anyone else, and it is important to note that Haller's argument is not that Foxe ignores other nations, but that he assigns a special prophetical role in "the latter days" to England.

In *Christus Triumphans*, there is no mention of England. Foxe does identify himself on the title page as "John Foxe of England," but this has more to do with establishing himself as an English exile (and writer) on the continent. There are, however, a few important allusions to England in the play. One is in 5.2, when Psychephonus describes the setting through which he chases Hierologus, which is a clear reference to Oxford. On the other hand, earlier in the play, when Peter finds himself released from prison in 2.3, the scene is probably Basel. And although there are allusions to Latimer, Ridley, and Wycliffe in the play, there are also allusions to Luther and others. The most important allusion to England has to do with the character of Europus. In 4.7, Pseudamnus crowns Africus "Most Christian" and Europus "Defender of the Faith," which at this point in the play clearly identifies them with France and England respectively. Although Europus does fall under the sway of Pseudamnus, he is the first to listen to Hierologus and to understand his error, and from then until the end of the play Europus protects his mother Ecclesia. This is the closest that the play comes to a "special" role for England. However, like the character Hierologus or the places and

104 See Smith's footnote, 345.
105 See Smith's footnotes, 263.
106 In this case Hierologus represents Wycliffe, supporting the view that the Reformation began in England. See also note 48.
martyrs alluded to in the play, the identification between England and Europus is not consistent.\textsuperscript{107}

Perhaps the best way to approach the question of whether Foxe’s history in \textit{Acts and Monuments} is universal or particular is to return to the work’s status as an “ecclesiastical history” and to remember the relationship between “particular” and “universal” history in this genre. Arnaldo Momigliano explains that, in ecclesiastical history as Eusebius of Caesarea invented it, “the historian of the Church is inevitably faced with the difficulty of having continuously to relate the events of individual local churches to the \textit{corpus mysticum} of the \textit{Ecclesia universalis}.”\textsuperscript{108} But after the fall of Rome in 410, the possibility of discussing a single universal church as Eusebius had envisioned it became more difficult, especially in the west. Momigliano says,

\[\text{T}he\text{ }notion\text{ }of\text{ }the\text{ }Universal\text{ }Church\text{ }informed\text{ }the\text{ }telling\text{ }of\text{ }local\text{ }events.\text{ }Indeed\text{ }the\text{ }notion\text{ }of\text{ }a\text{ }Universal\text{ }Church\text{ }implies\text{ }a\text{ }paradox.\text{ }Being\text{ }universal,\text{ }Church\text{ }history\text{ }tended\text{ }to\text{ }embrace\text{ }all\text{ }the\text{ }events\text{ }of\text{ }mankind\text{ }and\text{ }was\text{ }therefore\text{ }permanently\text{ }in\text{ }danger\text{ }of\text{ }losing\text{ }its\text{ }distinctive\text{ }character.\textsuperscript{109}\]

This created a problem for the historians of the Middle Ages, such as Bede, who were interested in concentrating on their specific country—they needed to identify it separately without separating it from its connection to the Universal Church. The nationalist dimension of Bede’s \textit{Ecclesiastical History} was prevalent enough to be exploited by Stapleton, but in the cause of Roman Catholicism.\textsuperscript{110} The nationalist tendencies of Stapleton’s translation are not insular, however; Bede serves Stapleton as a means of asserting the Romanity of the British church, derived from the mission of Augustine of Canterbury. Thus Stapleton connects the English church to a universal (Roman) church,

\textsuperscript{107} More problematic still is the identification between Africus and France—see Bauckham 81-82.
\textsuperscript{108} Momigliano 136.
\textsuperscript{109} Momigliano 149.
\textsuperscript{110} See previous section I.B: “Tradition, Authority, and the Reformation Debates.”
providing an example of what Momigliano sees as a common tactic in the sixteenth
century: "What both Protestants and Catholics wanted to prove," argues Momigliano,
"was that they had the authority of the first centuries of the church on their side.
Consequently the ecclesiastical history that the religious controversies of the sixteenth
century demanded was a history of the Universal Church—not a history of special
churches."\textsuperscript{111} Momigliano’s hypothesis can help us to put into perspective Foxe’s
particular attention to the English nation without assuming that he is attempting to assign
a special role to England that separates it from what he believes to be the Universal
Church that “reign[s] in every nation,” including (but not exclusively) England. Thus we
may agree with Richard Bauckham, who states that Foxe

exploited Bale’s belief that the pattern of prophecy is fulfilled both universally
and in each particular nation of the world. This enabled him to focus attention on
the events of the English Reformation and the Marian reaction and present these
as part of the pattern of apocalyptic prophecy, without thereby denying the
universal scope of the prophecies.\textsuperscript{112}

This is, I would argue, the best way to understand Foxe’s view of England in relation to
the universal church—in the same way that we understand his movement throughout the
Acts and Monuments from universals to particulars.

The fact that Foxe was writing Christus Triumphans on the continent meant that
he was interested in a wider audience, and to this end he wrote the play in Latin, just as
he would write the Eicasmi at the end of his life. Yet it is evident that the particulars
toward which Foxe tended to move were those of England. His attention to his own
nation and his own church which began with an interest in Wycliffe continued to grow,

\textsuperscript{111} Momigliano 150.
\textsuperscript{112} Bauckham 82.
and when he migrated back to England, it was to these people that he most desired to speak.

The Role of England and Its Monarch

One of the most difficult problems to solve when examining the question of England as an “elect nation” is the relationship between the monarchy and the church. Helgerson agrees that Haller pushes his thesis too far, but still argues that “England’s royal identity is built into the very structure of *Acts and Monuments*. Though the book presents itself as a universal ecclesiastical history, its chronological frame is provided by the succession of England’s monarchs.”¹¹³ Yet, if we take our cue from Momigliano’s assertion about the relationship between individual and universal history in the construction of ecclesiastical history, we may be better able to understand Foxe’s view of the relationship between the monarchy and the church. Foxe, like most English Protestants of his time, was interested in the power of the English monarch over the papal title, and like Bale before him, he focused on people such as King John as an example of the king oppressed by the papacy, and Thomas Beckett as the villain papist who oppresses the king. Foxe’s examples of this abuse of papal power at the expense of the monarchy are not centred only on England, however. One of the most famous woodcuts in the *Acts and Monuments* accompanies Foxe’s story about the Emperor Henricus being made to stand outside in the cold while waiting to see the pope. Any monarch, in Foxe’s view, is ordained by God and should have more right to lead the church in his realm than the pope. The figure of Constantine is, of course, the sign of the power of the good Christian emperor; his control and authority is contrasted to the poor kings of the Middle

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¹¹³ Helgerson 260.
Ages who had to wait in the cold or who were made to kiss the pope’s feet. The degradation of the monarchs of England is a target of Foxe’s especial vehemence.

In *Christus Triumphans*, Europus’ title “Defender of the Faith” equates him specifically with King Henry. In the *Acts and Monuments* Foxe also focuses on Henry’s change from the misguided one who (like Europus) falls under the evil influence of the papacy into the powerful monarch who asserts his Christian kingdom by his own right and pledges allegiance to “orthodox Ecclesia.” Foxe had to treat Henry carefully, because he wanted to continue to portray him as a heroic Christian king; therefore, Foxe blames Henry’s advisors for any ill actions on the part of the king. Foxe not only constructs Katharine Parr as a martyr who was condemned because of the evil plots of Gardiner, but also goes so far as to suggest that the king saved her at the last moment because of his true faith: “the king’s mind was clean altered, and he detested in his heart (as afterwards he plainly showed) this tragical practice of those cruel Caiaphasas; who, nothing underst[ood] the king’s well-reformed mind and good disposition toward the queen” (5.560). Yet the tension is evident when Foxe depicts the martyrdom of Tyndale, who ends his life with the plea, “Lord ope the king of England’s eyes” (5.127). Foxe seems to be suggesting that, like Europus, any monarch can be fooled by the corruptions of the Roman Catholic church, and that therefore it is important for the monarch, as much as the common person, to read the Scriptures (as well as Protestant exegetes) in order to discriminate truth from illusion.

When Foxe dedicates the *Acts and Monuments* to Elizabeth, he is interested in pleasing and flattering her, but also in casting her in the role of the ultimate Christian monarch, who will be more like Constantine and less like her father. In the “C” which

114 The famous woodcut of King Henry suppressing the pope and using him as a footstool is a testimony to Foxe’s view of Henry.
begins the word “Constantine” in the 1563 edition and “Christ” in the later editions of the 
*Acts and Monuments*, there is a picture of Elizabeth sitting on a throne, and the pope is 
pictured underneath her feet (see Figure 6). Frances Yates argues that “The picture of 
Queen Elizabeth trampling on the Pope in the initial C is thus the climax of the whole 
book. She represents the return to the Constantinian, imperial Christianity, free from 
papal shackles, the kind of religion which Foxe regards as alone pure.” The second 
sentence here may well be true, but we should be wary of accepting the first sentence 
without some further consideration. To call the opening image the climax is to lessen the 
importance of the material within the book itself. The final story of the book is the story 
of Elizabeth’s supposed martyrdom: her suffering in the tower during the reign of her half 
sister. It seems that Foxe is constructing a framework around the character of Elizabeth 
and the promise of her kingdom. Later prefaces and materials he adds emphasize this 
point more directly, for he talks of the length of the queen’s reign of peace. Yet the very 
fact that this image of Elizabeth is contained within a C which stands for the concept of 
the universal emperor or the universal saviour puts this idea of Elizabeth’s supremacy 
into perspective. She is a *particular* manifestation of the universal idea that Foxe depicts.

It is an important point that neither Elizabeth nor anything specifically English is 
evident on the frontispiece. Foxe’s story still is the struggle between the two churches, 
and although the English church is a microcosm of this struggle, nowhere does he dare to 
suggest that the English church is entirely on one side of it. Significantly, the troubles of 
Mary’s reign involved English people against other English people. Furthermore, the

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116 Granted, the martyrs on the frontispiece can easily be associated with the Marian martyrs on whom Foxe 
spends the bulk of the latter books of the *Acts and Monuments*, but there is nothing about these martyrs that 
would make them necessarily English; they could just as easily be the continental martyrs whom Foxe also 
treats at length in his book.
evidence that Firth and Collinson gather from the *Eicasmi* is convincing proof that, even at the end of his life, Foxe did not seem interested in promoting a special role for England in the last days of the world on the apocalyptic stage.

What concerns Foxe far more than the English nation is the English people who comprise his readership. He attempts to make the *Acts and Monuments* a book for people of all stations and degrees, and to include all available information, no matter how repetitive it may seem. As Breitenberg observes, “repetition enables Foxe to heap his stories and documents on top of each other in an effort to amass an entire Protestant ‘state’ of texts in his book, from royal proclamations to village conversations.”

In this miniature state which Foxe constructs textually, everyone has his or her role to play. The sense of communal readership is emphasized throughout the *Acts and Monuments*, where Foxe creates an imagined community out of the shared textual experience of his readers. Helgerson calls Foxe’s “invisible church” a community of readers who “imagine themselves in invisible fellowship with thousands of other readers.” He adds that

Like the nation, this imagined community does not necessarily coincide with the state. Indeed, the state may frustrate its ambition to achieve a visible institutional embodiment of its own, may hunt down and persecute its members. But where the imagined community does not coincide with the state, it saps the state’s legitimacy and the legitimacy of the social hierarchy that constitutes the power structure of the state.

Thus there are difficulties with assuming that Foxe’s imagined community is the same as the English nation; in fact, there are ways in which these two ideas are not compatible. The rift caused by the tension between the textual community that the *Acts and Monuments* creates and the nationhood that it seems to form may not be so great if we

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117 Breitenberg 392.
118 Helgerson 266.
keep in mind that Foxe, like Augustine, may see a foreshadowing of the two churches/cities in earthly institutions, but understands their ultimate identity as an eschatological one.

Other-worldly Kingdoms

Foxe’s interest in Constantine and Eusebius places Elizabeth in a central role. However, there is an important difference between Eusebius and Foxe which should not be overlooked. Eusebius was like Virgil in that he was writing for a ruler whose earthly kingdom was imagined as endless; therefore, it seems perfectly natural that Eusebius’ view of the apocalypse was rather “spiritual” and not very imminent. By contrast, even during the reign of Elizabeth Foxe maintains his apocalyptic outlook, and seems certain that the English nation, too, will come to an end. Yates argues that “the politico-religious position which [Foxe] propounds derives its sanction from the traditions, Christianized it is true, of the worldly empire of Rome.” This point is certainly correct, but we should pause for a moment and ask what effect the “Christianization” of the Roman empire has upon Foxe’s model.

If Eusebius “Christianized” Rome’s imperial destiny, Augustine (we may say) “de-Romanized” the destiny of empire. After Augustine’s time, it is never again so easy for Christians in the West to talk of a worldly empire that fulfills the promises that Augustine interprets from the Bible. Augustine’s reading of the apocalypse tames it, making it possible for Christians to live eschatologically while still living in this world. They may make use of this world, and at certain times the earthly and the heavenly cities

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120 Yates, Astrea 44.
121 Augustine was so opposed to millennial philosophies precisely because they promised a time of peace in this world.
will intersect in objective. Does this not seem to be what Foxe suggests about the English nation? My argument is that, if Foxe assigns a special place to England, it is only insofar as he believes that its national objectives are intersecting with the objectives of the pilgrims of the City of God. And these pilgrims, for Foxe, are the martyrs who live and die by the Word which has become available not just in English, but in all languages.

However, there is an important difference between what Foxe may have intended the Acts and Monuments to say about England, or even what the book seems to say to us, and the sort of cultural work that it did. The fact that it does concentrate most heavily on English matters, was written in English, and was ordered to be chained to the pulpit of every church in England makes it difficult for the book, as a cultural product, to be considered anything other than distinctively English. Levy notes that Foxe’s theological views, while based on a theory of universal church history, led also to an emphasis on the history of national churches. Local autonomy was one of the legacies left by the primitive church, and it became an article of the faith in England. But this notion, taken up by Foxe, eventually came to mean that the history of England was something special.

The elect role of the English nation became an even more pressing issue when the English church came to be contested not by Roman Catholics and Protestants, but by two groups of English Protestants—Anglicans and Puritans—who developed mainly after Foxe’s time. Foxe’s work and life developed as the English Reformation did. He was born in the year that Luther was nailing his theses to the church at Wittenberg, was present in Frankfurt for the troubles among the English exiles there, and published the first edition of the Acts and Monuments the year that Bale died. And although Foxe lived

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122 The factual basis for the popular anecdote that the Acts and Monuments actually was chained to the pulpit of every parish church in England has recently come into question. See Freeman 64 n94.
123 Levy 122-23.
well into Elizabeth’s reign, his own personal contribution to English nationalism may have been largely posthumous, for he died the year before the defeat of the Spanish armada. Gordon Rupp tells us that

There is a famous story of how [Foxe] suddenly cried out at the time of the Spanish Armada in 1588, “They are gone! They are gone!” and so announced for the first time the destruction of the Armada. Unfortunately the story has difficulties, among them that in 1588 Foxe had been dead a year!¹²⁴

This apocryphal story is an excellent piece of evidence that Foxe’s own life and story, like that of the martyrs he portrays, quickly became a cultural currency for public consumption.

As a discourse that attempts to be “totalizing” in its historical scope and exhaustive presentation of information, the Acts and Monuments manages a textual inclusivity that, in the words of Breitenberg, “seems motivated by the fear of leaving any ‘open spaces’ which could be filled by contrary material.”¹²⁵ Foxe encloses the reader of the Acts and Monuments in a world of marginalia, recapitulation, iconographic representation, and narrative continuity that leaves little room for “unguided” tours through the massive network of by-ways in this book. Nonetheless, this inclusivity inevitably opens up the desire to explore uncharted territory; there are some avenues which Foxe gestures toward without fully mapping their trajectory. Just as Augustine does not fill but opens up a place for apocalyptic exegesis, so Foxe (who was fully engaged in filling and mapping the apocalyptic space) opens up, but does not fill, a place for English nationalism.

¹²⁵ Breitenberg 389.
Foxe’s denial that he wrote a work entitled the “Book of Martyrs” points to the
title which he did specify—the Acts and Monuments. The 1563 and 1583 editions of the
Acts and Monuments put “Actes and Monumentes” first in the title, and in the other
editions it comes only after the words “ecclesiastical history.” The ideas encompassed by
these two terms, in fact, are absolutely central to the structure, content, and argument of
the work. The relationship between the words “act” and “monument” parallels the
Augustinian categories of “change” and “rest.” Throughout the Acts and Monuments,
Foxe encloses the dramatic martyr stories within a larger textual apparatus. This
controlled presentation of the allegorical movement from flesh to word directs his readers
toward an understanding of unseen truths (such as the “invisible” church). He is careful
to educate his readers—to teach them how to read and how to be aware of their
interpretive acts as they do so. Foxe’s text gains authority precisely because it purports to
be comprehensive; his combination of many genres and exhaustive documentation
enhances this impression. Therefore, by emphasizing the transition between actions and
monuments, and between this world and the next, Foxe’s text speaks to a community of
readers and teaches them how to live in the mean time.

Change and Rest
The pairing of the words “act” and “monument” provides a sense of a contrast between
(or at least a combination of) motion and rest. Yet the word “act” itself already includes
both the sense of doing something and that of a record of what has already been done.
Foxe’s use of the term “act” in his title and throughout his work depends upon both senses of the word, and specifically upon the progression from action to written record.

The action in which the true Christians engage is evident on the frontispiece—it is the pilgrimage of the faithful through prayer, Bible study, and steadfast faith in God even at the moment of death. These activities all point toward a suspension of individual will in favour of acting in accordance with God’s plan. Here the sense of acting in a play is useful for Foxe’s purposes; he compares the performance of the martyrs who act in God’s drama with the “new sort of players” who began in the Middle Ages “to furnish the stage, as school-doctors, canonists, and four orders of friars” (1.xxi). This deceitful action is the opposite of the true action of God’s followers, underlining the contrasting dramas of the two churches. Yet the action of the lower portions of the frontispiece is also encased within the stability of the top panel in the same way that Foxe encases the account of a martyr’s death within a textual framework.

The action of the members of both churches happens under the surveillance of God. The top centre image in the frontispiece means not only that God is watching, but that God is controlling. Like Augustine, the Protestants want to make it very clear that everything in history and life is directed by Providence. And also like Augustine, Foxe emphasizes the action within the stable super-structure of God’s theatre. The frontispiece is full of action—people praying, reading, worshipping, blowing trumpets, and being burned at the stake—but all of the action in the lower portions of the picture serves to emphasize the stability and stasis of the top portion. Like Augustine’s *City of God*, Foxe’s frontispiece, and his book, depict a dualistic division between a group of faithful and a group of unfaithful people. More importantly, Foxe designs this idea in order to incorporate the dual nature of his own City of God. Like Augustine, he sees the good
city/church as comprised of both those who are residents in heaven, and those who are on pilgrimage on earth. This combination of change and rest is an integral part of history until its conclusion, and the citizens of the earth are still, for Foxe as well as Augustine, pilgrims who may not come to rest until after the last judgement.

When Foxe announces that "this present history contain[s] the Acts of God's holy martyrs," his usage of the term "act" recalls the "Acts of the Apostles." In this sense, the "act" is not just what the Apostles/martyrs did, but the written record of what they did. The legal aspect of Foxe's accounts also emphasizes the idea of "act" as a decree. As he includes or takes account of the Act of Supremacy, the Act of Succession, or the Act of the Six Articles, Foxe weaves these acts into a larger story about "the acts and proceedings of the whole church of Christ" (8.753). Although these uses of the word "act" privilege the written word, they are also dependent upon the "actions" which had to occur in order for there to have been events to record.

Unlike "act," the word "monument" has a much narrower range of meanings, and all of them are associated with stability. Foxe proposes to set down "the acts of God's holy martyrs and monuments of his Church" by collecting sources from "all our monastical writers and written monuments" (1.xvii). Here "act" and "monument" are virtually synonymous, referring to a written record of the past. The connotation that "monument" adds is that of a written record for the specific purpose of memorialization. Foxe explains that he "thought it not to be neglected, that so precious monuments of so many matters meet to be recorded and registered in books, should lie buried...under the darkness of oblivion" (1.xxv). Foxe wants to talk about the actions, witness, faith, and events concerning the martyrs, monarchs, and members of the two churches. But as a

126 John King notes that "The concept of texts as witnesses to faith plays upon the different senses of 'monument' as sepulchre, written document, funerary memorial" (King, "Fiction and Fact" 21). *OED* defines "monument" as "A written document, record; a legal instrument" (Foxe cited as a reference).
writer, he is interested in a textual remembering of these acts, in monumentalizing them in written form so that they become stable signifiers of imitable action. As discussed earlier, Foxe’s narrative moves persistently from the flesh to the Word, because the flesh represents a certain instability or unreliability that must be contained and controlled by the textual space created by the *Acts and Monuments*. This movement is evident in the title—the already inherently dual nature of the word “act,” when combined with the less ambiguous word “monument,” emphasizes the changing sense of “act” while also re-containing it within a stable textual space.

Similarly, Foxe also moves in his martyr narratives not just from unstable flesh to stable textual representation, but from unstable flesh to stable flesh within the space of controlled textual representation. An example of the movement from unstable to stable flesh is Foxe’s narrative account of the death of Cranmer, who intentionally thrusts his weak hand (the one that had written his recantations) into the fire before the flames reached his body (see Figure 7). Foxe remarks that when Cranmer did catch fire, “His body did so abide the burning of the flame with such constancy and steadfastness, that standing always in one place without moving his body, he seemed to move no more than the stake to which he was bound” (8.90). Cranmer combines this steadfast physical demeanor with a sign of spiritual steadfastness as well, saying “Lord receive my spirit” as his flesh burns. Cranmer’s once corrupted flesh becomes pure and stable, then is inscribed by a narrative stability that makes his story a monument that can serve as an exemplum for faithful Christians.

This stability in death is repeated incessantly throughout the *Acts and Monuments*. Hooper refuses to be tied to the stake because he puts faith in God’s ability to strengthen his spirit: “Ye have no need thus to trouble yourselves; for I doubt not but God will give
strength sufficient to abide the extremity of the fire, without bands” (6.657). Similarly, Rose Allin shows her remarkable steadfastness, as she stands still while Tyrrel holds a candle under her hand until the sinews crack, and she remains calm, even though (as she remarks later) she could have hit him on the head with the pitcher she was carrying in her other hand (8.386). Their behaviour “marks” them as true martyrs, and their pious character is re-inscribed in Foxe’s narrative and book.

Sometimes Foxe’s emphasis on the various ways that the martyrs are “marked” becomes literalized. In the preface “To the True and Faithful Congregation,” he talks about a miraculous event in 1501, when

the Lord began to show in the parts of Germany wonderful tokens, and bloody marks of his passion...which fell from heaven upon the garments and caps of men, and [f]rocks of women...By which tokens Almighty God, no doubt, pre-signified what grievous afflictions and bloody persecutions should then begin to insue upon the church for the gospel’s sake. (1.xxiv)

The literal “marking” of the martyrs by God is made known to a larger audience because Foxe memorializes this event by marking the occasion with a textual monument. Just as the bloody marks pre-figure the martyrdoms, so Foxe’s textual memorialization both post-figures (and authenticates) those martyrs, and also pre-figures the glory to come. Augustine had imagined the perfection of post-resurrection bodies by an extrapolation based on the wonders of the natural world; similarly, Foxe uses the bodies of the martyrs as well as his own textual remembrance of them to imagine the glory of heaven promised to the faithful. In both cases, the visible world becomes a medium for the imagination of the invisible world.
The Invisible Church and the Protestant Aesthetic

Critics often over-simplify Foxe’s theory of the two churches just as they do Bale’s, assuming that the true church is invisible and the false church is visible. In the preface Foxe insists that

although the right church of God be not so invisible in the world that none can see it, yet neither is it so visible again that every worldly eye may perceive it. For like is the nature of truth, so is the proper condition of the true church, that commonly none seeth it, but such only as be the members and partakers thereof.

Like truth, the true church is difficult to discern, but by no means impossible. Later, Foxe makes a more complete statement about the relationship between the visible and the invisible and the true and false churches:

And this number of Christ’s subjects is it, which we call the visible church here in earth; which visible church, having in itself a difference of two sorts of people, so is it to be divided into two parts, of which the one standeth of such as be of outward profession only, the other of such as by election inwardly are joined to Christ: the first in words and lips seem to honour Christ, and are in the visible church only, but not in the church invisible, and partake the outward sacraments of Christ, but not the inward blessing of Christ. The other are both in the visible, and also in the invisible church of Christ, which not in words only and outward profession, but also in heart do truly serve and honour Christ, partaking not only the sacraments, but also the heavenly blessings and grace of Christ. (1.88)

Here Foxe wants to make it clear that there are two sorts of people who exist together in the visible/institutional church—those who really are God’s chosen ones (members of the “invisible church”), and those who are only “outward” members of God’s church, but not true members of the “inward” church of Grace. This scheme is very like Augustine’s description of the two sorts of people who exist on earth together (and even in the institutional church together), intermingled in this saeculum.
The crucial difference between Foxe’s conception of these two churches and Augustine’s notion of the two cities, however, is that Foxe’s model (despite quotations like the one above) often seems to allow no room for “intermingling.” He may account for the deception of the papists, and show characters like Europus being led astray, but in the *Acts and Monuments*, as in the frontispiece, the two groups are always clearly divided, and seem to be so from the beginning. This view of the two cities is one that Augustine would never allow. It presumes to show the story from God’s perspective, and does not account for what Augustine sees as the difficulty of human interpretation in this world. As I noted in the “Apocalyptic Exegesis” section above, Foxe proposes a greater degree of certainty in interpretation than Bale, and certainly more than Augustine.

Perhaps Foxe’s interpretive exactitude grew out of a Protestant fear of unmediated interpretation: if people have direct access to the Scripture, as the Protestants believed they should, there was a danger that they would begin to interpret it however they wanted. Coats sees in the *Acts and Monuments* a tendency for Foxe to “spell out his reader’s approach to the text,” also using asides to the reader to “disrupt the narrative flow in order to designate it as story to be evaluated; critical commentary is called for.”

One part of the “critical commentary” is the woodcuts, and their usage as exegetical tools is what distinguishes them from medieval art forms. Granted, medieval art was also “exegetical,” but there is a tendency in Protestant art to teach not only the meaning of a passage, but to make the viewer aware of the process by which correct meaning is achieved. Huston Diehl argues at great length that Protestantism was not inherently hostile to images at all, but that in fact “The sacraments for Calvin are ‘the true picture’ and ‘the good images that God hath set afore us,’ and reformed Christians are

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127 Coats 42.
encouraged to discover God in 'such tokens and synes' and to 'turne our eyes to that countenance...that we should behold it with great heade, care and diligence.' Diehl notes that the Acts and Monuments "approves of the production of certain kind of secular images while it condemns the creation of sacred images" and argues that "Foxe defines an emerging Protestant aesthetics, one that restrains the power of the image to elicit awe and wonder by forcing the spectator to become conscious about how it signifies." The Protestant aesthetic uses visible imagery to direct the reader systematically toward the invisible (but not non-corporeal) reality of the next world. In Christus Triumphans Foxe tried to use the dramatic form for his didactic presentation of Scripture. At this time (c. 1556), he apparently found drama a safe and effective medium in which he could do this, but even in this case the drama was very much a text to be read and studied more than it was one to be acted.

Laurence Humphrey's rather paradoxical statement about Christus Triumphans—"Reader, if you would like to see this idea, behold, Foxe's stage presents it to your eyes" (217)—makes it clear that the recipients of Foxe's drama were likened to readers, who would glean a message from seeing a certain idea represented on stage, just as they would from reading the drama on a page. Yet drama is not quite drama when it is printed on a page; in order for a text to work as performance, the actors must act, and create a world of movement which cannot always be contained by the precise words of the page. Like Bale, Foxe presented a highly controlled drama. Diehl argues that the Calvinist view toward images and drama complicates the idea of the theater in the English Renaissance. By celebrating the created world as a divine theater wherein God manifests himself while simultaneously arousing fears that its beauty dazzles and blinds its fallen

128 Diehl 102.
129 Diehl 38.
spectators, early English Protestantism contributes to the formation of a new kind of theater, one that enacts Reformation culture's struggle to master and contain the seductive appeal of the visible, imagined, and created.¹³⁰

But this theatre was one that Foxe was not to create; like Bale, he abandoned his practice as a dramatist in favour or other genres. The Protestant aesthetic could achieve a more controlled representation in the woodcuts of the Acts and Monuments than in drama, which by nature resists stable signification because of the insistent presence of the actor's body on the stage. Foxe's theatre, like Augustine's, is ultimately constituted by words. A printed prose text such as the Acts and Monuments allows for an exploration of dramatistic models that is achieved not through viewing and interacting with other people, but only through reading and interacting with the text.

Furthermore, these martyrs are memorialized and pictured in iconographic representations which serve as further evidence of their stability. Unlike the dramatic medium, these pictures cannot move and shift, and thus better serve as a supplement to the didactic purpose of the Acts and Monuments. These pictures, like Foxe's text, are supposed to lead the reader from a corporeal to a spiritual significance. The graphic description of Hooper's burning is captured in one snapshot that shows his dismemberment (see Figure 4), yet elides the horror of the situation by emphasizing his physical and spiritual steadfastness—and by inscribing it in wood. Furthermore, the woodcuts throughout the Acts and Monuments provide a sense of continuity and repetition that runs parallel to Foxe's narrative continuity. Many of the woodcuts are used repeatedly, to accompany different stories, and often the details do not match the narrative, because the details do not matter—just the consistent representation and monumentalization of countless martyrs. In the woodcut that accompanies the story of

¹³⁰ Diehl 73.
the burning of Rose Allin's hand (see Figure 8), a picture hangs on the wall above Rose's head—a picture that could have been taken from anywhere in the *Acts and Monuments*. This pictorial representation links her suffering with that of other Protestants, while also foreshadowing her own imminent martyrdom. Rose's steadfastness (and the steadfastness of the martyrs in the picture, or of those on the frontispiece) is a mark of their salvation—an eternal condition of unchanging bliss which is foreshadowed by the stability and incorruptibility that their flesh is able to achieve at the moment of their death.

**Generic Hybridization and the Space of the Text**

"John Foxe never totally breaks with the concept of intercession," observes Coats, "he conceives of his book as a mediator between God and man. His book itself becomes a form of textual body—a bodying forth of its author's presence—that must be confronted and traversed before the Word is heard in its immediacy."¹³¹ Foxe's book itself fills the gap of the mean time, teaching people how to live and interpret properly, both the words of the Scripture and their lives in relation to it. Like Augustine, Foxe uses many different genres and hybridizes them in order to construct a totalizing discourse.

D.R. Woolf argues that "any attempt to analyze Foxe's book according to a single inherited formal genre, or even a set of genres, oversimplifies the work.... [I]nstead of imitating genres, Foxe's narrative strategy depends rather on *following* them, appropriating from them elements of plot, trope, and character that would resonate with his readership" (244). Thus, Woolf suggests that, rather than puzzling about the exact "genre" of the *Acts and Monuments* as a whole, we should instead understand the work as a combination of various narrative and rhetorical techniques that Foxe weaves into one

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¹³¹ Coats 38-9.
work in order to present a coherent and seamless view of Protestant history. While the *Acts and Monuments* includes elements of many genres, such as ecclesiastical history, epic, poetry, dramatistic narrative, and martyrology, Foxe uses these different forms to repeat the same message, focusing not on the differences between modes of expression, but upon the points of intersection and similitude between them. In this way, Foxe's narrative fills up the interstices between genres and viewpoints, leaving no blank spaces for free interpretation and positing his own book as a totalizing super-genre of Christian historiography.

If the *Acts and Monuments* is filled with documents, charts, and every conceivable form of information, it is also filled with a multitude of genres. Wooden notes that "Foxe's book includes a medley of literary forms, in prose and verse, ranging from sermons, tracts, and epistles to doggerel rimes, self-contained stories of romantic adventure," and also comic modes such as "[b]east fables, mock-epistles, moments of high dramatic conflict, and scenes of heart-wrenching pathos." Through a variety of viewpoints and genres, Foxe presents a landscape that enables the reader to adopt a "God's-eye" view of history, to see the whole and understand the way hundreds of case studies fit into the overarching scheme of the two churches. The charts, tables, and indices in each edition form another sense of overview—a way to guide the readers through a text that purports to be totalizing. Foxe argues by exhaustion, including everything possible in the body of his ever-growing text.

Woolf writes that

If there is a Burkean 'master-trope' underpinning the *Acts and Monuments*, it is certainly metaphor, the figure of sameness. What strikes the reader most about the many successive accounts of persecutions, trials, and martyrdoms is how little

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132 Wooden 42.
they differ from one another: it is almost literally true that if you have read one martyr’s death, you’ve read them all.\textsuperscript{133}

Each story repeats similar themes, and works the small example into the structure of the whole. Foxe allows the reader to focus on an individual story only in order to show how that story fits into the larger scheme, to return to the “god’s-eye” view that leaves no line of sight unexplored. Although the \textit{Acts and Monuments} spans centuries and nations, it collapses all distinctions into the same dialectical formula—the division between the two churches throughout all of history until the resolution promised by the Apocalypse. Generic hybridization is a bridge, a way of teaching readers about essential sameness in the midst of seeming difference.

Woolf further relates these issues to an Augustinian notion of community, in which “The Church is no human institution, confined by the human dimensions of time and space; rather, it is a spiritual body (the oxymoron is intentional) which seeks, and finds, a multitude of physical manifestations that at bottom are essentially alike.”\textsuperscript{134} Although Foxe addresses his prefaces to both the godly and ungodly readers, it is clear that the \textit{Acts and Monuments} is concerned with addressing the members of the persecuted and true church, and teaching them something about history, prophecy, and exegesis. The sense of community formed by this rhetoric of likeness can be equated with Augustine’s concept of the Heavenly City, in which all members will effectively be the same.

Generic hybridization is a way of filling the interstices and pulling seemingly different forms together in the service of the same basic message. Foxe makes it as easy for the reader to walk from letters to trial scenes to narratives as he does for the reader to

\textsuperscript{133} Woolf 258.
\textsuperscript{134} Woolf 258.
walk from the story of John Hooper to that of John Philpot or Rose Allin. Thus, the process of generic hybridization is an integral part of Foxe’s exhaustive presentation of the battle between the “persecuted church” and the “persecuting church” which leads the reader to a unified interpretation of Protestant history that is achieved not through the formal structure of a single genre, but through a combination of genres within the superstructure of the Book of Martyrs.

The totalizing discourse of the *Acts and Monuments* may create a textual community formed around the shared understanding of a script, but this community insists upon the individual reader and interpreter. Because Foxe’s historically specific exegesis allows much less room for Augustine’s notion of an intermingled history that cannot be unraveled until the End, we might ask where this important notion in Augustine’s scheme goes, especially considering the fact that in places like 1.88 (quoted above), Foxe seems to suggest that there is a degree of uncertainty and intermingling. If the textual apparatus and the iconography of the *Acts and Monuments* causes the reader to turn to “inward contemplation,” perhaps the sense of intermingling that Augustine found so central to the community of Christians is driven inward—into the individual Protestant martyr. Both Augustine and Foxe are concerned with teaching their readers how to interpret and to live in the “in-between” time, but for Augustine the project in the *City of God* is always communal. Foxe is certainly also interested in the Christian community, but his concentration on the glory of the named martyrs presumes an interpretation of their acts that Augustine suspends in order to fit the individual more easily into the community of likeness—the City of God. The two churches are presented separately and not intermingled on Foxe’s frontispiece both because Foxe presumes a closer proximity
to the End Times than Augustine, and because the impetus for interpretation is placed on
the individual reader. Thus, the frontispiece is not so much a view of the End Times as it
is the view of the difference between the two churches that Foxe’s narrative attempts to
create in a clearly delineated fashion in his readers’ minds. Foxe’s final words in the Acts
and Monuments are not addressed to Queen Elizabeth or to the community of readers, but
to the individual reader:

In the mean time, the grace of the Lord Jesus work with thee, gentle reader, in all
thy studious readings. And while thou hast space, so employ thyself to read, that
by reading thou mayest learn daily to know that which may profit thy soul, may
teach thee experience, may arm thee with patience, and instruct thee in all
spiritual knowledge more and more to thy perpetual comfort and salvation in
Christ Jesus our Lord; to whom be glory in secula seculorum, Amen.

(8.754, my emphasis)
PART THREE

Shakespeare
In 1610, the same year that the first English edition of the *City of God* was printed, The Stationers’ Company produced a major edition of the *Acts and Monuments*, with material added from the years since Foxe’s death. The next year would see a reprint of the works of John Jewel, John Speed’s atlas (entitled *The Theater of the Empire of Greate Britaine*) and, of course, the King James Bible. The Jacobean period was characterized by an interest in the English nation, apocalypticism, and antiquity—subjects which we have been tracing in the works of Bale and Foxe.

Avihu Zakai argues that “The nationalization of the Book of Revelation reached its peak with Foxe,”¹ but given Foxe’s ambiguity on this subject and his interest in a universal church, this is a difficult claim to sustain. It would be more appropriate to suggest that the nationalization of the book of Revelation reached its peak when King James himself wrote a commentary on the Apocalypse. James was interested in the prophecies of Revelation, for he found in this book a model for England’s (and his own) special role in Providential history. However, his interest in the apocalypse was not in the same vein as much of the anti-papal polemic that had preceded him. Although he agreed that the pope had no right to interfere with earthly rulers, James attempted a sort of truce with the Roman Catholic Church, while also pursuing an interest in defining himself and Britain in terms of the ancient Trojan/Roman ancestry. In looking back to Rome and to the Scriptures to define his own place in history, James was grappling with

¹ Zakai 55.
many of the issues that had also concerned Bale and Foxe—the role of Rome, of the
monarch, and of the nation on the apocalyptic stage.

During this same period (c.1610), Shakespeare wrote *Cymbeline*—a play in which
these issues are central. With its combination of Roman and British history, its situation
during the Augustan/Incarnational era, and its synthesis of tragic and comic elements in a
world that moves through discord and division to an arena of revelation and resolution,
*Cymbeline* serves as a fitting conclusion to this study of the drama of the two cities in the
English Renaissance. Two plays that were written just a few years earlier than
*Cymbeline*—*King Lear* (c.1605) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (c. 1606-7)—are important
predecessors. In *King Lear*, the combined themes of British nationalism and
apocalypticism result in a tragedy, but this same combination will be turned into tragi­
comedy in *Cymbeline*. The interest that Shakespeare shows in the Roman empire,
especially in Augustus, is also played out as a tragedy in *Antony and Cleopatra* before it
becomes an integral part of *Cymbeline*’s comic structure. The radical dualism and
apocalyptic symbolism that critics have noticed in these plays can be understood more
completely when viewed in light of Augustine’s model of the two cities as it was
understood in the English Renaissance. All three of these plays explore the idea
exemplified on Foxe’s frontispiece: two radically opposed communities that are
controlled/contained by a single controlling force. Furthermore, the generation of theatre
in connection with themes of history, apocalypticism, and interpretation serves, as it does
in Augustine, Bale, and Foxe, a community-building function.

This chapter first traces some of the connections between Shakespeare and the
Christian writers we have discussed so far, then shows how three of his Jacobean plays
adopt issues related to the two-cities model and re-work them in the profoundly physical
environment of the playhouse. In *King Lear*, Shakespeare takes up the subject of British history and creates apocalyptic tragedy out of a symbolic (and literal) stripping on this national stage. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare stages the interplay between change and rest, while presenting (and subverting) a series of dualisms, showing the power of drama to work in the interstices between action and monumentalization. Because *Cymbeline* is closer in form to a non-dramatic genre (romance), it has more in common with the controlled dramatic works of the Reformers than his tragedies do. Despite this apparent similarity, however, it is evident that this theatre of the body exists for its own sake, and it therefore questions all authoritative symbols—including the book.
I. Shakespeare and the Two Cities/Churches

Shakespeare’s secular drama necessarily creates a different kind of community than the works of the Christian writers discussed earlier in this thesis. Although some critics regard Shakespeare as a zealous reformer, some as a recusant Catholic, and some as an atheist, there is no evidence that his audience was receiving any particular religious message. Yet whatever Shakespeare’s own religious views may have been, it is clear that he was alert to the religious controversies of his day, and there are a variety of ways in which reformed issues made their way into his plays, infusing them with metaphors, themes, and language that are unmistakably indebted to the Christian tradition. Augustine’s model of the two cities, with its accompanying tropes, its construction of history and exegesis, and its concern with the dramatic, is one example of a Christian construction that was replayed on the Shakespearean stage.

The way in which these ideas became part of the cultural poetics of England involves a complex genealogy. The most direct connection between Shakespeare and the writers discussed earlier in this thesis lies in the work of Foxe, and this chapter’s primary focus is Shakespeare’s adoption and modification of Foxe’s notion of the two churches. However, it is also important to note that there are possible connections between Shakespeare and the Protestant dramatic tradition as exemplified by Bale, as well as between Shakespeare and the theological heritage of Augustine.
Shakespeare's Augustinian Dimension

Despite the difficulty of proving their hypotheses, a fair number of scholars have suggested that Shakespeare read or knew Augustine in some form, and that Christian elements in his plays owe a direct debt to Augustinian theology. Roy Battenhouse, for example, has worked to elucidate "Shakespeare's Christian Dimension," anthologizing critics who share his view that Shakespeare was presenting a Christian doctrine in his plays.

In Book 1 of the City of God, Augustine discusses the famous story of Lucretia in order to compare her unfavourably with the Christian women who were raped during the sack of Rome; these Christian women, unlike Lucretia, understood that the rape was not their fault—therefore, they found no reason to commit the crime of self-slaughter. Augustine questions Lucretia's pride in a subversive reading of this Roman legend, and Battenhouse believes that Shakespeare was doing the same thing in The Rape of Lucrece. Although most scholars agree that Augustine's version of this story could have come to Shakespeare via Chaucer's Legend of Good Women, Battenhouse believes that Shakespeare read the City of God, and even goes so far as to suggest that "[Augustine's] writings, together with the Bible's, were probably Shakespeare's chief guides, both in understanding the nature of evil and in imaging its historical logic for the catharsis and enlightenment of a latter-day Christendom."^2 However, there is no evidence of such a close connection; if Augustinian ideas are evident in Shakespeare's plays, it is certainly not necessary for the playwright to have been reading Augustine directly to be aware of these. Battenhouse's insistence upon direct biblical or Augustinian influence in

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Shakespeare's work obscures the complexities involved in post-Reformation culture and its debt to primitive Christianity.

A more temperate view of the relationship between Augustine and Shakespeare is offered by James Walter, who connects Augustinian allegory to the symbolism of *The Tempest*. Walter also believes that "Shakespeare must have been familiar with at least some of Augustine's works," but rather than looking for Augustinian moral values in Shakespeare's plays, Walter focuses his discussion on Shakespeare's attention to the inadequacy of language as a result of the Fall, the uncertainty of interpretation, and the function of poetry within this dynamic. *The Tempest*, according to Walter, imitates Augustine's Genesis commentary in the *Confessions* by showing providential control in the character of Prospero, who can mediate between words and images, and who directs his audience in a sort of interpretive lesson. Walter's analysis can help us to understand how the community of interpreters that is formed through a shared experience of theatre is not unlike the textual community formed by the model of the two cities.

To say that Shakespeare was aware of and even attuned to the idea of the two cities/churches is not to say that he read Augustine's works. Augustinian theology, or a version thereof, was an important component of the Reformation. The influence of Augustine can be detected in a variety of sixteenth-century English writings, including Cranmer's prayer book, popular sermons, iconography, and Protestant drama.

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4 See the introduction to Part Two, B: "The Continental Reformation: In Search of Authority."
Protestant Drama to Secular Drama

Attempts to make links between Elizabethan or Jacobean popular theatre and the earlier Christian dramatic tradition have been made repeatedly. However, conjectures regarding the connection between Bale and Shakespeare have generally been limited to the contention that Bale’s *King Johan* was a “source” for Shakespeare’s *King John* (though this link is very tenuous). I would suggest that, rather than looking for cases of Bale’s direct influence on Shakespeare, the best way to link these traditions is by looking at similarities in dramatic practice—specifically, to note Shakespeare’s adoption of the genre of the history play, the subject matter of the apocalypse, and the employment of books and interpretation as insistent tropes in his plays.

Whether or not Shakespeare saw or read *King Johan*, it is clear that Bale created a kind of drama which others developed further, and which Shakespeare made famous. An interest in the relationship between the nation and the church was part and parcel of the emergence of Renaissance English writing. In the words of Helgerson,

> If one event more than any other determined the extraordinary sixteenth-century outpouring of writing about England—poetic, theatrical, legal, chorographical, historical, antiquarian, mercantile, or whatever—it was the separation of the English church from the church of Rome. And if one issue kept England unsettled both in the sixteenth century and the century to follow, it was the question of church government.

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5 Most notably, see David Bevington, *From “Mankind” to Marlowe* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1962). John Arden, by his own admission, was attempting to find some sort of connection between the dramatic tradition represented by Bale and that of Shakespeare in his novel *Books of Bale*. As Arden well knew, making the dark lady of Shakespeare’s sonnets Bale’s biological granddaughter was a very large leap, but it does point to the difficulties inherent in connecting these traditions. Arden explains in the author’s note: “It is perhaps a little strong to make Bale’s grand-daughter grow up to be a famous mystery-woman of literature. My excuse for this melodrama is that I needed to create some human link between Bale’s theatre and that of the more celebrated Elizabethans” (ix).

6 Helgerson 251.
The political and historical concerns of Shakespeare's plays, and his insistent
representation of the English nation at various points in time and from various points of
view, make it evident that he was working with an idea of his country that had been
created by the religious conflicts of the sixteenth century.

Bale's dramatistic picture of the two churches was dependent upon his conception
of apocalyptic history; the apocalyptic imagination he emphasized continued to thrive in
England in various forms, including (and even especially) in literature. Shakespeare's
plays follow this tradition through their preoccupation with apocalyptic imagery and the
end of the world. This is most evident in Shakespeare's tragedies, but eschatology is also
an integral part of his last plays. Like Bale and Foxe, Shakespeare uses the interplay
between bodies and words in order to emphasize the themes of the apocalypse.
Ultimately, however, Shakespeare de-eschatologizes apocalyptic, interpreting the
apocalypse as a secular phenomenon, connected with the state.

Shakespeare's plays are fraught with the interpretive anxiety that was a by-
product of the Reformation concern for books, interpretation, and controlled dramatic
representation. The availability of books made possible by the Protestant imperative for
the public to read, and by the technology of the printing press, was accompanied by
anxiety about interpretation. Books, letters, and writing are everywhere in Shakespeare's
plays—from Lavinia who writes the names of her assailants in the dirt, to Hamlet who
enters "reading on a book," to Imogen who turns down a leaf of Ovid before going to
bed. Interpretive anxiety is a natural by-product of this preoccupation with books and

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8 Curtius, Chapter 16 (302-47) discusses "The Book as Symbol." See especially pages 332-40, which
provide several examples of Shakespeare's use of book metaphors. Curtius concludes that "Shakespeare's
imagery of the book...is the emanation of a prodigal vitality which fertilizes the brain no less than the
heart. His relation to the world of the book is wholly different from that of the Middle Ages as well as
from Dante's.... From the rhetorical poetic style of his period he takes the imagery of the book and raises it
individual readers; in the absence of institutional control, interpretation may become seriously misguided. Where proper interpretation may be a matter of life or death (which it often is in Shakespeare's plays), not to mention eternal salvation or damnation, anxiety is an emotion that is ripe for stage representation. Bale's depiction of the character Infidelity shows that he understood quite well the relationship between theatrical show and false interpretation. Although the function of the commercial drama fifty years later is decidedly different, Shakespeare's plays show an acute awareness of the problem of certain interpretation and of the difficulty involved in using a dramatic form to explore this issue. But whereas Bale and Foxe moved away from the dramatic medium because of the ambiguity associated with it, Shakespeare embraced this ambiguity and made it a central feature of his art.

Shakespeare and Foxe

The connections between Shakespeare and Foxe are much more specific than those between Augustine and Shakespeare or Bale and Shakespeare. At the end of 2 Henry IV, Shakespeare strives to disassociate his character Falstaff from the Lollard martyr Sir John Oldcastle. The epilogue assures us that in the next play "Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already 'a be kill'd with your hard opinions; for Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man" (Epilogue 30-32). As critics have long recognized, this retraction is a response to widespread criticism of Shakespeare's denigration of Oldcastle, whose popularity as a proto-Protestant martyr owed everything to the influence of Bale and

to the level of the many-faceted play of ideas with which he brilliantly outshines his contemporaries. His 'life-relation' to the book is that of aesthetic enjoyment" (340).

9 All quotations from Shakespeare's plays, unless otherwise noted, are from The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

10 One of the responses to Shakespeare was a play honouring Oldcastle, written by Drayton, Munday, Wilson, and Hathaway, entitled The True and Honorable History of the Life of Sir John Oldcastle.
Foxe. Helgerson suggests that "If [Shakespeare] was not retelling Oldcastle's story, if he was not renewing for the stage Foxe's celebration of this fifteenth-century hero of the faith—and clearly he was not—he was then mocking both the story and the use to which it had been put."¹¹

In addition to the case of Shakespeare's use (or abuse) of Foxe's Oldcastle story, there are other instances of Foxe's direct influence on Shakespeare. The playwright probably used the *Acts and Monuments* as source material for *2 Henry VI*, *King John*, and especially *Henry VIII*. Other critics in addition to Helgerson have noted Shakespeare's use of Foxe, and have made some conjectures about general connections as well as specific ones. For instance, Shakespeare's portrayal of violence and martyrdom (in plays such as *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard II*, and *King John*) can be linked to Foxe's popularization of Protestant martyrs. "Throughout his career," observes Daryl Palmer, "Shakespeare allowed himself the occasional martyrrological flourish.... Although [these instances] hardly constitute an engagement of Foxe's notions of religious commitment, they do add up to a theatrical version of how English culture explains its own violence to itself."¹² Most critics recognize that, wherever Shakespeare seems to be working with issues that were made commonplace by the Reformation, they undergo an alteration and no longer hold the same moral certitude that Bale or Foxe would have given them. In the words of Palmer, Foxe's ideas "engender violence and offer no salvation" in Shakespeare's plays; instead, they "resonate with dissimulation and despair."¹³

¹¹ Helgerson 249. Helgerson locates Shakespeare's "rhetorical debunking" of this story in a concern for the impact of popular culture—the culture of commoners that Foxe had so lauded but that is treated much more harshly in Shakespeare's plays. "The popular, as Shakespeare represents it," argues Helgerson, "is not only implicated in the theater's attempt to elevate and purge itself, it is also deeply entangled in the Elizabethan movement for religious reform" (249).


¹³ Palmer 96.
In order to explore the relationship between Elizabethan and Jacobean popular theatre and the Reformation, Huston Diehl turns to Foxe as her major point of reference. Diehl argues that, because of its undisputed impact upon English culture, the *Acts and Monuments* can be seen as a book with a substantial influence upon the popular imagination:

Written in the vernacular and incorporated into the popular culture of early modern England, [the *Acts and Monuments*] appealed to the same broad spectrum of people as the drama of the commercial London stage. Like the drama, too, it helped to forge a sense of national identity among a diverse people. ... Foxe's history of the Reformation [is] a narrative literature that, through repeated readings and tellings, helped to shape the English people's understanding not only of the Reformation but of the world they inhabited as well.¹⁴

The dramatistic elements of the *Acts and Monuments* are of special import to Diehl, who is "particularly interested in the way Foxe constructs the history of the Reformation as a riveting and dynamic drama." She observes that "Foxe champions another kind of theater, substituting the theatrics of martyrdom for traditional pomp and pageantry."¹⁵ However, ultimately Diehl's discussion of the dramatistic dimension of Foxe is limited, mainly because it does not take note of Foxe's own writing of an "apocalyptic comedy" or of the larger dramatic tradition in which he was working.

After discussing some of the central issues in the *Acts and Monuments*, Diehl examines several plays in order to show how Renaissance dramatists "rehearse [Foxe's] plots of demystification, appropriate his metaphors of stranger and whore, rehearse the eucharistic controversy he explores, and grapple with the questions he raises about the nature and function of their art."¹⁶ Diehl's use of words such as "rehearses," "explores,"

¹⁴ Diehl 23.
¹⁵ Diehl 24.
¹⁶ Diehl 39.
and "enacts" highlights an important point: Shakespeare may be dealing with Reformation issues, but in his re-presentation of these themes, there is certainly also an alteration. He seems to be more interested in the aesthetic potential of these ideas—in the way that they can be used to construct popular drama for a public audience—than in arranging them into a coherent philosophy/doctrine.

The appropriation of various forms of discourse not for their own sake, but for the sake of a literary work, is what Bakhtin explores under the rubric of "heteroglossia." The formal organization of social discourses that we see in Shakespeare's plays carries with it an implicit critique of those discourses. In the words of Paul Yachnin, these languages "cut across each other in illuminating ways." This is the crucial difference between Shakespeare's writings and those of Augustine, Bale, and Foxe: the use of various (and competing) discourses, with no attempt to contain them within a single "totalizing discourse." More specifically, when Shakespeare appropriates the language of the Reformers for his own secular art work, this language undergoes a crucial shift in its movement form one field of discourse (religious) into another (artistic).

Stephen Greenblatt has observed that the drama of Shakespeare often uses religious themes and concepts while "evacuating" them of their religious significance. Greenblatt develops the concept of the "circulation of social energy" to theorize the way in which "collective beliefs and experience were shaped, moved from one medium to another, concentrated in manageable aesthetic form, offered for consumption." This process is especially relevant to the theatre because "Through its representational means, each play carries charges of social energy onto the stage, the stage in its turn revises that

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19 Greenblatt 5.
energy and returns it to the audience." Greenblatt’s interest in the way that Shakespeare’s theatre “evacuates” religious symbolism is particularly germane to a line of argumentation that attempts to see how his secular drama can be connected to the religious imagination of his time.

The role of the audience in these aesthetic transactions bears an important similarity to the textual, interpretive, or imagined communities we have discussed thus far. The work of Huston Diehl helps to elucidate the connection between the religious language which Shakespeare’s plays appropriate and the role of the community of readers/observers. Diehl explores the ways in which Protestant ideas about the Eucharist, or concerns with idolatry, found their way onto the Renaissance secular stage. She sometimes sees these dramatists as “rehearsing” various religious controversies—a point of view that allows one to see the differences between the doctrinal formulations of Foxe and the theatrical representation of Renaissance dramatists. However, at other times Diehl goes so far as to suggest that these dramatists were themselves creating a “reformed” drama that adopted and incorporated Protestant aesthetics into their own art. Unlike Diehl, I would not suggest that the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries can be seen as a “reformed” drama, but I would agree that these dramatists are working with various cultural materials and ideas, including (and even at times especially) those fostered by Reformation writers such as Bale and Foxe. Anthony Dawson, countering Diehl’s more tendentious thesis, suggests that “the theatre folded in Protestant suspicion and opposition as a crucial feature of the cultural meanings with which it had to work.”

An idea, indeed the key idea, in Protestant concerns with “opposition” is the opposition between the true and the false churches. It seems reasonable to suggest, then,

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20 Greenblatt 14.
that one of the issues Shakespeare explored was the English Reformation idea of the two churches. The next three sections of this chapter discuss how Shakespeare's presentation of interpretive cruxes, apocalyptic models, and nationalist issues can be connected in part to the Augustinian legacy of the two cities.

Whether or not Shakespeare read Augustine is not my concern; rather, I am interested in the ways in which the literary expression of the idea of the two cities as modified by Bale and Foxe found its way onto Shakespeare's secular stage. Shakespeare has a way of absorbing current cultural ideas and transforming them into a form that is suitable for theatre. The idea of drama, which is such an important part of the model of the two cities, becomes literalized in Shakespeare's theatre. In this theatre, although words hold a central place, they are combined with an insistent interest in the body on stage. Shakespeare's plays repeatedly underline the importance of the body in two ways: first, by drawing attention to the bodies of the characters (showing them stripped, in pain, or "marked"); secondly, by directing attention to the troubled place of the actors' bodies themselves (using meta-theatrical moments to emphasize the rift between character and actor).

The mimesis of Shakespeare's theatre is always dependent upon the versatility of the medium itself, and of the protean bodies upon the stage. For this reason, his plays consistently resist doctrinal statement. Whereas for Augustine and the Reformers the secular imagination was a space that could be filled by writing in the interstices between the Incarnation and the Second Coming (a way of bridging the gap between life in this world and the next), for Shakespeare it became an arena for the presentation of a theatre of the body.
II. *King Lear*: An Image of National Apocalypse

Following the work of Bale and Foxe, who helped to create English apocalypticism and to prepare the way for English nationalism, many writers explored these themes in tandem; such a conjunction is evident in *King Lear*. This play brings us to the edge of apocalypse—the “promised end” or “image of that horror”—in a decidedly British setting. If we situate Shakespeare’s dramatic exploration of the nation and apocalypticism within a post-Reformation context that is attuned to Bale and Foxe’s use of these themes, we are in a better position to discern what Shakespeare appropriates from this tradition, and what he changes. If we look at Lear’s often-noted dualisms, apocalyptic elements, and concerns with the nation through the lens of Augustine’s model of the two cities, it becomes apparent that the play’s interest in internal division and discord parallels the Protestant tendency to drive the intermingled aspects of Augustine’s model inward—to the cares of the state, the individual, and the place of both in history.

The Pilgrimage of the Community

As critics have noted, there is an obvious division of characters in *Lear* into two camps, with the struggle between these groups as an embodiment of the struggle between good and evil. Each group forms a community—Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, Edmund, and Oswald as the persecutors who stay inside, versus Lear, Gloucester, Edgar, Kent, and the Fool as the persecuted who wander in the wilderness and to Dover where they join Cordelia. Joseph Wittreich argues that

The dialectics of Shakespeare’s play involving a youthful and wise fool and an old and foolish king, an even distribution of good and wicked characters (the
latter divesting their fathers of their belongings), the annihilation of the evil and survival of the good, even the dialectical relationship of the play with its sources, can be accounted for by the premises and concerns set forth in the Book of Proverbs.\textsuperscript{22}

But equating basic themes like the division between two communities and the conflict between good and evil exclusively with Proverbs narrows the scope of Shakespeare's dramaturgy, and it also over-simplifies the moral world of the play. Certainly there is a tendency toward a polarization of these two communities, but after this polarity is set up, it is also questioned. Indeed, the division between these two communities is not as rigid as it could be, and many directors\textsuperscript{23} and critics of the play have found ways to empathize with Goneril and Regan, or have highlighted negative aspects of Edgar and Kent. Cordelia can be seen as haughty, Goneril and Regan can seem justified in their protests against Lear's 100-knight entourage, and Edgar's role as a guide for his father's redemptive journey is highly problematic.

The blurring of the lines between good and evil does not make the dualism less like Augustine's, but closer to it, because of Augustine's emphasis on intermingling and uncertainty in determining (in this \textit{saeculum}) who belongs to which city. Thus Shakespeare seems to make clearly demarcated lines between the community of good and the community of evil (a tactic that Foxe often uses) only to question those lines and to focus on the intermingled aspect of this model. Like Augustine, but unlike Foxe, Shakespeare asserts the impossibility of "knowing" in this world—not for theological purposes, as Augustine did, but instead for aesthetic purposes. Just as Augustine finds a productive arena for his own literary imagination in the interplay between conditions of

\textsuperscript{22} Joseph Wittreich, "Image of that Horror": History, Prophecy, and Apocalypse in King Lear (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1984) 118.

\textsuperscript{23} Some productions of particular note that blur this neat division between characters are those of Peter Brook (Stratford, 1962), Allen Fletcher (Stratford, Connecticut 1963), and Michael Elliot (1983 television version starring Sir Laurence Olivier).
pilgrimage and citizenship, so Shakespeare creates out of this tension between stable meaning (the neatly constructed dualisms) and dramatic performance (the frustration of these categories) a generative realm for dramatic art.

A further similarity between the structure of Lear and the model of the two cities is the emphasis on pilgrimage; both Lear and Gloucester go on a pilgrimage in the wilderness and become martyr figures. Joseph Wittreich argues that the play’s martyrological content is particularly important because it was performed on St. Stephen’s Night, and that its reference to this saint “advances the notion, developed by John Foxe, that persecutions and martyrdoms are but the harbingers of notable conversions.” When he is bound to the chair before being blinded, Gloucester says, “I am tied to th’stake, and I must stand the course” (3.7.54). This statement recalls Foxe’s depiction of the steadfast faith of the martyrs, who are as motionless as the stake to which they are tied even as the flames encompass their bodies. As Diehl says, for Foxe martyrdom “is a rhetorical act; it requires witnesses; it must be seen.” This same imperative to witness is apparent in Lear because Gloucester, Lear, and Cordelia resemble martyrs in this play which repeatedly directs its audience to “see.” Yet the bitter irony of this echo of Foxe in Shakespeare’s play is that, unlike the martyrs, Gloucester is not suffering for any great cause. He is guiltless, certainly, since his “crime” is helping Lear, but he cannot be certain of an afterlife—in this pre-Christian world, he is denied even the possibility of redemption. Because Shakespeare’s audience is required to witness, but without the ethical implications of Foxe’s martyrology, its members are forced to question and analyze their own participation.

24 Wittreich, History, Prophecy, and Apocalypse 114.
25 Although the idea of being “tied to the stake” may refer to the practice of bear-baiting, it also seems to recall the numerous depictions of Foxe’s martyrs, especially because of the particular emphasis he places on how they were tied to the stake when they were burned.
26 Diehl 190.
Although Gloucester's pilgrimage is surely part of the play's Christian symbolism, echoing ideas in the *City of God* as well as the Protestant interest in martyrdom, these themes are persistently problematized. John Cunningham suggests that "the journey of Lear and Gloucester away from the court, into the storm, and out of it leaves them morally and spiritually reborn." The idea of an individual spiritual journey that parallels the journey of the Christian community is a notion that the Protestants adopted from Augustine because it echoed their emphasis on individual spiritual development through the reading of the Word. But even if the journeys in *Lear* do resonate with Christian symbolism, the play gives little or no evidence that the characters actually *are* reborn. Edgar describes his journey with his father as a "pilgrimage," but the Christian symbolism is made uneasy by Gloucester's own doubt concerning his goal, his attempted suicide, and his basic inability to "look up" (4.6.59) as Edgar directs him. The last words we hear from Gloucester are "and that's true, too" (5.2.11)—hardly a convincing sign of conversion. Furthermore, Edgar's description of Gloucester's death does not hold any suggestion of redemptive language; instead, Edgar acknowledges that he had committed a "fault" by keeping his identity from his father for so long.

Similarly, although Lear's pilgrimage has spiritual qualities, he is more like the mad Old Testament king Nebuchadnezzar than a Christian pilgrim. Dover is not heaven, and although Lear wakes believing that Cordelia is "a soul in bliss," this moment of redemption within the play is short-lived, and insufficient in light of the cruelty still to come. Lear's descent into madness and his inability fully to comprehend his situation even when he recovers suggest that this redemption is incomplete (or perhaps that

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28 The literary form of the individual Christian journey would reach its culmination at the end of the seventeenth century with Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.
29 Only in the Folio. The Quarto reads "Father."
"redemption" is the wrong metaphor in the world of this play). Critics have debated whether Lear dies in agony, believing that Cordelia is dead, or in ecstasy, believing that she still lives. The multiple parallels between Lear’s story and Gloucester’s, however, suggest that Lear, too, dies "’Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief" (5.3.199).

The fallen world of Lear, like the fallen world of Augustine, is marked not just by discord and death, but by interpretive uncertainty. The inability of the characters to see and know and understand properly is associated directly, as it is in Augustine, with a fallen condition that causes right understanding to be locked in the darkness of interpretive mystery. Bale and Foxe had struggled to systematize interpretation, to teach their readers how to progress in an orderly (and orthodox) fashion from the literal to the spiritual significance, from the seen to the unseen. Yet, time and again in Lear, Shakespeare highlights the impossibility of certain interpretation, frustrating the relationship between the visible and the invisible. In fact, the main action and tragedy of Lear rests upon the discrepancy between what is visible and what is not. By forging letters and floating innuendoes, Edmund can trick his father into believing that Edgar is plotting against him as easily as Goneril and Regan’s speeches can convince Lear that they love him more than Cordelia does. Diehl notes that Jacobean plays do not so much teach their audiences how to interpret as arouse anxiety about any act of interpretation. Visible evidence in them is unreliable and easily manipulated by malicious men and cunning women.... The act of interpreting is both critical and potentially tragic, for any reliance on sight as a basis of knowledge results in uncertainty and, often, disastrous errors.³⁰

Lear is a prime example, for in this play, interpretation is a matter of life and death. Identity begins to disappear in the midst of disguises and deceptions as Shakespeare turns

³⁰ Diehl 144.
interpretive uncertainty into a subject of tragedy and creates a world of shadows and doubts which threatens the moral certitude that the Reformers worked so hard to create. The tragic consequence of interpretive error is not a theme peculiar to this Shakespearean play; indeed, it is the main subject of Othello. However, the domestic tragedy of Othello becomes a national tragedy in Lear, where the interpretive mistakes in family politics have a direct and tragic bearing upon the politics of the nation.

Inwardness and Absence

The emblematic map at the beginning of Lear stands for the imminent division of the kingdom. "The map claims to signify Britain as absolutely as does the name 'Britain,'" observes James R. Siemon, "and Lear would know the map the way a god would see Britain—as subject viewing object." 31 Lear's "god's-eye" view at the beginning of the play presumes that his country can still be unified, despite the division of it among his children. This division is represented on the map by innocent-looking lines that do not seem to threaten the unity of the country/map itself. Yet the entire action of the play from that point forward proves the opposite—it shows that division cannot be comfortably contained within a unified principle. In questioning this premise, Shakespeare's play questions the very foundations of the model of the two cities, in which a radical dualism is contained within a single providential history.

Although this theme can be seen to operate in the larger scope of the play (and on the cosmic scale) it is more often evident within individual characters. Like the Reformers, Shakespeare is concerned not only with the physical opposition between two forces, but also with the division and discord that is inside an individual. The most

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painful divisions in the play are not between Lear and his daughters or between Gloucester and his sons, but within each man’s mind as he walks the line between sanity and madness, hope and despair. Cordelia typifies these extremes of emotions when she reads the letter about her father’s plight. A gentleman describes her reaction as “Sunshine and rain at once; her smiles and tears / Were like a better way” (4.3.16-18). She contains these contrary emotions within herself, as if she were a microcosm of the struggle between extremes in the play. But most often in Lear, the extremes of passion cannot be adequately contained; like Cordelia herself, this delicate balance proves too fragile. Lear’s mind cracks, creating madness, and he dies in between two violent extremes—believing in Cordelia’s life and mourning her death. Edgar sadly reports that his father died “Twixt two extremes of passion” which caused his heart to “Burst smilingly” (5.3.199). Here Shakespeare seems to turn Augustine’s careful model inside-out, to show that one thing cannot contain opposite extremes without resulting in an irreparable tragedy.

As if enacting Augustine’s idea of evil as absence, the play’s tragedy is consistently associated with darkness and emptiness. The Fool points to this absence—to the “O without a figure,” to the nothingness in the middle of Lear’s plight. The Fool calls Lear “nothing” just after Lear has explained to Cordelia that “Nothing can be made from nothing” in response to her own word, “nothing.” Similarly, Edgar falls into a situation where he must denounce his own identity: “Edgar I nothing am” (2.3.21). The toll of the word “nothing” pervades the play and threatens to overtake it. Jan Kott sees this threat of nothingness from an existential perspective, but it is not necessary to assume that Shakespeare’s play “makes a tragic mockery…of both Christian and secular theodicies”

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in order to understand the play's concern with nothingness. The play's consistent links between evil and absence bring the drama closer to an Augustinian theology than critics such as Kott allow.

Like Infidelity, the evil characters of Lear, such as Edmund or Goneril and Regan, operate by corrupting the order of the kingdom and the order of nature. Their actions have no positive force—they are a negation of the goodness represented by characters such as Cordelia and Edgar. This theology of evil-as-absence is more threatening in the play than a substantive evil presence could be. Edmund is capable of repenting, and Goneril and Regan are capable of killing one another—thus, they are not lasting forces of evil, but only representatives of the turning away from good toward nothingness that threatens to negate the entire world of the play.

The tendency toward abstraction in Lear (e.g. the impulse to make Goneril, Regan, and Edmund into symbols of evil) is complicated in Shakespeare's play in a way that allegorical abstractions are not in the theatre of the Reformers. Whereas the allegory of Bale and Foxe began with the body, but moved away from it toward a spiritual significance, Shakespeare's drama, while it also re-enacts this movement, also returns the sphere of meaning back to the body. The characters in Lear consistently strip themselves of identity and assume a baser role—the servant Kent, the beggar Edgar, and the stripped king, who attempts to become "the thing itself." However, in this stripping of the self, there is a sense that Shakespeare's play does not dissolve into nothingness, but points to a hermeneutic that is centred upon the body. Critics have recognized that the changing of clothes in the play reflects the Pauline injunction to put off the old man and put on the new in righteousness. This implies that the characters do have an essential identity—one that can be purified but not negated. However, this idea is complicated by its
presentation in a theatrical medium; locating signifying presence in the body of an actor is a practice fraught with complications. Tom (who is really Edgar playing the role of Tom) is certainly not "the thing itself" because, in the words of Greenblatt, "when Lear thinks he has found in Poor Tom 'the thing itself,' 'unaccommodated man,' he has in fact found a man playing a theatrical role."\(^{33}\) Edgar's role is theatrical in two senses: within the play, the nobleman is playing the part of the madman; within the theatre, the actor is playing the part of the nobleman who plays this part. Edgar highlights his disguise in meta-theatrical language; as Mary Lascelles observes, "Edgar makes it clear that he is assuming an established pattern of behaviour, from which he remains in himself wholly detached."\(^{34}\) This is the sort of emphasis on self-aware and inward interpretation that Diehl and others associate with the Reformation, and that the role-playing in Lear highlights.\(^{35}\)

There is an added dimension of meta-theatrical awareness in this play that relates to the iconoclastic tendencies of the Reformers. In his madness, Lear understands the errors of his earlier actions; one of his mistakes was the desire to be idolized. Siemon argues that Lear eventually realizes that "speech is not any simple manifestation of the speaker's essence; he admits the necessity of interpretation."\(^{36}\) But if Lear is not "everything," he is also not "nothing," for the play fosters a detached level of interpretation that seeks meaning in the process of theatrical representation itself. The play repeatedly asks the audience to "look" and to "see," creating a meta-theatrical

\(^{33}\) Greenblatt 126.
\(^{34}\) Mary Lascelles, "'King Lear' and Doomsday," *Shakespeare Survey* 26 (1973): 71.
\(^{35}\) For a different perspective, see Lisa Jardine, *Reading Shakespeare Historically* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), Chapter 5: "Reading and the Technology of Textual Affect: Erasmus's familiar letters and Shakespeare's *King Lear.*" Jardine draws a connection between the type of emotion that is expressed in Erasmus' "familiar letters" and the "emotional dyslexia" created by the play's world, in which "unnatural sons and daughters have taken control of the technology of affect for their own manipulative purposes," leaving "no possibility of articulation left for the naturally caring members of the family" (96).
\(^{36}\) Siemon 256.
emphasis upon theatrical viewing which bears an important resemblance to Diehl’s idea of “reformed seeing”: the employment of images in order to draw attention to the act of gazing itself and ask the audience to question their own responses.

*King Lear*’s obsessive meta-theatricality has been much discussed, but analyses such as Diehl’s (though it does not discuss *Lear* specifically) are relatively new. It is important to draw connections between the Reformation and the meta-theatricality of Renaissance drama; however, what Diehl’s analysis under-emphasizes is that, while Shakespeare adopts the reformed art of meta-seeing, he deprives the act of its devotional significance. Rather than directing his audience from actor to sign to meaning, as Bale and Foxe did, Shakespeare flaunts the gaps, underlining the absolute impossibility of stable hermeneutics in a theatrical realm that is inhabited by protean bodies.

The horror of the play is a result of the fallen condition, but this is a world where the gods are silent. The tragedy of this play is created, in part, by the sense that the Christian God is nowhere, and thus all characters are, to one degree or another, removed from him. Again, this is not to suggest, as some have, that the pre-Christian context of the play creates a Christian moral lesson in the form of tragedy. Wittreich contends that Shakespeare’s use of Christian symbols and contexts “neither discredits a non-Christian, nor credits a Christian reading of the play; and rather than lessening, it complicates the problem of perspective in the play.”³⁷ Further to this, I would suggest that the complication of these perspectives in the play represents both an awareness and a reformulation of Reformed ideas of interpretation within a world marked by division and discord. Shakespeare adopts a loosely Foxean model of an opposition between two communities, one following God, the other following its own pleasures, but he deprives

this model of the god figure who oversees this discord as well as the clarity of the separation. In the absence of a controlling deity, an Augustinian theology of evil as a negation of good threatens to corrupt not only the course of human history (like Infidelity), but to threaten the eschatological promise on which Augustine’s model depends.

Secularizing the Apocalypse

By locating the themes of dualism and interpretive uncertainty within an insistently apocalyptic play, Shakespeare alludes to the Christian ideas of redemption and rebirth traditionally associated with the End Times, but empties these promises of their divine resolution. What remains is a profoundly secular world that inevitably sees its apocalypse not as comedy or tragi-comedy (as the Christian view interprets it), but instead as a pure tragedy.

This tragedy involves a disjunction between the body/natural world and the realm of the spirit. Early in the play, Gloucester notices that “These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good” (1.2.103-4). True to the nature of apocalyptic, Gloucester makes a prophecy based on the natural world—he looks for signs that help to explain his place in the cosmos, just as Lear does when he has his dialogue with the storm. Wittreich lists the mystery of the seven stars, the cracking thunder, earthquakes, eclipses, the wheel of fire, the lake of darkness, the sulphurous pit, the wrathful dragon, the prince of darkness, the trumpets, and the imagery of defiled and fresh garments, among the apocalyptic resonances in this play.38 These signs are accompanied by prophecies from characters such as Poor Tom or the Fool. All of these signs, and the increasing tragedy of this play,

38 Joseph Wittreich, “‘Image of that horror’: the Apocalypse in King Lear,” The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature; Patterns, Antecedents and Repercussions, ed. C.A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984) 189.
seem to point toward the exchange in 5.3 when Edgar asks, "Is this the promised end?" and Kent echoes with "Or image of that horror" (5.3.264-65). Although there is no specific reference to Christianity in this play, the Christian symbolism in this pre-Christian world seems to offer a dim shadow of a different future—a hesitant promise of a world beyond tragedy.

This hesitant promise looks obliquely forward to the advent of Christianity. Therefore, the play does not present apocalypse as the cataclysmic ending to history; instead, we see a pre-figuration of the Incarnation, which parallels the final apocalypse of the Parousia. The space between the pre- and post-Incarnational worlds is not "the promised end," but only an "image of that horror." Thus the play itself becomes curiously dependent upon its position as an image. Foxe was acutely aware that *Christus Triumphans* could provide only a dim reflection of the actual apocalypse:

> Would rather that we could see [Christ] coming from heaven, in triumph in the clouds. Perhaps it will not be long before stage representations lie neglected; then indeed we will see all with our own eyes, when God sends in actual fact what he now only promises. For now, do not be ashamed to view through a netting the image of things, which is all we play. (Prologue; 229)

Thus Foxe’s apocalyptic play, like Shakespeare’s, is an image. But the fact that Foxe’s play is an image of fulfillment, while Shakespeare’s is an image of horror, makes all the difference. Furthermore, the script that Foxe follows is in the text of the Scriptures, but Shakespeare’s tragedy is not written in the text of sacred history—it is written in the text of secular British history.

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39 See Wittreich, *History, Prophecy, and Apocalypse* 114-21. There is never a direct allusion to the Incarnation, but the Christian symbolism that penetrates the pagan world of *Lear* makes the audience aware that the future will bring a different promise and a different god.
The impulse to read English history in terms of an apocalyptic framework recalls Bale, who believed that history could be best understood if the Scriptures were read as a light to the chronicles (Image 253). Shakespeare uses the apocalypse to “read” and even to revise his source, King Leir, making what was a tragi-comedy set in a Christian world into a tragedy set in a pre-Christian world. Wittreich explains that “Shakespeare introduces prophetic and apocalyptic elements into his play and allows them to authorize his astonishing revision of a received tradition whose view of history is grimly pessimistic.” Shakespeare secularizes the apocalypse by placing it in a pre-Christian era that speaks in earthly terms and leaves earthly survivors.

But as Lear brings us to the edge of a secular apocalypse through a series of unveiled prophecies (mirrored in the unveiling of bodies), we are left with a future (however grim) that, by its very existence, promises more than the nihilism at the centre of the play would suggest. As Foxe insists, apocalyptic is ultimately a comic form; therefore, Lear is a tragedy because it brings us to the brink of the apocalypse, and lets us have only a slight and uncertain glimpse of what lies beyond. The hesitant promise at the end of Lear rests upon the characters on stage at the end, who must form a community out of the ashes and the rubble they see before them.

40 R.A. Foakes writes: “[Shakespeare] turned a tragicomedy into a tragedy, selecting only what would contribute to his bleaker and more powerful vision of the story of Lear. Leir is a play in which characters routinely refer to God, and which has from the start, where Leir imagines his dead queen among the ‘Cherubins’ in heaven, a good deal of Christian religious colouring; this is especially associated with Cordilla, who in one scene has a soliloquy on her way to church to pray (1061-93). In Shakespeare’s play, by contrast, characters routinely refer to pagan gods, and only Cordelia is left with residual Christian associations, though the play has many biblical echoes in the dialogue” (99). But the biblical “echoes” in Shakespeare’s play should not be underestimated, because they are so numerous, and because they resound more loudly precisely because the play lacks a historical Christian context. R.A. Foakes, “Introduction” to King Lear (Surrey: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1997) 1-151.

41 Wittreich, “Apocalypse in King Lear” 185.
The Post-apocalyptic Community

The survivors at the end of Lear must bear the burden of the cares of the state that Lear was so anxious to shun, but Kent immediately refuses Albany’s suggestion that he and Edgar rule jointly. This leaves a sort of community that will continue, but it is a crippled one at best. In the final speech, Edgar\(^{42}\) refers to the future condition of “we that are young” (5.3.326). But what kind of a community does this younger generation represent? To what extent is this community determined by national boundaries?

When poor Tom ends 3.4 with the words, “Fie, foh, and fum / I smell the blood of a British man” (3.4.183-84), his substitution of the word “British” where “English” would usually appear is a significant choice. Foakes’ note for this line explains that the traditional tale reads “English,” not “British,” but it was likely altered in Shakespeare’s play because “Lear was king of Britain in the chronicles” and because “James I liked to be known as ‘King of Great Brittain’ (title-page of his Works, 1616).” By placing the action of Lear in ancient Britain at the point of the kingdom’s division, Shakespeare constructs a story of origins in specifically national terms. Like the biblical myths of the garden of Eden and the tower of Babel, this story explains the origin of discord, but it is cast not as the cause of human unhappiness, but of British political unhappiness. The nationalism that Foxe’s work in part suggests finds a clearer expression in subsequent writers—those Helgerson discusses at length, such as Spenser, Sidney, and Shakespeare. Writers of Shakespeare’s time were quick to identify James with Brut, and to flatter the king by suggesting that he had united Britain in peace and happiness at last. James himself cultivated this view, and added to it his interest in the prophetic elements of the book of Revelation.

\(^{42}\) Or Albany, in the Quartos.
In addition to participating in the Jacobean version of British nationalism, *King Lear* also betrays a sense of uncertainty about this idea. The elision between "British" and "English" in *Lear* suggests a difficulty in identifying the nation exemplified by the instability of its name. This confusion in identifying the nation in *Lear* is compounded by the position of France, which seems both enemy and friendly ally, as Cordelia’s army invades England to fight against Lear’s enemies. Thus, rather than unlocking apocalyptic prophecies to make the meaning clearer and more stable, as Foxe attempted to do (e.g. in his section entitled “The Mysterious Numbers of the Apocalypse Opened”), Shakespeare uses apocalyptic symbolism to confuse the role of the nation, thus pointing to the fundamental artificiality of this construction.

But if Foxe (and more particularly those who came after him) identifies this community with the nation, and thereby posits a Eusebian view of the monarchy, Shakespeare’s view of the nation in *Lear* is more qualified and ultimately more like Augustine’s. Shakespeare stops short of providing a positive ending to his Lear story, despite the fact that his source *did* include a happy resolution. This may represent a guarded view of James’ triumphalism—a view that, according to Wickham, would change in later years into the redemptive and optimistic mode of Shakespeare’s romances:

In the course of transforming the old tragi-comedy *King Leir* into a tragedy, Shakespeare came face to face with the sources of the Brutus/New Troy stories to which James I’s accession had given new life in the minds of other poets. He chose first to use this material guardedly and not to interpret it as explicitly.... However, he clearly read and digested his patron’s speeches; and, following the abortive Gunpowder Plot and the ratification of the Act of Union, he returned to it again and adopted James’s own belief that what was, in the minds of traitors, to

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43 In addition to the alteration to Edgar’s song, it is interesting to note that in 4.6.245-46 (“Seek him out / Upon the English party”), the Quarto reads “British,” and the Folio reads “English” (see Foakes’ note, 346).
have been a real-life tragedy, had been miraculously transformed by divine providence into a tragi-comedy for the royal family and all loyal subjects.\textsuperscript{44}

But perhaps there is an additional reason for Shakespeare's apparent pessimism in \textit{Lear}—a reason connected to other models and sources he used to create this tragedy. Foxe's model had begun to open up a place for nationalism in the model of the two churches, but Foxe's work is not overtly nationalistic; there are even ways that his idea of a universal church works against the idea of an "elect nation."\textsuperscript{45} Helgerson recognizes the paradox that Foxe's book creates:

Like the nation, [Foxe's] imagined community does not necessarily coincide with the state. Indeed, the state may frustrate its ambition to achieve a visible institutional embodiment of its own, may hunt down and persecute its members. But where the imagined community does not coincide with the state, it saps the state's legitimacy and the legitimacy of the social hierarchy that constitutes the power structure of the state.\textsuperscript{46}

The sense of communal identity that Foxe's book forms through a shared narrative of martyrdom is, in some ways, not compatible with the state. One of the points of tension is the apocalyptic framework itself—despite Foxe's praise for Elizabeth, the apocalypse he preaches throughout and calls for at the end of the \textit{Acts and Monuments} alludes indirectly to the end of her kingdom. James was trying to appropriate apocalyptic symbolism to his own situation, but there are tensions in this tactic which Shakespeare understood (tensions which perhaps ultimately led to the civil war). The Apocalypse is fundamentally not about temporal rule, and while it may not be about overthrowing it either, Wittreich is misguided in asserting that James’ move is natural because “early

\textsuperscript{44} Glynne Wickham, “From Tragedy to Tragi-Comedy: 'King Lear' as Prologue,” \textit{Shakespeare Survey} 26 (1973): 47.
\textsuperscript{45} See Chapter 3, section IV: “England.”
\textsuperscript{46} Helgerson 266.
Christian apocalyptic... seemed to sanction the tendency of supporting the establishment in times of crisis." It is the anti-institutional (or perhaps, more precisely, non-institutional) nature of the Apocalypse that Augustine adopts in the final books of the City of God to explain that history is determined by the opposition between two communities that are not defined by national or institutional boundaries. Shakespeare was attuned to this tension in apocalyptic: he points to this rift in his play that allows the audience to "read" James' Britain against the primordial chaos of Lear's. While the comparison is bound to be partially flattering, the nature of the alterations to the Quarto text and the political danger of the Fool's lines do of course suggest that, in some ways, Lear's world was intended as an image of James'. In the end, there is significant doubt in the play about whether God's salvation can be replaced by the recreation of a City of God on earth under the guidance of a temporal ruler.

Foxe's imagined community is formed through a shared narrative experience among its readers/listeners—the story of the martyrs of the church becomes each person's story. Similarly, the combination of individual and national storylines in King Lear encourages an identification between the audience of the play and the story it presents on stage. There is a sense of shared experience in Shakespeare's theatre, but although he is using the rhetoric of Protestantism and nationalism, he is not teaching a lesson about either of these. Insofar as Shakespearean theatre retains the didactic purpose of earlier

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47 Wittreich, "Apocalypse in King Lear" 182.
48 Many critics have conjectured that the Fool's missing lines in the Folio, which often are the most acerbic comments he makes about the division of the kingdom, were later censored to avoid offending James. Foakes also observes that "Edmund's account of 'menaces and maledictions against king and nobles'...the Fool's satirical allusion to monopolies....and a number of references to war with France...could have been omitted to avoid displeasing a king who was known for granting monopolies to favourites, and whose motto was Beati pacifici" (130). For more on the possibility of censorship in the alterations to the Quarto, see Annabel Patterson, Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1984): 58-73; and Janet Clare, 'Art Made Tongue-Tied by Authority': Elizabethan and Jacobean Dramatic Censorship (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990): 133-34.
forms of drama, the lesson of this theatre is a lesson only about the aesthetic value of drama itself.

What we are left with in this play, as in most of Shakespeare's tragedies, is a stage spectacle where the bodies of the dead are presented for the audience to see and reflect upon as the play ends. The final vision and monumentalization of tragedy gives us a moment of stasis that is supposed to stand for the action that has come before. This movement from action to stasis echoes Foxe's use of the "change and rest" component of Augustine's model of the two cities, yet the play frustrates this final monumentalization. Despite the fact that Lear ends with a version of the well-known artists' subject, the pieta, Siemon explains that Lear's "sweeping distribution of poetic justice is halted by the fact that the pieta will not be still, will not be silent, will not be content in the role of public exemplum, but persists in acting." Therefore, Shakespeare's "attention to the broken particulars of physical existence profoundly subverts the decorous generalizations of emblematic vision, which would seek to enwrap the scene in meaning and so solidify living flux into significance." 49 Siemon relates this refusal to emblematize in Lear to the Protestant concerns with idolatry, suggesting, like Diehl, that Shakespeare was well-attuned to these Reformation concerns, and that his drama reflects this awareness. Although the Reformers resisted the monumentalization of idolatry, they did attempt to create a textual monumentalization, but Shakespeare's plays work against the persistent systematization of an interpretation that moves from the body to the word.

This play ends with the body, and flaunts its presence on the stage in a way that both Bale and Foxe avoided. As Siemon notes, "The only adequate perspective on the pieta is Lear's own from within it, and his perspective is so lost in physical immediacy

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49 Siemon 289-90.
that it is incapable of the distance necessary for abstraction to shape suffering into significant figure.”

The bodies of Shakespeare’s stage resist being turned into neat allegorical symbols. Although this possibility is suggested in the display of Goneril and Regan’s bodies on stage as a sign that Lear’s “eldest daughters have foredone themselves, / And desperately are dead” (5.3.292-93), Edmund’s reading of these bodies produces a very different conclusion. For him, the bodies of the two sisters prove that “Edmund was below’d!” (5.3.240).

When Lear answers Gloucester’s plea to kiss his hand by saying, “let me wipe it first. It smells of mortality” (4.6.133), the audience is given a pertinent example of the inability of the body to escape from its mortal coil. In Lear the community we are left with at the end is neither the nation nor the church, but an invisible, imagined community that is dependent upon a shared viewing experience, the centre of which is the insistent presence of the body on stage. The shared experience of this type of theatrical viewing incorporates a dual understanding of drama—on the one hand an awareness of the power of words and the fallibility of interpretation, and on the other hand, the power of living bodies over the emblematic. This theatre creates an art form which is both self-conscious/meta-theatrical and phenomenal. By sharing in the bodily presence of Shakespeare’s theatre, the audience experiences a secularized eucharistic participation that unites them, if only briefly, within the aesthetic world created by Lear.

50 Siemon 277.

51 Anthony Dawson argues that this dual component of Renaissance theatre can be related to Hooker’s view of the Eucharistic sacrament, which takes a middle way between the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation and the Zwinglian view of mere representation. Like Hooker’s middle way between these two views, Dawson writes, “There seems... to be a constant oscillation between two different and opposing constructions of the theatre (and the theatrical body), on the one hand as mediated, self-conscious, meta-theatrical, and on the other as immediate and present. Participation, involving presence and representation in the ritualized act of reception, is a notion that links the two conceptions.” Anthony B. Dawson, “Performance and Participation: Desdemona, Foucault, and the Actor’s Body,” Shakespeare: Theory and Performance, ed. James Bulman (London: Routledge, 1995): 38-39.
III. Antony and Cleopatra: Acts in the Monument

At the beginning of Antony and Cleopatra, Antony echoes the Book of Revelation by defining his love for Cleopatra in terms of a “new heaven, new earth” (1.1.17), then he resolves to inhabit this new land created by love by embracing her, declaring “this is my space” (1.1.34). Throughout the course of the play, the space (both physical and temporal) that Antony and Cleopatra inhabit continually contracts. In a play obsessed with the “world” and its conquerors, the lovers who would create a new heaven and earth find themselves barely able to hold onto even the smallest piece of the world. By Act 3, Antony’s only request is “to live in Egypt, which not granted, / He lessens his request, and to [Caesar] sues / To let him breathe between the heavens and earth, / A private man in Athens” (3.12.12-15). By the end of this drama, Cleopatra’s space is limited to the physical confines of her monument. Yet Cleopatra’s performance in her final scene shows how productive such a small space can be; her “acts” in the monument highlight the major concerns of the play—role-playing, theatrical posing, and immortal longings. These actions within the walls of the monument take on a special resonance if we consider the play’s insistent exploration of dualities in terms of the Augustinian/Foxean interplay between change and rest.

More than King Lear, Antony and Cleopatra is the story of two opposed communities; the antithesis between Rome and Egypt serves as the organizing principles for the entire play. The affinity between the two worlds of Antony and Cleopatra and the two churches of the Protestant Reformers may seem, at first sight, to be limited to general structural similarities. Indeed, in Augustinian terms, this classical love tragedy would hardly serve as an appropriate picture of the earthly versus the heavenly city. Strictly
speaking, Rome versus Egypt is not a case of the heavenly city against the earthly city (like Augustine’s example of Abel and Cain), but a case of the earthly city against itself (like Augustine’s example of Romulus and Remus). The citizens of both Rome and Egypt seek power, wealth, fame, and glory within a decidedly pre-Christian world (though *Antony and Cleopatra*, like *Lear*, does resonate with Christian symbolism). However, the two-cities/churches model does have a deeper resonance in the play; the use of radical oppositions has an impact upon this play that can be seen in its attitude toward Rome, its emphasis on interpretation and role-playing, and its interest in history and apocalypse.

As the space for Antony and Cleopatra contracts, the space for the dramatic text *Antony and Cleopatra* opens up; this space gains its energy from the artificial construction of dualities and antitheses, which are subsequently questioned and subverted. Shakespeare’s drama, like Foxe’s book, encompasses a division between two different communities, and allows a vantage point from which to witness this discord—a “god’s-eye” view. In *King Lear*, such a cosmic perspective allows Shakespeare to explore the insignificance of humanity as he strips his characters to “the thing itself” and focuses on the rift created by this moment. By contrast, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare makes his characters larger than life, staging the potential power of rhetoric and imagination to transcend mortality. The action of the play forces specific attention to the gaps between history and mythology, between language and action, and between character and actor.
New Heaven, New Earth

The action of *Antony and Cleopatra* is insistently teleological; this pagan world is inundated with images of impending Christian apocalypse. Antony's reference to the "new heaven, new earth" (1.1.17), echoing Revelation 21:1, is only the first of many allusions to the Apocalypse that are scattered throughout the play. Critics have noted the references to falling stars, eclipses, earthquakes, crowns, and seals among the apocalyptic resonances. There are also potential parallels between Egypt and Babylon, between Cleopatra and the whore of Babylon, and between Cleopatra's description of Antony and the angel of Revelation 10. Ethel Seaton first explored these links, and other critics have added information and insight, perhaps most interestingly Helen Morris, who suggests that Shakespeare's imagery comes not from a reading of Revelation so much as from viewing the popular pictures of Dürer's Apocalypse. There is ample evidence that Shakespeare was using Apocalyptic elements in this play, but this information does not answer the question of how he was using them, nor what function they serve.

Wittreich argues that before the late Elizabethan period, the Apocalypse was not widely used by English writers, and that Spenser, Shakespeare, and others "set for themselves the task of returning the Apocalypse from exile and thrusting it into prominence." However, as the work of Firth and Bauckham makes clear, the Apocalypse was far from being in exile; because of Bale and Foxe, it had become a part of mainstream Protestant culture. Clifford Davidson relates Shakespeare's use of the Apocalypse to the time period of the play:

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53 Helen Morris, "Shakespeare and Dürer's Apocalypse," *Shakespeare Studies* 4 (1968): 252-62. Significantly, these pictures were used to illustrate some copies of Bale's *Image of Both Churches*.
54 Wittreich, "Apocalypse in *King Lear*" 175.
The old order is coming to a close, and the effect will be to reorient men who believe in the Christian message to the "new heaven" and "new earth" that will be ushered in after the Second Coming. What could be more proper than describing the final conflict of the old order, of the pre-Christian ages, through the visually rich iconography of the Apocalypse itself?55

Yet there is something a little odd about using imagery from the end of the world to describe, in Christian terms, a world's new beginning. The effect is to emphasize that the "new heaven" and "new earth" really are on earth and in history—in effect, to secularize the apocalyptic vision.

This alteration of apocalyptic theology can be further seen through Shakespeare's presentation of the relationship between the spirit and the flesh within his play. One of the most significant elements of Bale and Foxe's apocalyptic ideas involved the relationship between history and interpretation, especially their use of the metaphor of the flesh and the spirit for the exegetical process. The transcendence that Antony and Cleopatra attempt to achieve is reminiscent of the dream of resurrection—Cleopatra's "immortal longings" include visions of her kiss with Antony in heaven, and her cry to her "husband" Antony echoes the bride adorned for the marriage with Christ in Revelation 21. In Augustinian terms, however, these lovers cannot reach this level of transcendence because their love is "misdirected." Because Antony and Cleopatra direct their love to one another, they can never reach the City of God (unless, of course, the city they seek is one ruled by the god of Eros rather than Agape). This misdirected love some have seen as the source of their tragedy.56 Yet what is happening here is more complex than a Christian lesson along Augustinian lines. Instead, we have an Augustinian background, emphasized through the particular concerns of the Reformers, that is being staged and

56 See, for example, Battenhouse's comments in Christian Dimension 494-96.
questioned. Emptied of its Christian doctrine, this play provides more than a “lesson” about the pagan world. In *Antony and Cleopatra* we are seeing only part of history—a tragic part—but this vision gains significance in aesthetic terms which transcend the time period and topical allusions of the play.

Because Shakespeare situates the play at a point when “time is at its period” but the new beginning has not yet come, it exists in a caesura, and in this space the play spins its aesthetic vision. Unable to live in either Rome or Egypt, Antony and Cleopatra attempt to create their own world of love. Fichter points out that “The love Antony speaks of is both an alternative to empire and an alternative empire.” But this space is not comfortable or isolated—it is subject to the opposing forces between which it stands. Like Octavia, Antony and Cleopatra eventually discover that there is “No midway / Twixt these extremes at all” (3.4.19). Yet even as the play denies the possibility of negotiating between extremes, it stages both sides at once, invoking an incarnational dialectic that does not *combine* differences, but insists upon the simultaneous presence of opposites.

**Rome and the Classical Landscape**

Like Shakespeare’s other Roman plays, *Antony and Cleopatra* is firmly imbedded in a classical landscape and is indebted to classical sources. The time period of *Antony and Cleopatra*, like Antony himself, is caught between the end of an old world order and a new one about to begin. Fichter observes that “Antony is bounded on one side by the Christian visionary tradition to which he cannot attain and on the other by the Roman epic tradition he partly forsakes.” The Virgilian account of Roman history, beginning

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with Aeneas and reaching its climax with Augustus, is evident in this play. As Antony travels between Rome and Egypt, over the same seas and lands which Aeneas had traveled, he is also, like Aeneas, caught between the lure of Africa and his duty in Italy. Yet Antony is the "Aeneas who stay[s] with Dido,"59 and thus, from a Virgilian perspective, he must die so that Augustus (the Aeneas who does not forsake his Roman duty) can achieve the pax romana.

However, for Christians from the time of Constantine onward, this Roman peace meant something quite different than it did for Virgil, whose imperial epic had been filtered through hundreds of years of Christian reinterpretation, including Augustine's. Augustine, who likens himself to the wandering Aeneas in the Confessions, continues to use Virgil in the City of God, but subsumes the triumph of the Roman empire under a larger framework of the glory of the eternal city. From a Christian perspective, the glory of the pax romana was achieved not by or for Augustus, but for the coming of Christ during his reign. This was the view championed by Eusebius, but Augustine's view (especially after 410) is more guarded. For Augustine, Rome was not a consistent symbol—sometimes it embodied the wickedness of pre-Christian society, sometimes it was a neutral city to be used, and sometimes it was a positive foreshadowing of the glory of God's city.60

Therefore, it is no surprise that Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, which draws on Virgilian, broadly Eusebian, and Augustinian notions of Rome, should present a complex exploration of this powerful symbol. The audience is unable to share Octavius' view of the moral decadence of Egypt and its Queen, and the oppression and coldness of Octavius' Rome seem clearly negative. This particular depiction of Rome is somewhat

59 Frank Kermode, introduction to the play in the Riverside edition, 1345.
60 See Chapter 1, section I.C: "Rome and the Earthly City."
surprising in light of Protestant views, which also pictured Rome negatively, but in terms of papal lust, sodomy, and crimes of excess. In this play, it is Egypt that is the land of luxury, excess, and even weakness, but it has a lure and a charm that are innocent of the traditional associations of Egypt with Sodom and Babylon. Similarly, Rome is neither a den of papal lust, nor a relentlessly domineering force, nor an empire of eternal glory. Shakespeare balances these views, creating a vision of a classical world which cannot be reduced to the easy dualistic formulas that it pretends to present. Part of what enables Shakespeare to emphasize the interstices between these views is his concentration on the Augustan period. Linda Woodbridge explains that during the Jacobean age, writers often focused on the reign of Augustus, because it provided a compromise between two opposing views of Rome—"Rome the implacable invader" and "Rome the invaded, the sacked city." Woodbridge contends that

the opposed images represented successive phases of Roman history, and posited between them, as a historical "time out" like calendric intercalary days, was a third Rome, Augustus Caesar's, a Rome that had finished its invasions, acquired its colonies, and was enjoying its empire in peace, a Rome yet unsacked.\(^6\)

This "time out" depends upon an awareness of both these views of Rome—the invader and the invaded. The space in between allows the simultaneous presence of opposite extremes.

The other significance of this "space," of course, is that it is also the historical moment of the Incarnation. Shakespeare complicates the classical setting of this play by infusing it with Christian symbolism and language. He exploits the association between Augustus and Christ by having Octavius predict that "the time of universal peace is near"

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(4.6.4). Here Octavius speaks more than he knows; like all of the characters in the play, he is caught up in a grander design of history of which he remains ignorant. His own arrogant belief that he is in control not just of his earthly empire, but of the course of history, resembles the delusion of vice characters such as Bale’s Infidelity. While it is Vindicta Dei himself who makes it clear that Infidelity’s control of events was temporary and illusory, it is Cleopatra’s deception in the final scene of *Antony and Cleopatra* that draws our attention to Octavius’ inability to control history in the way that he would like. Octavius is clearly insufficient as a replacement for the controlling god-force of the religious drama.

The play’s interest in the *space* of the Augustan reign becomes a meditation on the *gap* of this reign; the final scene in the monument shows the hollowness of Octavius’ victory. Shakespeare does not offer a substitute to fill this gap which is created by the absence of an all-controlling deity. Instead, he explores the problem of absence in relation to the ability of theatre to create the illusion of presence. Marguerite Tassi explains that, because Cleopatra commands the centre of the play until the final scene, “her death opens up a phenomenological vacuum on the stage, but this space is quickly occupied by Octavius Caesar. He fills the center only in material and secular terms; spiritually and aesthetically, Cleopatra has achieved the victory.”

Octavius’ inability to fill this phenomenological vacuum left by Cleopatra underlines the power of her character—the mesmerizing quality of her person that is a continual obsession in the play. The gap created by Cleopatra’s death at the end echoes Enobarbus’ famous

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62 The ability of the theatre to create out of nothing the illusion of presence is one of the qualities for which Thomas Nashe defended it: “there is no immortalitie can be giuen a man on earth like vnto Playes.... In Playes, all coosonages, all cunning drifts ouer-guylded with outward holinesse, all strategems of warre, all the cankerwormes that breede on the rust of peace, are most liuely anatomiz’d,” *Pierce Pennilesse his Supplication to the Diuell* (1592).

description of her arrival at Cydnus; he remarks that everyone had gone to watch her, and imagines that even the “air, which, but for vacancy, / Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too, / And made a gap in nature” (2.2.216-18). Thus, the space between the two versions of Rome offered by the Augustan period and the space between Old and New Testament history offered by the Incarnational period both offer a way to reconcile extremes. This reconciliation insists upon both/and—upon multiple and competing views of history which are in full interplay upon the stage.

Just as Antony is caught between two facets of the classical world (the earthly city against itself), so he is also caught between the historical periods of the classical and the Christian worlds (the earthly city against the heavenly city). Antony’s pilgrimage reflects both the travels of Aeneas toward his earthly empire and the travels of the citizens of the City of God toward an other-worldly empire. This framework, reminiscent of the model of the two cities, becomes in Shakespeare’s drama not religious doctrine, but an arena for the exploration of theatrical representation itself. The play relates the historical space/gap of the Augustan period to a space created by drama, as Shakespeare’s theatre gathers its generative energy from these rifts.

**Interpretation and Role-playing**

If *Antony and Cleopatra* is suspended in between time periods and world views, it is also suspended between variously competing interpretive views, especially as they relate to dramatic representation itself. W.B. Worthen notes that “As Antony’s peerless ‘space’ withers, his ‘visible shape’ endures,” and that, when the women haul him up to the monument, he is “momentarily suspended between legendary greatness and its tragic acting, his body resisting the Roman gesture and its lofty rhetoric while it gains an
affecting weight of its own."64 Because of the conflation of classical and Christian ideas, and the intermingled quality of the two worlds of Shakespeare’s play (especially embodied within Antony), the characters are consistently faced with interpretive difficulties.

The Soothsayer claims, “In nature’s infinite book of secrecy / A little I can read” (1.2.10-11), which highlights the difficulty of interpretation, as well as its vital importance (he achieves a privileged status in both Egypt and Rome because of his interpretive skill).65 Having no Scriptures, these characters can read only the world around them. The Soothsayer’s prophecies lack the authority of Scripture, so the interpretive arena of the play insistently returns to a reading of the physical world, especially the body. Cleopatra recognizes that bodies speak truer than words:

Eternity was in our lips and eyes,  
Bliss in our brows’ bent; none our parts so poor  
But was a race of heaven. (1.3.39-41)

Her fear that Antony, “the greatest soldier of the world,” is turned “the greatest liar” (1.3.42-43) underlines the incessant fluctuation that deprives the characters of a ground for stable interpretation. Shakespeare carefully presents radically different viewpoints through the different characters. The manipulative power of language to cause people to see what they would like to see is evident throughout the play, as when Enobarbus creates the legend of Antony and Cleopatra’s meeting through the rhetoric of his “burnished throne” speech. Similarly, the messenger whom Cleopatra beats is only too eager to

invent the physical characteristics of Octavia that help Cleopatra picture Antony's new wife as she would like her to look.

This emphasis on report, legend, and lying in the play begins to raise the question of whether there is an actual "reality" beneath the events or characters, or whether they are all contingent upon uncertain interpretation. Beneath all of this uncertainty and fluctuation, there lingers a fear that there is no such thing as essence or truth in this world. "My oblivion is a very Antony" (1.3.90) says Cleopatra, and as Antony loses himself, he must convince himself that "I am Antony yet" (3.13.92). Antony's physical solidity (associated with Rome) breaks down in the volatile world of Egypt, where he fears: "I am Antony, / Yet cannot hold this visible shape" (4.8.12-13). Cleopatra's identity is likewise dependent upon Antony's: "but since my lord / Is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra" (3.13.185-86). Lepidus, who doubts that there are "Evils enow to darken all [Antony's] goodness," does believe that Antony has an essential identity, and that "His faults, in him, seem as the spots of heaven, / More fiery by night's blackness" (1.4.10-13). This idea that faults only function to make virtue shine brighter by contrast is similar to Augustine's conception of the universe as a painting with touches of black—spots of evil which exist only to make the good more apparent. Yet Shakespeare's version of this idea is unusual; the image reverses itself, and the evils which are first represented by darkness are then represented by stars, an analogy which seems to equate Antony's goodness with darkness.

This fear of darkness and a lack of stable identity in the play is only heightened by its meta-theatrical nature. The frequency with which these characters change roles, attitudes, and allegiances makes them similar to theatrical characters such as Bale's Infidelity and Foxe's Pseudamnus, who lack stable identity. While Shakespeare's
depiction of Antony and Cleopatra does not show them as evil, it does leave an uneasy lack of identity which suggests negativity. A further connection between these vice figures and Antony and Cleopatra lies in the type of roles that they play, for they all engage in some sort of parody of Christ and Christianity. In the case of Pseudamnus and Pornapolis, the strategy is clear: they act like Christ and the church in order to persuade people to follow them. Their falsehood is evident in their attention to theatricality and role playing. The case with Antony and Cleopatra is different; they cannot be deliberately imitating and subverting the Christian story because in chronological terms it has not even happened yet. Nonetheless, the play presents Antony and Cleopatra in role-playing activities that echo a story that the audience certainly does know.

Battenhouse has noted that when Antony feasts his troops the night before the final battle, the scene echoes Christ’s Last Supper. Similarly, Cleopatra “becomes a parody of the Virgin Mary when she supplies an asp to her breast and describes this serpent as the ‘baby’ she nurses to give suck to ‘immortal longings.’” Perhaps Shakespeare is using Christian symbolism in order to cast an ironic light upon the plight of Antony and Cleopatra. Battenhouse goes so far as to suggest that “Shakespeare is inviting us to recall a theological aphorism of Augustine, namely, that ‘souls in their very sins seek a sort of likeness to God, in a proud and perverted, and so to say, slavish freedom,’” but it is not necessary to assume that Shakespeare had a particular

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66 Battenhouse suggests that “Antony’s farewell supper in Act IV, for instance, has a tantalizing similarity to Christ’s Last Supper. There is a traitor at the table in the person of Enobarbus, who will later kill himself in remorse. Antony is trying to comfort his followers. He does so with phrases such as ‘Scant not my cups,’ ‘Haply you shall not see me more,’ ‘Tend me tonight two hours,’ and ‘I hope well of tomorrow, and will lead you / Where rather I’ll expect victorious life...’ These words have a ring oddly like Christ’s. But there is an underlying contrast to the Christian paradigm.” Roy W. Battenhouse, Shakespearean Tragedy: Its Art and Its Christian Premises (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1969) 173.


68 Battenhouse, “Augustinian Roots” 1.
Augustinian maxim in mind to see that this is a self-consciously parodic (or even perverse) presentation of the Christian story.

Of course we cannot see Antony and Cleopatra as Christ or Mary figures in a straightforward manner. The lovers’ deception of one another, Antony’s bungling of his own suicide, Cleopatra’s continued concern for her own safety—all of these factors make it clear that this imitation of the Christian story must, in some sense, be a parody or perversion of it. However, despite its parodic treatment of the Christian story, the play itself resists the idea that this role-playing game is necessarily the type of evil that Bale and Foxe (following an Augustinian idea\(^69\)) might suggest.\(^70\) In fact, unstable identity in Shakespeare’s dramaturgy is never entirely negative.

As in *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare’s anti-heroic depiction of classical heroes in *Antony and Cleopatra* creates a deliberate rift between event and interpretation, and makes us aware of the burden (and power) of hermeneutics.\(^71\) The time period and reference to Christianity throw a particular light upon the process of interpretation—a self-referential mode of seeing that is dependent upon the doubts about correct

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\(^70\) The crucial difference between Cleopatra and Pornapolis is that the former pre-figures that which is yet to come, and the latter imitates (and perverts) that which has already come. Furthermore, the status of the Virgin Mary in Shakespeare’s day was controversial. Critics mention the discrepancy between Cleopatra and Mary as if Shakespeare’s audience would have seen the Blessed Virgin as an entirely positive exemplum. However, in the wake of Reformation iconoclasm, the status of Mary changed, and statues of her had been desecrated throughout England—a troubling and confusing movement that makes any allusion to the Virgin Mary in Shakespeare’s day anything but simple (see Diehl, Chapter 3, “Iconophobia and Gynophobia”). It is unclear whether the association between Cleopatra and Mary is positive or negative, but it is clear that we are being asked to think about it. Thus, the play fosters a perspective whereby the audience becomes aware of its own interpretive decisions.

\(^71\) Although both *Troilus and Cressida* and *Antony and Cleopatra* share a similar skepticism toward heroism, *Troilus and Cressida* maintains a much more cynical view, whereas *Antony and Cleopatra* admits the possibility of romance even in the midst of the deflation of myth.
interpretation in this *saeculum*. The hubris of these characters, and their self-dramatization, only serve to highlight their inability to understand the depth of their historical situation. Naturally Protestantism is not the only factor behind the obsessive meta-theatricality of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, but it is certainly an important one. I would argue that the characters' parody of Christianity does not mean, as Battenhouse contends, that the play is necessarily providing a "Christian" interpretation of this classical story. What is happening is much more subtle than that. By folding the classical story back into a Christian context, Shakespeare is asking the audience to deal with a wider range of history, to read typologically, and to see themselves interpreting the story of the play. In this way, Shakespeare stages the process of interpretation which Protestantism had put at the forefront of Christian consciousness.

This emphasis upon the process of interpretation has an important effect upon the nature of Shakespeare's dramatic art. The play focuses upon the gap between myth and reality, but in doing so calls attention to dramatic artifice itself. If "Antony' is suspended in the rich gap between the dramatic performance and the narrative 'abstract' of character," he is also suspended between the actor's body and the character he represents. "For this reason," argues Worthen, "the role scrupulously draws our attention to the actor's body as part of our attention to the drama." The instability of the characters in their own bodies (in a world in which Rome itself is in danger of melting into Tiber) is complicated by this rift between actor and character, which produces another layer of unstable meaning. The characters and the drama seem to long for a stability from which they can claim a fixed identity.

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72 In this sense, "typological reading" involves reading the old (pre-incarnational) in terms of the new (post-incarnational), and reading history (e.g. Roman) in terms of the present (e.g. Stuart Britain).
73 Worthen 302.
74 Worthen 302.
Earning a Place in History

What the characters share as they cast themselves in various roles is the desire to fix their place in history. The interpretive uncertainty that permeates the play leads to the danger that history will always be contingent upon someone else’s interpretation. This is the fear that Cleopatra expresses when she prophesies:

The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us, and present
Our Alexandrian revels: Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I’th’posture of a whore. (5.2.216-21)

This speech creates a level of meta-theatrical awareness about Shakespeare’s play itself—like Octavius, Cleopatra speaks more than she knows. In both cases, the larger scope of history (of which the characters are ignorant) is used as a vital part of the play precisely because the audience does know it. What the audience knows creates an interpretive depth that exists on a plane beyond that of the visible drama. Janet Adelman explains that “the dramatic structure [of Antony and Cleopatra] functions to diffuse and dissipate our attention throughout a wider universe than that which the protagonists know.”

The audience of a play is often privileged by a sort of “god’s-eye” view, but in Antony and Cleopatra this view is intensified because of the historical perspective the play carries. The drama invites the audience to see history as God sees it—from a single totalizing viewpoint under which all discord and duality is contained. This impulse sets up what will become an interest in Shakespeare’s plays in the relationship between drama and deity, exemplified most clearly in the character of Prospero, but also suggested in Cymbeline’s use of Jupiter (discussed below).

The impulse to create a “god’s-eye” view that encompasses the dualisms of history was the driving force behind the historiographical efforts of Augustine, Bale, and Foxe. But in Shakespeare’s theatre, although this viewpoint is created, it yields a very different picture of history, which does not appear seamless and perfect, as it would to a god who created it; instead, this history is fraught with tension, uncertainty, and doubt. Foxe admitted interpretive difficulty and uncertainty when presenting his view of history, but his efforts were bent upon controlling this anxiety. Shakespeare, on the other hand, highlights these interpretive difficulties and the contingent nature of history. The arbitrariness of history is obvious to the characters of *Antony and Cleopatra*, who, like Enobarbus, seek to “earn a place i’th’story” (3.13.46). Because the actions are so volatile and so subject to change (like Cleopatra’s whims), the characters seek a written record, some sort of memorialization that will guarantee their place in the story. This desire was a central focus in the *Acts and Monuments*, where the record of Protestant history involved a series of progressions from bodies and events to textual monumentalization. This is exactly the move that Antony anticipates before the final battle, when he still has hope that he and his sword will earn a chronicle (3.13.175). As Worthen notes, “Relinquishing his ‘visible shape,’” then, becomes a critical process in Antony’s characterization, dramatizing his attempt to transmigrate from the dramatic to the narrative mode, from the actor’s lanking body to a changeless ‘place i’ the story.’”\(^{76}\) The characters—from Antony to Octavius and Cleopatra—desire stabilization in the text of history.

The ending of the play presents an example of instant historical reconstruction, for as Antony dies, the people around him recreate him. Cleopatra’s vision of Antony is

\(^{76}\) Worthen 302.
purposefully extreme: “His legs bestrid the ocean, his rear’d arm crested the world, his voice was propertied / As all the tuned spheres” (5.2.82-84). This re-creation of Antony’s character in cosmic terms (taken from the depiction of the angel in Revelation 10) is bound to seem at odds with the Antony that the audience has just seen, and they are likely to answer Cleopatra’s question, “Think you there was or might be such a man / As this I dreamt of?” as Dolabella does: “Gentle madam, no” (5.2.93-94). The ending of the play continually reinforces the disjunction between the heroes of legend and the people they were. Even Octavius is unable to believe the all-too-human death of Antony; Caesar protests, “The breaking of so great a thing should make / A greater crack” (5.1.14-15). Yet in his next act Octavius participates in a re-writing of history. He assures Cleopatra that “The record of what injuries you did us, / Though written in our flesh, we shall remember / As things but done by chance” (5.2.118-20). Here Octavius underlines the relationship between what is written in the flesh and what is written as chronicle—Foxe’s central metaphor for the move from the literal to the spiritual significance. But in this context, history seems completely arbitrary; Octavius will “remember” whatever he chooses, and interpret it however he chooses.

Cleopatra’s scene in the monument, however, resists the sort of stable memorialization which Octavius (or Plutarch) would impose upon it. Michael Neill remarks that

It is an essential part of the sublime paradox through which the Queen aims to “remake past time” and to deny death itself, that the final scene of her tragedy should be played out in a funerary monument, as a tableau of constancy whose self-conscious theatricality (emphasized by the iteration of words like “show,” “play,” “act,” “perform”) produces perhaps the most splendid elaboration in all drama of the ancient trope of art-as-monument.77

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However, like the pietà in Lear, this monument keeps moving, and resists stable signification in a stubborn inversion of the Reformers’ practice, insisting that there is a significance in drama that cannot be reduced to a stable monumentalized word.

Importantly, it is not clear that Octavius has any further written memorial in mind, at least not in this passage. The writing/memorialization is resisted in favour of dramatic representation. History in this play is ultimately not chronicle or written record of any kind, but physical drama itself—a drama that is not controlled and contained by the Scriptures as Bale’s and Foxe’s was, but a drama that cannot escape (and indeed does not desire to escape) from the signifying power of the body. Eventually Cleopatra’s method of death is discovered because the marks of the asp can be read on her body. Yet before that, the men enter the room to find a display of dead bodies that refuse to “mean” any one thing. Caesar’s final speech, like the ending speeches of all the tragedies, fails to “say” nearly as much as the dead bodies which it tries to interpret. The desire to create monuments at the end of the tragedies is similar to Foxe’s desire to monumentalize the martyrs, but Cleopatra’s awareness that her story will be told, retold, and rewritten, focuses the attention of the play back on the dramatic medium itself. Earning a place in the story is the key here, not earning a place in the monument. By the end of this play, it is clear why “After your death you were better have a bad epitaph than [the players’] ill report while you live” (Hamlet 2.2.525-26).

The emphasis upon dramatic representation itself consistently demands that the audience members become involved in the interpretive processes which the play enacts. Adelman remarks that Shakespeare “deliberately play[s] with these dramatic techniques
in order to draw us into the act of judging.”78 Our responses are dictated by the dualities of the play itself, including not just disjunctions within the drama and its characters, but (as in Lear) between the actor and character,79 this drama also makes us peculiarly aware of the opposing structures of the genre itself. If Antony and Cleopatra is “essentially a tragic experience embedded in a comic structure,”80 it anticipates the regenerative tragi-comic mode of Shakespeare’s last plays.

78 Adelman 39.
79 Worthen also relates this rift to audience participation: “By involving our assessment of the knot intricate binding actor and character, Shakespeare invites us to weigh both the story and its acting, and to find in the case of these huge spirits the specific gravity of the stage” (305).
80 Adelman 52.
IV. *Cymbeline*: British History as Romance

The compilers of the First Folio included *Cymbeline* among the tragedies, presumably because of the dark issues at the centre of the play that hardly seem the province of comedy. Although this play is now widely considered a romance or tragi-comedy, it also has important historical elements. In fact, *Cymbeline* combines many subjects and themes, and its detractors once called it for this reason “much ado about everything.” Like *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Lear*, *Cymbeline* uses Christian symbolism (especially apocalypticism) in a pre-Christian setting. By using a romantic or tragi-comic structure for this play, Shakespeare comes much closer to the model of history set out by Foxe than he does in the earlier tragedies. Nonetheless, even though he uses this structure in order to set up a controlled space for an exploration of the relationship between words and bodies, the results of his experiment are decidedly different.

**Romance and Tragi-comedy**

Although *Cymbeline* is mostly set in Britain, it has been referred to as “Shakespeare’s last Roman play”\(^81\) because of its historical context. Like *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Cymbeline* contains strong Virgilian themes; in particular, there is a similarity between Posthumus and Aeneas, “both of whom suffer in obscurity, ignorant of the larger plot working to secure that outcome.”\(^82\) The play as a whole, notes Parker, echoes “the history of the westering of empire—not just from Troy to Rome but from Rome to Britain.”\(^83\) The Roman setting of the play literalizes its position as a romance; furthermore, the

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\(^{83}\) Parker 192.
circumstances of Posthumus' and Imogen's wanderings certainly reflect a romantic structure. D.E. Landry explains that "In romance, the demonic or night world to which the self descends is the domain of tyrannous circumstances, filled with images of the displacement of the self: a world of doublings, disguisings, misnamings, and mistaken identities." These romance conventions, which Spenser had employed in the *Faerie Queene*, pervade *Cymbeline*, as does the convention of separating the characters into two camps: stereotypical villains (such as the wicked stepmother) are pitted against naive heroes. Shakespeare exploits this folkloric dualism, effecting a complete separation of everyone into two camps by the end of the play. The only two truly unredeemable characters (Cloten and the Queen) die, while the others are all offered redemption and happiness in the final scene. This division is never questioned the way it is in *Lear*, and in *Cymbeline* eventually all of the characters get what they deserve (or even more than they deserve), which brings the play much closer to the world Albany dreamed of inhabiting, where "All friends shall taste / The wages of their virtue, and all foes / The cup of their deservings" (*Lear* 5.3.303-5).

The arena of redemption in which the play concludes is closely connected to its Christian context. Like *Antony and Cleopatra*, this play is set during the reign of Augustus, which returns us to the *pax romana* and the promise of the Incarnation. The play's Christian symbolism anachronistically anticipates, as it does in *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Lear*, a world that has not yet been born. But if the earlier plays bring us to the edge of the apocalypse, *Cymbeline* brings us through it, to witness a new order on the other side. *Cymbeline* moves from a world of innocence to a fall and a final redemption—a movement reflected in the peregrination of Imogen, whose travels and

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trials resemble those of Ecclesia in *Christus Triumphans*. This resemblance is no accident, because Imogen’s flight to the wilderness, like that of Spenser’s Una, echoes the woman of Revelation 12, who represents the church.

From this peregrination to the changing of clothes to the apocalyptic battle in Act 5 and the final redemptive scene, the play is infused with Christian symbolism. David Scott Kastan says of the final scene that “if we hear echoes of Christ’s ‘*consummatum est*,’ it is because the achievement of harmony in the romance plot provides a secular analogue of ‘the rarer action’ of salvation history.”

If there is a sort of analogue of salvation history here, it is all the more appropriate that Shakespeare presents it in a tragi-comic mode. Without denying the appropriateness of “romance” as the genre of this play, I would add that the term “tragi-comedy” describes more accurately the way in which this structure follows the idea of Christian history as a tragedy that is contained within a comic super-structure. Peggy Simonds defines the elements of tragi-comedy to show that *Cymbeline*’s use of this genre was taken from a range of Christian and classical sources.

But it is important to note that these classical elements were part of Augustine’s vision of history—a vision which depends upon a fusion between the intellectual heritage of antiquity and the Judeo-Christian belief system. Throughout *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare combines Roman and British elements to create a complete hybridization. Parker notes that *Cymbeline* also combines folktale and imperial elements; romantic conventions of delay, such as “assumed names, enigmatic riddles, latent identities, and hidden heirs recognized only in a final scene” are presented “within a frame whose intertextual allusions also summon up the obstructive delays that make

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Virgil’s epic of empire the hybrid progenitor of so many Renaissance epics. Yet if we fail to understand that Augustine’s epic had long before absorbed these classical elements and Christianized them, we are in danger of overlooking what made Shakespeare’s inclusion of Christian elements within his classical landscape possible.

Reading Words and Bodies

The main action of Cymbeline rests on a series of readings and misreadings. The ubiquitous presence of letters—exchanged, counterfeited, and used as evidence—points to an obsessive use of the written word in Cymbeline; as David Bergeron notes, “Life in the final plays often seems an unfathomable riddle—a difficult text, resistant to every effort at reading and understanding. Cymbeline certainly contains such intractable experiences. With all those letters floating around in the play, eventually someone will have to read them.” At the beginning of the play, as Posthumus and Imogen part, they desperately exchange words and tokens. In a phrase with oddly violent imagery, Posthumus declares: “with mine eyes I’ll drink the words you send, / Though ink be made of gall” (1.1.100-1). Reading and writing do become increasingly violent acts as the play progresses. Iachimo’s metaphoric rape of Imogen is an act of reading: he declares that he will “write all down” but then finds this precaution unnecessary because the text of Imogen’s body is “riveted / Screw’d to [his] memory” (2.2.43-44).

As the play approaches its potential tragedy, the letters that once were tokens of love become tokens of death, such as the letter from Posthumus which metaphorically slits Imogen’s throat (3.4.32). Pisanio cannot understand how a letter can hold such power:

Parker 198.
O damn'd paper,
Black as the ink that's on thee! Senseless bauble,
Art thou a feodary for this act, and look'st
So virgin-like without? (3.2.19-22)

The discrepancy between inner and outer meaning that the Reformers had feared becomes painfully obvious in the texture of this play. Shakespeare even adopts some of the same language as Foxe to describe incorrect interpretation or textual corruption, as at the moment when Imogen learns that Posthumus has ordered Pisanio to kill her, and she exclaims:

What is here?
The scriptures of the loyal Leonatus,
All turn'd to heresy? Away, away,
Corrupters of my faith! you shall no more
Be stomachers to my heart. (3.4.80-84)

Bergeron points out that this letter “cancels, erases, the other letter, presumably written on Cupid’s tablets…. The erasure of one letter by the other introduces complexity, uncertainty, and division. These letters make problematic the act of interpretation.”89 Shakespeare’s use of the word “heresy” to describe this problematic interpretation makes the event seem more than uncertain—it makes it seem dangerous. The threat of heresy was a major preoccupation for the English Protestants, and Foxe’s history and martyrology is, in many ways, an extended collection of sources which help to prove the Protestant argument—to unravel the knots of heresy and to direct the faithful towards the correct path. The layering of texts within Cymbeline, such as the reference to Ovid’s tales (2.2), serves a similar purpose as Foxe’s picture of Rose Allin: it forces the reader to take

89 Bergeron, “Treacherous Reading” 167.
account of the layers of meaning and to attempt to unravel them. The difference, of course, is that Shakespeare's text rarely attempts to answer the questions it raises.

Like Foxe, Shakespeare realizes the signifying potential of the body, and uses instances of "reading" the body in order to explore the relationship between what is written in a text and what is written on a body. The most emphatic case of this in Cymbeline is Iachimo's reading of Imogen's body. Yet this scene, like many other instances in the play (Imogen's misreading of Cloten's body, to name the most obvious) suggests that reading bodies is not a straightforward process. Whereas Foxe is careful to attempt to control difficult acts of interpretation, Shakespeare has more of a tendency to highlight these interpretive dangers by focusing all of the potentially tragic moments of the play on acts of misinterpretation.

Shakespeare exploits the brutal irony of the misreading of bodies and of people. The act of reading involves taking the visible physical evidence and extrapolating unseen truths; it is this transference which repeatedly causes the protagonists in Cymbeline difficulty. Thus Posthumus reads his wife's character because of a testimony of a particular about her body; similarly, Cymbeline misreads Posthumus because of the "mark" of his social class. Yet most other characters in the play are able to discern Posthumus' character more faithfully (because they are not under the corrupting influence of the Queen, as Cymbeline is). Posthumus is declared a good person from the beginning; a gentleman of the court insists that "By [Imogen's] election may be truly read / What kind of man he is" (1.1.53-54). The use of the word "election" is an appropriation of a Christian term that insists upon a selection that is based not upon visible, but upon invisible characteristics. Posthumus is a good man, but Iachimo's claim that he "sits 'mongst men like a descended god" (1.6.169) is clearly an exaggeration (and meant to
be)—one made all the more apparent by his subsequent error in judgement. Posthumus’ weaknesses are manifest when he quickly jumps to conclusions as soon as Iachimo begins to give evidence of Imogen’s infidelity (it is Philario who must remind Posthumus to ask for more information). For Posthumus, the record of Imogen’s body is the evidence that cannot lie: “Render to me some corporal sign about her” (2.4.119). Iachimo’s description of the mole thus convinces Posthumus of his wife’s infidelity, while we watch and understand that even a mark upon a body is not an unequivocal sign. By placing doubt upon the romance convention of recognition via such marks, Shakespeare brings the entire tradition into question.

One of the difficulties with reading bodies is that they are protean; the dramatic progress of Cymbeline highlights the changing nature of costumes and disguises which frustrate proper interpretation. The apparent physical similarity between Posthumus and Cloten is ironic in light of how different they are within. Cloten’s obsession with Posthumus’ clothes creates the comic moment when Cloten boasts of his garments, and Guiderius retorts that “those clothes /... (as it seems) make thee” (4.2.82-83). This point becomes grotesque when Imogen wakes next to the headless corpse of Cloten and is convinced that it is Posthumus precisely because the clothes are his. She misreads this body as Posthumus misreads her fidelity. Both the good and the evil characters experience discrepancies between the visible and invisible, and it is clear that, in this (temporarily) fallen world, right interpretation will always be frustrated.

Critics have remarked that the clothes-changing motif in Cymbeline, like the one in Lear, has to do with Paul’s maxim about putting off the old man. This may be true, but it is significant that this clothes-changing is literalized, and that it creates a theatre of the grotesque full of unforgettable images. These scenes of interpretive uncertainty and
danger pervade the centre of the play, but by the end, we are left with a different view of the relationship between the reading of bodies and words—a relationship that suggests, as do the Reformers, that it is possible to move from a literal to a spiritual significance in an orderly and orthodox way. This does not suggest the orthodoxy of the church, of course, but the orthodoxy of natural order, including the divine right of kingship.

There is a certain fear throughout this play, as there is in Lear, of nothingness. Imogen meditates upon how she would have watched Posthumus disappear upon the horizon had she watched his boat leave:

I would have broke mine eye-string, crack’d them, but
To look upon him, till the diminution
Of space had pointed him sharp as my needle;
Nay, followed him till he had melted from
The smallness of a gnat to air, and then
Have turn’d mine eye and wept. (1.3.17-22)

Imogen’s imagination of her husband’s disappearance turns into a fear that he will be gone from her permanently—a fear that almost becomes a reality. Later, turning herself into a peasant boy, she exclaims, “I am nothing; or, if not / Nothing to be were better” (4.2.367-68). However, the characters of Cymbeline, unlike those in Lear, are not in danger of disappearing into nothingness. Their essence is readable from the indelible marks on their bodies. Despite the instances of mis-reading the body by individual characters within Cymbeline, the play itself moves toward a suggestion that bodies do ultimately show “truth” in their signifying capacity. Like the converted Jew that Foxe shows with scars all over his body which attest to the truth of his faith, the characters in Cymbeline have marks upon their body which signify the nature of their inner person. Belarius tells his adoptive sons that his scars represent the wars in which he fought for his country:
O boys, this story
The world may read in me: My body's mark'd
With Roman swords, and my report was once
First with the best of note. (3.3.55-58)

His body is, in essence, a record of his own history; without these scars, the boys are not a readable text, and thus they are a blank, omitted from the annals of history. When Guiderius is able to combine this birthright (exemplified by his birthmark) with the scars that he receives in the battle with the Romans, his entrance into history is complete. This echoes the Jacobean interest in the Roman Empire, for the British people realized that, without having been invaded by Rome, Britain would have remained outside of history. As Jodi Mikalachki remarks, "The masculine rite of passage such scars represent for [the princes] personally is a version of the national entry into history by means of the Roman invasion. For early modern historiographers Britain, too, would have remained outside history had she never entered into battle with the Romans." In Cymbeline, there is a certain sense of awe associated with the power of Roman history, and a desire to connect British history to Roman history that is typical of the Jacobean period. However, this "way" inevitably involves the violence of invasion or war. Cymbeline says in his concluding speech, "Never was a war did cease / (Ere bloody hands were wash'd) with such a peace" (5.5.484-85). Although this comment emphasizes the peace that was achieved with unprecedented celerity, the mention of blood makes it impossible to forget that this peace comes only at the price of war and bloodshed.

The motif of scars is also evident in Posthumus' dream, when his brothers are shown "with wounds as they died in the wars" (5.4.29 sd). These scars, like those that the martyrs receive as they die for their beliefs, are a visible record that signifies one's

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place in history because of one’s deeds. But if the martyrs are prompted to these actions by an inner quality, so are Guiderius and Arviragus. They are skilled in battle precisely because of the inner merit of their birth. There is, as Belarius has remarked repeatedly, an inherent quality in the noble body which will eventually show itself for what it is.

Belarius swears to Cymbeline that Guiderius

is better than the man he slew,
As well descended as thyself; and hath
More of thee merited than a band of Clotens
Had ever scar for. (5.5.302-5; my emphasis)

The scars that Guiderius wins defending Britain would not have been sufficient to save him; only when these marks of bravery are combined with his inherited nobility is he able to take his proper place in the natural order. To make the importance of nobility all the more explicit, Shakespeare includes the convention of a mole on Guiderius’ body that is the mark of his birthright.

Thus the play ends with an interpretive finale that moves from the marks upon bodies to their significance. Suddenly the interpretive uncertainty that plagued the earlier scenes seems to dissolve. The previous heretical reading of Imogen’s body is corrected, and she is transferred from the realm of the body into the “piece of tender air” she represents at the end of the play. Mikalachki elucidates this moment:

by presenting Imogen as a piece of tender air, the Soothsayer completes the separation from the earth begun by Lucius when he lifted her from the ground of Wales and the body of “du Champ.” This fancy antiquarian footwork restores Imogen to her husband by reconstituting woman, strongly identified with the land...as air so that she might take her place in the prophetic new order of Roman Britain.91

91 Mikalachki 320-21.
In addition to providing a gendered reading of this process, Mikalachki’s interpretation makes it clear that the final scene arrives at prophecy and spiritual significance only by rising from the earthly level. However, this “other-worldly” quality of the play is achieved only at the price of the grotesque moments of near-tragedy in the middle of the play. Indeed, how can we be expected to be entirely comfortable with a reunion that is based upon a reading of Guiderius’ mole after having witnessed the disaster that resulted from a reading of his sister’s mole? In a way that cannot be entirely glossed over by the play’s happy resolution, the haunting image of the “cinque-spotted” crimson mole on Imogen’s left breast subverts the promise of the “mark of wonder”—the “sanguine star” on Guiderius’ neck.

British History and Apocalypse

One of the most complex interpretive issues in Cymbeline is the place of the British nation. Like Lear, this play is unmistakably Jacobean, reflecting the current political situation and using ancient British history to comment on contemporary Britain. Wickham suggests that Lear was a prologue to the more positive valuation of Britain that Shakespeare offers in Cymbeline:

the drift away from revenge tragedy and toward regenerative tragi-comedy in the first decade of James’s reign...has its true origins in the political consciousness of the British peoples saved from foreign invasion and civil war by the peaceful accession of James I in 1603, by the timely discovery of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605, and the final ratification of the Union of the two Crowns by Act of Parliament in 1608....There followed from [Shakespeare’s] pen a succession of plays which, if obliquely and en passant rather than directly, reflected the fulfilment of prophecy in the advent of a second Brutus in new Troy.92

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92 Wickham 36.
A further positive valuation of James' Britain is the association between Augustus' *pax romana* and the Jacobean peace embodied in King Cymbeline at the end of the play. This peace is achieved in *Cymbeline*, as it partially was by James, through a union of Britain with Rome. Just as Cymbeline makes peace with Rome, so James was entering into negotiations with papal Rome. Thus the British nationalism in the play undergoes a sort of revision; as Frye explains, "a union of Britain and Rome is set over against a nationalistic Britain represented by Cloten and the Queen, and an Italian Rome represented by Iachimo." This combination of British and Roman elements in the play is embodied in the central characters Imogen and Posthumus. Imogen becomes a Roman page before reclaiming her position as a British princess, and Posthumus is, in the words of Knight, "a composite of the British and the Roman—his virtues are throughout pre-eminently the Roman virtues." Posthumus' "Roman virtues" (made obvious by his Roman name) stand in contrast to the Italianate villain Iachimo, while Posthumus' "British virtues" stand in contrast to the fiercely nationalistic dolt Cloten. "Unlike Cloten," notes Parker, "[Posthumus] is British and Roman, Roman and British by turn, in a series of chiastic exchanges that finally make him the play's primary combination of both."

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93 Parker argues that “The Jacobean *pax*, which extended even to negotiations with Papal Rome...by no means negated the ideology of historical transumption in which Britain, and its king, would be the fulfillment and surpassing of Rome” (206-7).
94 Northrop Frye, *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* (New York: Columbia UP, 1965) 110. Mikalachki notes that “Roman Britain came to play a foundational role in the recovery of native origins not only because it provided a context for the male bonding that characterizes modern nationalism but also because it enabled exorcism of the female savagery that challenged both the autonomy and the respectability of nationalism” (316). For more on the fascination with ancient ancestry in seventeenth-century England, see also Graham Parry, *The Trophies of Time: English Antiquarians of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).
96 Parker 200.
Perhaps it is Posthumus' hybrid composition that makes him the most difficult character in the play to read. He is a difficult text ("I cannot delve him to the root," says the First Gentleman in 1.1) that must be deciphered; the relationship between him and the cryptic tablet he is given during his dream makes this connection explicit. In 5.4, Posthumus is presented as a sort of martyr—a depiction that intensifies the imperative for the audience to read him (as Foxe reads his martyrs). After the dream, when Posthumus still believes that he is being sent to his death, he puns with the jailer on his own position as a spectacle for the audience: "So if I prove a good repast to the spectators, the dish pays the shot" (5.4.155-56). Like many of Foxe’s martyrs, Posthumus is ready to meet his own death, but not because he is certain of heavenly glory; it is the jailer who turns the conversation to the subject of Grace, rehearsing the difficulties encountered in the Protestant doctrine that insists on faith in that which cannot be seen or known.

The suggestion of martyrdom in this scene, combined with the play’s Christian context, resonates with images of the apocalypse. Marshall observes that Posthumus’ dream of his family suggests the reunion with the dead on Judgement day, and that

the features of the play’s conclusion, considered singly, are unremarkable in Renaissance drama. Occurring together, however, theophany, battle, reunion, collective judgment, and final peace become profoundly suggestive, for they follow the pattern of events expected to take place on Judgment Day.

Like the apocalyptic elements in Lear, the apocalyptic elements in Cymbeline involve the British nation, and the reunion at the end of the play is clearly a national (as well as a familial) event. Cymbeline’s apocalypticism is also similar to that of Antony and

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97 Another interesting possible linkage between Foxe’s stories of martyrs is Posthumus’ use of the term “Overroasted” to describe his readiness for death (5.4.152). Could this recall Foxe’s famous story of the martyr who told his tormenters that he was cooked well enough on one side, and should be turned over? 98 Marshall 28.
Cleopatra, because these plays share the same time period, they also share the same hint of the advent of Christ. In the nationalistic and the pre-Christian context of apocalypticism, the suggestion is that the traditional millennial promises are capable of being realized in this time-bound world.

Providence and Authority

The condition of fallen interpretation in the play seems to be caused in Cymbeline, as it is in Lear, by a discord in the state. The headless body of Cloten literalizes the political problem in Britain, where the country has thrown off the rule of its head (Rome), and Cymbeline is not the proper head of the state because he is controlled by his wicked Queen. Though the circumstances are quite different, Posthumus is separated from his position as the “head” of his marriage. As the political and domestic bodies become headless corpses, they, like Imogen, fall to the ground (du Champ) and rise again “the happier” to be united with their proper heads. This gradual reunion of heads and bodies is achieved by a series of revelations (or apocalyptic unveilings) that create a sense that proper reading is always possible, even in a fallen world. Frye observes that “The difference between Cymbeline and the earlier problem comedies, then, is that the counter-problem force, so to speak, which brings a festive conclusion out of all the mistakes of the characters, is explicitly associated with the working of a divine providence, here called Jupiter.”

The question in the context of this discussion becomes: who is Jupiter? Should he be identified simply as a pagan god, or does he suggest the Christian God, or James himself?

99 Frye, Natural Perspective 69.
A sense of providential direction in this play is most explicit during Posthumus’
dream in Act 5, when Jupiter makes it absolutely clear that he is in control, and tells the
pleading ghosts not to meddle: “No care of yours it is, you know ‘tis ours” (5.4.100).
When the final events of the play corroborate the prophecy that Jupiter left with
Posthumus during this dream, it is clear that the division that was achieved, and the
happiness, are a result of Jupiter’s guiding hand. This *deus ex machina* is a vivid moment
of theatrical spectacle, and serves to remind Posthumus, and his audience, that all events
are controlled by Providence. This is the same message that is evident in Foxe’s
frontispiece, where all of the action within and between the divided churches is overseen
by a single omnipotent God. Foxe’s understanding of the apocalypse is absolutely
dependent upon this belief in God’s providential control, expressed in the words of
prophecy that will be borne out by the events of history. To this end, Foxe interprets the
events of history in order to discern the directorship of God. This sense of a larger
providential history behind the events in *Cymbeline* has been connected by several critics
to the self-consciously Christian context of the play. For example, G. Wilson Knight
recognizes in this scene the “revelation of a kindly Providence behind mortality’s drama”
and concludes that we may “practically equate Shakespeare’s Jove with Jehovah.”100 Yet
this association remains vague, and most critics tend instead to see this scene as part of a
classical tradition, relating both to theatre and to epic. Leah Marcus says, simply: “In
terms of the play’s contemporary context, Jove is clearly to be identified with King James
I, the creator of Great Britain, who had a similar habit of intruding upon his subjects to
lecture them when his plans for the nation went unheeded or misunderstood.”101

100 Knight 202.
101 Leah M. Marcus, “Cymbeline and the Unease of Topicality,” *The Historical Renaissance: New Essays
on Tudor and Stuart Literature and Culture*, ed. Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier (Chicago: U of
The best way to understand the nature of Providence in *Cymbeline*, however, is in terms of the combination that the play itself offers of British, Roman, and Christian elements. Parker writes that

Commentators have noted not only the strong echoes of the *pax Augusta* in the play’s concluding “peace” but the fact that it was instituted with the birth of Christ—creating, in Augustinian terms, that split in which the Rome achieved through Aeneas and celebrated by Virgil would be definitively surpassed.¹⁰²

The double vision that is achieved through this dual focus opens up the possibility of a vision of unified peace, reflecting James’ motto *Beati pacifici* in terms of his position as a Christian monarch. Thus the play can be read “straight” as a panegyric to James; but, as Marcus observes, “*Cymbeline* displays a number of specific mechanisms that work against the communication of its Stuart message, engendering an ‘unease of topicality’ specific to this play.”¹⁰³ Marcus notes that, although the play does eventually provide a resolution to the interpretive difficulties and the series of misreadings it presents, there is a simultaneous subversion of this arrangement. “By embedding *Cymbeline*’s ‘Jacobean line’ within structures that at least potentially call it into question,” Marcus suggests, “Shakespeare partially separates the play from the realm of authorship and ‘authority,’ reinfuses its topicality with some of the evanescence and protean, shifting referentiality that was still characteristic of Renaissance theater in performance as opposed to authored collections of printed *Workes*.¹⁰⁴ In one sense, it is flattering to stage a scene in which Jupiter can be equated with James. However, the nature of dramatic performance makes stable identification difficult to sustain. By printing his own works, James was attempting to combine the authority of the written word with his authority as king. Shakespeare, the

¹⁰² Parker 204.
¹⁰³ Marcus 138.
¹⁰⁴ Parker 195.
dramatist who never published his own works, operates in the evanescent realm of
performance, denying any of his characters—even the king himself—an "authorized"
place. The distinction between drama as text and drama as performance is key, and it
highlights the difference between Shakespeare's play and Christian apocalyptic writing as
popularized in England by Bale and Foxe.

Patricia Parker identifies Posthumus' dream exclusively with a classical tradition
because

Posthumus, in Shakespeare's play, receives a tablet left by the descending Jupiter,
whose riddling text he cannot decipher, though it foretells the future outcome of
his present suffering, and whose meaning coincides with the ultimate fulfillment of
a plot which, like the Aeneid's, also binds up personal stories and familial struggles
into a larger imperial history.105

However, the issues of interpretation and prophecy in this scene (and in the play) are also
related to the Christian apocalyptic tradition. There are, in fact, two notable differences
between Aeneas' situation and Posthumus' which point to this tradition. The first is that,
when Aeneas is given the shield, the audience certainly understands the full significance
of its pictures, whereas Posthumus' audience, while it may understand the general idea of
the prophecy, is very unlikely to perform the hermeneutical tricks that the Soothsayer does
(tender air to mulier). Secondly, and more importantly, the emphasis in Cymbeline placed
on the book as the conveyor of prophecy betrays this scene's connection to the Christian
tradition, especially because these prophecies are essential to the play's concluding
recognition scene in which, as Frye says, "the truth is torn out of a score of mysteries,
disguisings, and misunderstandings."106 Although Jupiter says he will leave a "tablet"
(5.4.109), when Posthumus awakes he sees it and exclaims, "A book? O rare one, / Be not,

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105 Parker 195.
106 Frye, Natural Perspective 69.
as is our fangled world, a garment / Nobler than that it covers!” (5.4.133-35). This unveiling of prophetic meaning from a book that determines the final outcome of a war and the fate of all the mortals in it is exegetical in the extreme, as meaning is wrested out of the words and events so that a new order may be instituted. Thus, because Cymbeline is a drama that contains apocalyptic elements, and includes a rare prophetic book at centre stage, there are indeed relevant connections between the interpretive practice of Christian apocalyptic and the interpretive cruxes of Cymbeline.

The difference between Shakespeare’s and the Reformers’ apocalyptic presentation of this interplay of words and bodies is that, for Bale and Foxe, the body on stage is a subsidiary of the word that is being presented. As he does in the Acts and Monuments, Foxe frames Christus Triumphans with books; Scripture is the basis for all of the events in the play, and the climactic ending is a scene in which thrones with bibles upon them descend from the heavens. Yet the didactic aim of Protestant theatre was constantly in danger of being undermined by the vitality and protean nature of drama itself. The idea of drama remains absolutely essential to Foxe’s enterprise in the Acts and Monuments, but the dramatic medium is less easy to control than pictures which accompany a text that is characterized by the Protestant “plain style.” By contrast, although Shakespeare’s Cymbeline comes closer to returning to the word and interpretive certainty than the tragedies, it still focuses primarily on the body on stage. It is the aesthetic potential of Cymbeline’s closing gathering of bodies on a stage—this time in a comic rather than a tragic arena—which creates a sense of community that is associated with, though not limited by, ideas of the nation and of the church.

107 The Riverside edition suggests that these lines “indicate that this is an inscribed sheet within elaborate covers.”
The Aesthetic Space and Its Community

The final scene of *Cymbeline* provides a resolution to all the events and misunderstandings in the play and ends with the resounding word “peace.” Furthermore, Posthumus’ tablet returns to the stage as an integral part of the action. In one sense the play *does* end with the word, because the Soothsayer’s interpretation of the tablet gives a textual permanence to the events of the play, thus forging a direct correlation between what Jupiter prophesies and what happens in the world. But this final interpretive act by the Soothsayer is, in a sense, destabilizing. After interpreting the tablet, the Soothsayer revises his own earlier exegesis of his dream; he had mistakenly predicted a Roman victory, and now he “correctly” interprets the dream as a prophecy of the union between Rome and Britain.

Bergeron sees this moment of revisionist historicism as Shakespeare’s assertion that reading should be “an ongoing process, a constant re-reading and reinterpretation. The texts that invade our lives, the texts that our lives in fact constitute, do not remain static as long as readers interpret them.”¹⁰⁸ Moreover, this phenomenon also underlines the arbitrary nature of interpretation, and this ending can suddenly seem ridiculous in its neatness—it portrays a perfection that is foreign to the real-life uncertainties of interpretation in a fallen world. Therefore, Cymbeline’s final proclamation to “publish” (5.5.478) the new peace between Britain and Rome is fraught with political ambiguity.¹⁰⁹

Instead of framing the political elements of the play with words or monumentalized images (such as the statue at the end of *Romeo and Juliet*), Shakespeare leaves the political questions open-ended, cryptic, never monumentalized or stabilized. In

¹⁰⁸ Bergeron, “Treacherous Reading” 168-69.
¹⁰⁹ Philip Edwards further notes that “Those critics who maintain that *Cymbeline* was written by Shakespeare as a tribute to the pacific policies of James and his belief in world peace may wish to reflect on how diametrically opposed to the spirit of the ending of *Cymbeline* were the policies being actively and personally pursued by James in Ireland at the very time when Shakespeare was writing his play” (93). Philip Edwards, *Threshold of a Nation: A Study in English and Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979).
fact, the instant historicization of the battle for which Posthumus invents a rhyme—"Two boys, and old man (twice a boy) a lane, / Preserv'd the Britains, was the Romans' bane" (5.3.57-58)—parodies this idea. Thus we are left with a difference in Shakespeare which results from the construction of a drama that cannot be contained by words. Instead, it keeps turning the signifying power back to the body on stage and focuses the drama upon attempts to read these bodies. But this turning back, this opening up of the drama to questions about the practicality of ever interpreting correctly, gains an added force because Shakespeare is working within Foxe's tradition. Foxe made popular a national Protestant history that takes the apocalypse as its framework and says at every turn that there is a possibility for correct interpretation, even if only in the world to come.

Posthumus speaks to the jailer in Foxean terms, saying that he is certain which way he will go, and the jailer responds, "Your death has eyes in 's head, then; I have not seen him so pictur'd" (5.4.177-78). Even the simplest characters in Shakespeare's play can tell that, without any picture or stable sign, nothing is certain.

In an England where James was authorizing the Bible and writing his own commentary on Revelation, and which was headed towards its own apocalypse, a drama that cannot be tied to correct interpretation could not last in the secular realm any more than it could last in the religious realm for the Protestants who, like Bale and Foxe, ultimately sought a stable textuality where even images exist to support the Word.

We have seen how Shakespeare's presentation of dualism, history, and interpretation in these three plays bears some important similarities to Augustine's model of the two cities. Furthermore, we have noted that Shakespeare's interest in apocalypticism and nationalism seem to be related to common concerns of the day as
popularized by Bale and Foxe. But Shakespeare’s reflections upon these matters went beyond the level of subject matter, and extended into the realm of literary expression. His exploration of these themes is accompanied by reflections upon the relationship between word and drama—reflections that show an attention to (though not a repetition of) earlier writers such as Bale and Foxe. In all of these plays Shakespeare emphasizes the power of dramatic expression—especially in the interstices between action (change) and monumentalization (rest). The gaps between this world and the next, between the book and the Word, between the pilgrim and the citizen, are filled by Augustine in the *City of God* with dramatistic elements that can speak to his audience in the *mean time*. Therefore, Shakespeare’s assertion of the efficacy of drama within this space can also be seen as a descendent of Augustine’s practice.

Augustine’s use of dramatistic elements in the *City of God* can hardly be called a deliberate tactic—it reflects instead the strength of drama, even unconsciously, as an effective rhetorical device. With Bale and Foxe, there is a more specific and conscious use of drama (even if it is carefully controlled), because they both wrote plays. When we look at Shakespeare, dramatist *par excellence*, it is no surprise that his relation to drama is direct, insistent, and extremely self-conscious. However, at this point we may be in a position to ask how much of Shakespeare’s own view of drama is informed by previous uses of it—as an idea as well as a genre. For instance, how much does Shakespeare’s presentation of bad acting (Iago) and good acting (Hamlet) owe to earlier writers who carefully divided drama (at least Bale and Foxe, if not Augustine himself)? Indeed, despite Shakespeare’s insistent valorization of theatre, his plays are not completely without their own hints of anti-theatricalism.
Perhaps the seemingly straightforward dichotomy between the English Renaissance dramatists and the anti-theatrical polemicists obscures an important point: there seems to be in every writer's mind and practice a division between different kinds of drama. If the most famous of playwrights (Shakespeare) found some kinds of drama objectionable, so the most famous of anti-theatricalists (Prynne) was no stranger to drama (either in his writing or in his life). For many in the English Renaissance, the world was a theatre of God's judgements.\textsuperscript{110} For Shakespeare, perhaps it was simply a theatre. Certainly the world had been a stage long before Jaques said so, but what becomes interesting in this context is that so many in the English Renaissance found it necessary to say so. This habit of thought which sees the world as a theatre owes a large part of its efficacy to a Christian tradition that describes Providential history in dramatistic terms.

\textsuperscript{110} Thomas Beard, \textit{The Theatre of God's Judgements} (1597).
Epilogue

When William Crashawe spoke of the "speciall preheminence" of Augustine's books on the City of God, surely he would have been surprised to hear that Augustine's "relation to drama" in the terms I have been suggesting was of any importance. Certainly the most obvious impact of the *City of God* in the English Renaissance has to do with the Reformation writers, who developed his theory and adapted many of the historical, hermeneutical, and eschatological implications that went along with it. Nonetheless, the very nature of Augustine's two cities model, written in a book that, as a totalizing discourse, draws so many genres, tropes, and ideas together, creates an abundance of other areas in which Augustine's influence can be traced.

For instance, my own line of inquiry into the relationship between word, community, and drama in the *City of God* shows how the two cities model also operates on a literary level. This allows us to understand both the relationship between Bale, Foxe, and the literature of the English Renaissance, and the relationship between Shakespeare and the Reformation. More broadly, this sort of analysis enables us to trace the story of Augustine's influence in Renaissance England, and to ask whether the vexed debates over drama in the seventeenth century had anything to do with this earlier heritage of dramatism.

Despite the large chronological span we have negotiated up to this point, the story is far from over. The *City of God* continued to speak to various communities—of readers, visionaries, or even playgoers—in a language that employed dramatistic elements to create an imaginative space, a literary space, for people who found themselves caught in one world, yet aspired to the next. For a brief view of the future of
this legacy, let us begin where we left off, in 1611, a full twelve centuries after the fall of Rome...

In 1611, Simon Forman recorded a performance of *Cymbeline* at the Globe. This was also the year *The Tempest* was written—a play that highlights the crucial relationship between drama and the book through its portrayal of a self-consciously dramatic protagonist whose power comes from his knowledge of magical books. Two years later the Globe burned down during a performance of *Henry VIII*. Although ostensibly a history play, *Henry VIII* shares with the late romances an interest in pageantry, in the theme of reconciliation, and in the idea of a providential control behind history. Like *Cymbeline*, *Henry VIII* includes a pivotal moment of *deus ex machina*, but whereas the descent of Jupiter in *Cymbeline* is only obliquely related to James, the ring that saves Cranmer in *Henry VIII* is the King’s, and it is he who descends to protect this Protestant martyr. This play, which celebrates England as a Protestant nation, and Cranmer as a hero of the faith, is a drama Foxe might have appreciated (as well he should have, since Shakespeare took his account of Cranmer’s trial scene directly from the *Acts and Monuments*).

Cranmer’s prophecy at the baptism of Elizabeth predicts that during her reign "God shall be truly known, and those about her / From her shall read the perfect ways of honor" (5.4.36-37). Right religion, right reading, and right living are thus united in this golden age of English history. This millennial peace is not limited to Elizabeth, however:

Nor shall this peace sleep with her; but as when
The bird of wonder dies, the maiden phoenix,
Her ashes new create another heir
As great in admiration as herself. (5.4.39-40)
Eschewing any sense of ambiguity or cryptic prophecy, *Henry VIII* ends with a clear encomium to James. Not only will this “future” king carry on the new peace in England, insists Cranmer, but

> Where ever the bright sun of heaven shall shine,  
> His honor and the greatness of his name  
> Shall be, and make new nations. He shall flourish,  
> And like a mountain cedar reach his branches  
> To all the plains about him. (5.4.50-54)

The image of the tree with branches recalls the same symbol for royal lineage in *Cymbeline*. But at the same time, this prophecy’s emphasis on the image of the phoenix suggests that there will be other, less linear, benefits of James’ reign. When Cranmer speaks of the “new nations” bearing the name of the King, the audience surely would have thought of the New World, particularly Virginia (named for the Virgin Queen herself) and its city, Jamestown.

The New World had long captured the poetic imagination. 110 years after Thomas More’s *Utopia*, Francis Bacon imagined a place called New Atlantis. If we only knew what More had said about the *City of God* in his lectures of 1501, we would be in a better position to understand the legacy of the *City of God* in English Renaissance literary imaginings of the New World. However, there are more than vague connections between the allusion to Jamestown in Shakespeare’s last play and the dramatic imagination of Augustine’s two cities.

In 1610, a copy of John Healey’s translation of the *City of God* was presented to James. Furthermore, the preface of the work alludes to the travels, both imaginative and literal, of the translator:

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1 See Mark Vessey, “*The Citie of God* (1610) and the London Virginia Company,” *Augustinian Studies* 30.2 (257-81), note 83.
your late imaginary, but now actual Trauailer, then to most-conceited Viraginia, now to almost-concealed Virginia; then a light, but not lewde, now a sage and allowed translator; then of a scarce knowne nouse, now a famous Father, then of a deuised Country scarce on earth, now of a desired Citie sure in heauen; then of Vtopia, now of Eutopia.²

Healey had traveled to the New World because he had dealings with the London Virginia Company. It appears that William Crashawe, who was involved in commissioning this translation, wanted to use the City of God to inspire more travelers to cross (or to finance crossings of) the Atlantic.³ Healey’s City of God literally traversed this ocean, for it was recorded among the books in the Virginia library in 1621.⁴

The New World, though taking its original place-names from the monarchs of Britain, was also, even primarily, a land of utopic visions that belonged to the heavenly king. Casting themselves as pilgrims and religious exiles, many of the colonists would find not just in the Bible, but in the writings of the church fathers and sixteenth-century Reformers, inspirational material that spoke to their position as exiles and helped them to imagine the glory to come. These colonists saw themselves poised between this world and the next, and at first viewed the New World as a desert space—a “place between” where they would await the End. But this prevailing sense of apocalypticism, like so many before it, was gradually de-eschatologized. The City of God became the “shining city on a hill.” The citizens of the New World sought ways to build this city not just with mortar and brick, but with words.

By 1700, New England had its historian. In the Magnalia Christi Americana, Cotton Mather wrote the history of the New English church, calling his first book

² Preface to the Earl of Pembroke.
³ Vessey asks, “Is it conceivable that among those reputedly ‘desiring’ an English translation of Augustine’s ‘great and difficult’ work, some—including perhaps a few of the more influential—thought it a book to stir the hearts or loosen the purse strings of any as yet unwilling to adventure to or for Virginia?” (“Citie” 273). He later suggests that “the preaching of the Virginia colony after 1608 created, or rather presupposed, a climate of opinion among learned supporters of the enterprise in which a person acquainted, if none too familiar, with Augustine’s City of God might think of arranging for its translation” (“Citie” 275).
⁴ See Vessey, “Citie” note 84.
“Antiquities: A Field Prepared for Considerable Things to be Acted.” Mather’s New England fathers are peregrini in America, and actors on its stage. He uses a variety of genres, and borrows heavily from Eusebius, Foxe, Jerome, Augustine, and others. His purpose is to record the “Acts and Monuments” of the church; furthermore, he states that he is “going to give unto the Christian reader an history of some feeble attempts made in the American hemisphere to anticipate the state of the New-Jerusalem” (46). Like Augustine, Mather realized that the earthly city was just an image of, and not a realization of, the heavenly city.

Making the reverse journey across the Atlantic in this century, T.S. Eliot (a descendent of John Eliot, one of the colonists lauded by Mather) returned again to the words of Augustine, and wrote of “unreal cities” in The Waste Land:

What is the city over the mountains
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal

Like Rome, the cities of the world seemed to be falling. The tumbling towers left only the imaginative landscape of the poem itself, and this poet-dramatist, like many before him, found that the City of God was both a drama and a book. Most of all, it was a structure that could speak to the community of pilgrims in the mean time. Reaching the point from which he did not hope to turn again, Eliot proclaimed,

“Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something upon which to rejoice.”

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5 Magnalia Christi Americana; or the Ecclesiastical History of New England from its First Planting, in the Year 1620, unto the Year of Our Lord 1698, 2 vols. (Hartford: Silas Andras and Son, 1855).
6 “To Carthage then I came, burning.” (Confessions, Book 3).
Figure 1

ILLVSTRIVM
MAIORIS BRITANNIAE
Scripтурum, hoc est, Angliae, Cameriae,
ac Scotiae Summarii, in quasdam centurias distribulm, cum diversitate doctrinarum et annorum recitata supplicatione per omnes ataces a Lapheto sanctissimi nostri filio, ad annum domini. M. D. XLVIII.
Autore Ioanne Balebo s. d. Volca.

John Bale presenting his book to Edward VI
Frontispiece from Bale’s *Scriptorum Illustrium maioris Britanniae...Summarium* (1548)
A Literal Picture of the Woman in the Wilderness and the Whore of Babylon
Title Page from the Second Part of Bale’s *Image of Both Churches* (c.1551)
Figure 3

The Frontispiece of Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* (1563)
The burning of John Hooper, Bishop of Gloucester
Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*
The burning of Anne Askew with John Adams, John Lacels, and Nicholas Belenian
Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*
The Initial Letter "C" of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, picturing Elizabeth I
Figure 7

Thomas Cranmer thrusts his hand into the fire
Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*
The burning of Rose Allin’s Hand
Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*
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