

RADICAL RELIGION FROM  
SHAKESPEARE TO MILTON

*Figures of Nonconformity in Early Modern England*

KRISTEN POOLE



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## CHAPTER I

### *The puritan in the alehouse: Falstaff and the drama of Martin Marprelate*

In the early fifteenth century, a pious, innocent man was put to a most gruesome death – at least, that is the story according to his sixteenth-century chronicler, the Protestant bishop John Bale. A faithful follower of John Wyclif and an avid reader of the Scriptures, this gentleman was a “moste valyaunt warryoure of Iesus Christ” (Figure 3) who courageously battled that Whore of Babylon, the Roman Catholic church:

In all adve[n]terouse actes of wordlye manhode was he ever bolde, stronge, fortunate, doughtye, noble, & Valeau[n]t. But never so worthy a conquerour as in this his present conflyct with the cruell and furyouse frantyeck kyngedome of Antichrist. Farre is this Christen knyght more prayse worthy, for that he had so noble a stomake in defence of Christes Verite agaynst those Romyshe supersticyons, than for anye temporall nobynesse eyther of bloude, byrthe, landes, or of marcyall feates.<sup>1</sup>

Against an onslaught of hostile questions from an archbishop and his henchmen, those “spygthfull murtherers, ydolaters, and Sodom-ytes,” the Christian knight firmly stood his ground, bravely defending the opinions he had gleaned from the Gospel concerning the material substance of the eucharist (merely symbolic), the sacrament of confession (invalid), and the efficacy of pilgrimages (pointless). But alas, the “bloud thirstye rauenuours” that were his opponents sentenced him to death, and not a pretty one at that. The faithful prisoner, bound “as though he had bene a most heynouse traytour to the crowne,” was carted from the Tower to St. Giles Field and a new pair of gallows. There he fell to his knees, praying “God to forgeve his enemyes.” Standing, he “behelde the multytude” and exhorted them “to folowe the lawes of God wrytten in the scripturs,” and to be wary of teachers that are “contrarye to Christ in theyr conuersacyon and lvynges.” Finally, the unfortunate was hung in “cheanes of yron and so consumed a lyve in the fyre,



Figure 3 Title page of John Bale's *Brefe Chronycle concernynge the Examynacyon and death of the blessed martyr of Christ syr Johan Oldecastell the lorde Cobham* (Antwerp, 1544)

praysynge the name of God so longe as his lyfe lasted. In the ende he commended his sowle into the handes of God, and so departed hens most Christenlye."<sup>2</sup>

The subject of this account was Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham, reputed leader of a Lollard insurrection in 1414. Bale clearly hopes to establish Oldcastle as an early martyr of the Protestant Reformation, proclaiming that Oldcastle had "a tryumphau[n]t Victorye ouer his enemyes by the Vertye which he defended," and that he "dyed at the importune sute of the clergye, for callinge vpon a Christen reformacyon in that Romyshe church of theyrs, & for manfullye standynge by the faythfull testymonyes of Jesu."<sup>3</sup> John Foxe, Bale's friend and former housemate,<sup>4</sup> incorporated this version of events in the 1563 edition of his martyrology *Actes and Monumentes*, with Oldcastle's death graphically illustrated in a woodcut (Figure 4). This hagiographic depiction drew sharp attacks from those who adhered to the fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century image of Oldcastle as a devious heretic and traitor. In response to such criticism, Foxe added a thirty-page "Defense of Lord Cobham" in his 1570 edition, a gesture which at once increased the Lollard's popularity and highlighted his controversial status. Oldcastle became a prominent cultural figure in Elizabethan England, his trial and death subsequently recounted in Stowe's *Annales*, Holinshed's *Chronicles*, and elsewhere, and his antics dramatized in the anonymous play *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*.<sup>5</sup> For some, Oldcastle was a schismatic rebel who betrayed his friend and king Henry V;<sup>6</sup> for others, he was the valiant martyr we see in Bale's account, a courageous force of proto-Protestant reform.<sup>7</sup>

In his own story of Henry V, Shakespeare again put Oldcastle on the stage – in the form of Sir John Falstaff. Shakespeare's audience readily identified Falstaff as a representation of Oldcastle. In early performances of *1 Henry IV* the character appears to have actually been called "Oldcastle," and even after he was re-dubbed "Falstaff" extensive historical and literary evidence indicates that the public did not quickly forget the character's original and "true" identity.<sup>8</sup> The name "Oldcastle" was retained for private (including court) performances, and many seventeenth-century authors indicate that "Falstaff" was widely understood as an alias for the Lollard leader.<sup>9</sup> ("Falstaff," it should be noted, was itself a name with Lollard connotations.<sup>10</sup>) In *1 Henry IV*, Hal addresses Falstaff as "my old lad of the castle" in their very first exchange (1.2.41), although the oft-



*The description of the cruell Martyrdome of  
fyr Iohn Oldcastle Lord Cobham.*



Figure 4 The martyrdom of Sir John Oldcastle, as depicted in *The First Volume of the Ecclesiasticall history containyng the Actes and Monumentes of thynges passed in euery kynges tyme . . . Newly recognised and enlarged by the Author John Foxe*, 2 vols. (1570), 1:762.

quoted Epilogue from *2 Henry IV* – “Oldcastle died martyr, and this is not the man”<sup>11</sup> – vehemently protests the association of Falstaff and Oldcastle.

This defensive epilogue not only indicates how extensively audiences did equate the two, but also suggests the need for a public apology. While critics have traditionally assumed that the name-change took place in order to placate the outraged Elizabethan Lords Cobham, it is just as likely – if not more so – that the playwright found himself needing to appease disgruntled members of a nationalistic audience who considered Oldcastle an important early hero of the English Reformation.<sup>12</sup> Post-Falstaffian representations of Oldcastle frequently seek to remedy the knight’s battered

image. *The First Part of the True and Honourable History of the Life of Sir John Oldcastle, the Good Lord Cobham* (1599), as the title suggests, redeems Bale's Oldcastle from Falstaff's fleshy sins; the Prologue again asserts that the Oldcastle-Falstaff transformation was common knowledge: "It is no pampered glutton we present, / Nor aged counsellor to youthful sin, / But one, whose virtue shone above the rest, / A valiant martyr, and a vertuous peer" (ll. 6-9).<sup>13</sup> Written by Michael Drayton, Anthony Munday and others, this play was commissioned by the savvy theatrical entrepreneur Philip Henslowe, who obviously calculated that the popular demand to see Oldcastle restored as a heroic martyr was great enough to be profitable. The urge to recuperate the image of the pious Lollard was also illustrated in John Weever's hagiographic poem *The Mirror of Martyrs, or The life and death of that thrice valiant Capitaine, and the most godly Martyre Sir John Old-castle knight Lord Cobham* (1601). The need for such ardent counter-representations testifies to Falstaff's popularity as well as his infamy.

The early modern desire to restore Falstaff's righteous Lollard origins has found an analogue in recent scholarly desires to recover Falstaff's original identity. Seeking to purify Shakespeare's text from the coercive influences of the censor, prominent editors have reinstated Falstaff's original name of "Oldcastle."<sup>14</sup> This decision has led to a profusion of critical debate and meditation on topics ranging from editorial protocol to the theatrical dynamics of fictional character.<sup>15</sup> But these discussions have largely left unanswered crucial questions about Shakespeare's depiction of a well-known Lollard: why, contrary to so many of the contemporary representations, did Shakespeare take the figure of this "noble Christen warryour" and mold him into the Rabelaisian, gluttonous coward of the *Henriad*? Conversely, why did he deviate so far from the alternative tradition of depicting Oldcastle as a bellicose heretic, a serious martial threat to king and state?

Some critics maintain that "Shakespeare simply blundered"<sup>16</sup> – that he more or less picked a name out of a historical hat, a name which happened to have unfortunate political consequences. Others assert, more plausibly, that Shakespeare intended to satirize the Elizabethan Lords Cobham (Sir William Brooke and his reputedly less competent son and successor Henry) related by marriage to the Lollard Oldcastle.<sup>17</sup> Neither of these answers seems satisfying. The notion of the playwright innocently and ignorantly choosing

the name of a figure who had become hotly contested as a cultural icon by competing religious/political factions does not seem likely. And while Elizabethan and Jacobean gossips seem to have reveled in the Falstaffian portrayal of the Lord Cobhams' namesake, thus far scholars have established no clear motive for personal parody; rather, there were strong reasons to avoid conflict with William Brooke, then Lord Chamberlain and in control of the theatres.<sup>18</sup>

In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate that the conversion of Oldcastle into Falstaff was neither haphazard nor a local moment of satire; nor was it, as some critics have supposed, a "profoundly original . . . representation" or a "daring and provocative inspiration," an innovative departure from the stereotypical image of religious reformers.<sup>19</sup> Rather, I will argue that Falstaff – in all of his sack-swilling glory – both catalyzed and epitomized the early modern representation of the stage puritan. The years immediately preceding the creation of the *Henriad* witnessed the extended and rambunctious pamphlet warfare known as the Marprelate controversy; originating with the illicit anti-episcopal pamphlets of the pseudonymous "Martin Marprelate," this textual phenomenon evoked widespread public mirth and official outrage. Borrowing from Marprelate's own comic and often grotesque style, a bevy of hired authors fired back, attacking Martin in satirical pamphlets and often violent theatrical performances. Dramatizing the historical persona of Oldcastle, a renowned reformist leader, Shakespeare followed the pattern that the anti-Martinists had established for representing religious dissent. In the process, Falstaff assumes the characteristics of Martin Marprelate himself, reproducing Martin's irreverence for established authority and bringing the dynamics of religious controversy into a burgeoning sphere of public print culture.

The Marprelate tracts grew out of frustration over a stagnating process of ecclesiastical reform. In the late 1580s, "popish" vestments and ceremonies were still an integral part of the English church, and in 1583 the conservative John Whitgift had been appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. As the desired reforms became more illusory, individuals such as the popular twenty-four-year-old preacher John Penry began illegally publishing attacks on the bishops and nonpreaching (often nonresident) clergy. The church authorities felt the sting of these attacks and appointed John Bridges, Dean of Salisbury, as their spokesman. But his *Defense of the government*

established in the *Church of Englande for ecclesiasticall matters* (1587), a large quarto volume containing 1400 pages of “lumbering orthodoxy,” did little to stop the flow of antiprelatical attacks.<sup>20</sup> Early in 1588 Penry sallied forth with the *Exhortation*, a scathing assault on the bishops, and in April of the same year the young John Udall challenged the episcopacy with *The State of the Church of England laide open*. The printer for many of these pamphlets was Robert Waldegrave, whose printing press was finally seized and destroyed in the spring of 1588.<sup>21</sup>

According to legend, during the chaos surrounding the destruction of his press Waldegrave managed to escape with a box of types hidden under his cloak.<sup>22</sup> Armed with these types and a newly acquired press, Waldegrave was able to help launch the guerrilla pamphlet warfare of Martin Marprelate. In October of 1588, Martin’s first clandestine tract *The Epistle* exploded onto the scene, quickly circulating in and around London. Intended as an introduction to *The Epitome* (a critical summary of John Bridges’s work), *The Epistle* hailed the “terrible priests” in a riotously irreverent and comic tone, a stark contrast to the stodgy pedantry of Bridges’s *Defense*. Martin Marprelate (a pseudonym for one or more undetermined authors, most likely including Penry, Udall, and Job Throk-morton<sup>23</sup>) informs his readers from the first that he must play the fool, since that is the appropriate response to Bridges’s text: “Because I could not deal with his booke commendable, according to order / vnless I should be sometimes tediously dunsticall and absurd.”<sup>24</sup> In a subsequent tract, *Hay any worke for Cooper*, he asks, “The Lord being the authour both of mirth and grauitie / is it not lawfull in it selfe / for the trueth to vse eyther of these wayes?” (14). Martin recognizes the public’s apathy regarding ecclesiastical controversy, and seeks a means to attract their attention: “perceiuing the humors of men in these times . . . to be giuen to mirth. I tooke that course” (*Hay*, 14).

While the text bursts with laughter (“Ha ha ha,” “Tse tse tse,” “Wo ho how”), the attack on the bishops is ominously real: “All our L[ord] B[ishops] I saye / are pettie Popes / and pettie vsurping Antichristes” writes Martin in *The Epistle* (8). Marprelate’s chief weapons are ridicule and insult. Rather than confute the authority of an episcopal church government through biblical analysis (the standard approach of most reform-minded authors), Martin endeavors to mar the prelates with more personal smears. He laments that

“we haue so many swine / dumbe dogs / nonresidents with their iourneimen the hedge priests / so many lewd liuers / as thecues / murtherers / adulterers / drunkards / cormorants / raschals / so many ignorant & atheistical dolts / so many couetous popish B[ishops] in our ministry: & so many and so monstrous corruptions in our Church” (*Epistle*, 33). To illustrate his claims, Martin relates the personal foibles of bishops and ministers with unmitigated zest and extensive poetic license; he promises, “In this booke I wil note all their memorable pranckes” (*Epistle*, 41).

Geoffrey Jones, a pastor from Warwickshire and a regular at the local alehouse, became an exemplary victim of Martin’s witty, sarcastic narration. Once, while frequenting the alehouse, Jones flew into a rage (Martin speculates that Jones had either been asked to settle his account or had lost money gambling) and “sware he would neuer goe againe into it.” “Although this rash vow of the good priest” was much to the dismay of the alewife, Martin informs us that “the tap had great quietnes and ease therby / which coulde not be quiet so much as an houre in the day / as long as Sir Iefferie resorted vnto the house” (*Epistle*, 42). Jones soon repents his vow of abstinence, but is hesitant to break his oath; “And so he hired a man to carie him vpon his backe to the alehouse / by this meanes he did not goe / but was caried thither / wherevnto he made a vow neuer to go” (*Epistle*, 42). Not only do Martin’s cynical comments on this compromise mock Sir Geoffrey, but this episode serves as an allegory for the bishops’ manipulation of scriptural loopholes.

Martin inflicts the greatest harm on the clergy by simply not taking them seriously; for him, nothing in the episcopacy is sacrosanct. He openly scoffs at Archbishop Whitgift (whom he hails with such names as “John Cant,” “Dumb John,” and “Don John”), and claims that Dean Bridges has been playing “the fool . . . in the pulpit” (*Epistle*, 43). He mocks the bishops’ mitre with parodic titles such as “my horned Masters of the Confocation house” (*Epistle*, 5), and provides them with helpful, moralistic “true” stories:

Olde doctor Turner . . . had a dog full of good qualities. D. Turner, hauing inuited a B[ishop] to his table / in dinner while called his dog / and told him that the B. did sweat. (You must think he labored hard ouer his trencher.) The dogg flies at the B. & took of his corner capp (he thought belike it had bene a cheese cake) and so away goes the dog with it to his master. Truely, my masters of the cleargie / I woulde neuer weare corner cap againe / seeing dogs runne away with them. (*Epistle*, 43)

With this one tale, Martin inflicts more damage to the bishops' image than tomes of biblical exegesis could ever have accomplished. Now the bishops not only had egg on their faces, but cheesecake on their heads; who could take them seriously? Here, as elsewhere, Martin proves himself a master of timing. With this ridiculous image of dog, priest, and cheesecake before us, Martin immediately asks the bishops a pointed and sobering question: "May it please you . . . to tell me the cause / when you have leysure / why so many opinions & errors are risen in our Church / concerning the ministry?" (*Epistle*, 43–44). The question becomes rhetorical. The bishops, represented as buffoons, are disempowered and cannot respond.

Martin's charm comes from what Christopher Hill termed a "witty, rumbustious, savage and extremely effective colloquial style."<sup>25</sup> Martin writes in a vivid, informal first person; he is part reporter, part neighbor, part preacher, part gossip. *The Epistle* contains abundant anecdotal accounts of the bishops' travesties, from not paying their bills to stealing cloth to bowling on Sundays. He claims to be gathering rumors and the sentiments of parishioners, printing such "reports" in their own words. Martin even plays the comedian and does impersonations; here he mimics the Bishop of Gloucester preaching on St. John, coming to "the very pithe of his whol sermon": "Iohn / Iohn / the grace of God / the grace of God / the grace of God: gracious Iohn / not graceles Iohn / but gracious Iohn. Iohn / holy Iohn / holy Iohn / not Iohn ful of holes / but holy Iohn" (*Epistle*, 47).

For twelve months, Martin harassed the bishops in his hit-and-run style. The infuriated authorities organized large-scale hunts for the underground Marprelate press, but always arrived just after it had moved on. *The Epistle* was followed by five equally lively tracts, and the persona of Martin was joined by his sons, Martin Jr. and Martin Sr., who engaged in fraternal bickering after the younger brother took the liberty of publishing one of their father's manuscripts which he had "found" lying under some bushes, dirty, crumpled, and only partially legible.<sup>26</sup> The Marprelate tracts were enormously popular. "England falles a Martining and a marring," complains one pamphleteer;<sup>27</sup> Martin, on the other hand, chuckles, "I haue bene entertained at the Court: Euerye man talkes of my worship. Manye would gladly receiue my bookes / if they coulde tell where to finde them" (*Epitome*, sig. A2<sup>r</sup>). Martin's tactic of using humor to foster widespread ecclesiastical debate had paid off; the tracts, according

to Hill, soon became “the biggest scandal of Elizabeth I’s reign.”<sup>28</sup> Hill observes that “Martin’s rude, personalizing style appealed because it was subversive of degree, hierarchy and indeed the great chain of being itself. The shocking thing about his tracts was that their rollicking popular idiom, in addition to making intellectuals laugh, deliberately brought the Puritan cause into the market place.”<sup>29</sup>

Not everyone, of course, found this an endearing quality: the bishops were confounded and the queen was not amused. Following the publication of *The Epitome*, Richard Bancroft preached against Martin Marprelate at Paul’s Cross, and Thomas Cooper, Bishop of Winchester, wrote *An Admonition to the People of England* (1589) defending the episcopate and providing scriptural authority for the bishops’ large incomes.<sup>30</sup> Such counterattacks merely became fuel for Martin’s fire, and he entitled his next pamphlet *Hay any worke for Cooper* (an echo of the common London street cry, “Ha’ ye any work for the cooper?”) in the Bishop of Winchester’s honor.<sup>31</sup> When paternalistic “admonitions” failed to quench Martin-mania, the tracts were categorically outlawed. Legal measures proved equally futile, however, and even the Earl of Essex allegedly pulled a Marprelate tract from his cloak, waved it before his queen, and demanded “What will become of me?”<sup>32</sup> Martin reveled in the mischief he was causing; Martin Senior tauntingly mimics the Archbishop of Canterbury, having him lament to his servants, “No warning will serue them; they growe worse and worse . . . I thinke I shall grow starke madde with you, vnlesse you bring him [in].”<sup>33</sup>

After futile attempts to take the Martinists by force, sermon, or dense theological prose, the bishops finally hired mercenaries who could challenge Martin on his own ground: John Lyly, Robert Green, Anthony Munday, and the young Thomas Nashe (Penry’s former associate at Cambridge). These new arrivals studied Martin’s style, learned to imitate it, and for the next six months pamphlets were furiously hurled back and forth. Colorful insults flew, and each side lampooned the other with zeal and relish. New personae entered the scene (Mar-Martine, Pasquill, Marphoreus, Cutbert Curryknave, and Plaine Percevall the Peace-maker) as the pamphlet warfare took on a plot of its own. Characters made personal challenges to other characters and formed alliances. At one point rumors even filled London that Martin was dead; *Martins months minde, that is, A Certaine report, and true description of the Death, and*

*Funeralls, of olde Martin Marre-prelate* (1589) reports, “some say hee was taken by the Sp[aniard]s and burnt in the Groyne” (sig. E2<sup>v</sup>). The “Groin” was the English name of a battle site in Essex’s military expedition to Cadiz, but the possibility of military heroism is quickly deflated by bawdy humor; Lyly writes, “But soft *Martins*, did your father die at the *Groyne*? It was well groapt at, for I knew him sicke of a paine in the groyne.”<sup>34</sup> (Martin’s “sons” capitalized on these rumors. In *The iust censure and reproofe of Martin Iunior*, Martin Junior laments, “I weene not, if my father should be hurt, either at the Groine, or at the suburbes of Lisbone” [sig. A2<sup>r</sup>], while the Archbishop of Canterbury is quoted as saying, “He died at the Groine, as they saie? Naie, heele be hanged ere heele die there. He is in some corner of England, lurking and doing mischiefe” [sig. A4<sup>v</sup>]. Martin later reappeared in another pamphlet to assure his readership that he was alive and well.) Martin was soon portrayed on the stage and became the target of broadsides; Mar-prelate was attacked by Mar-Martine who in turn came under fire from Marre Mar-Martin. *Antimartinus* (1589) took up the cause in Latin. The controversy became so prominent that even Gabriel and Richard Harvey and Francis Bacon joined in the pamphlet battle.<sup>35</sup>

The anti-Martinists amplified the grotesque undertones of the Martinist tracts. Martin Marprelate, according to Neil Rhodes, originated the grotesque comic prose of the 1590s.<sup>36</sup> Throughout Martin’s writing, the prelates, those “Carnal and sensles beastes,” “monstrous and vngodly wretches,” revel with their “bo[o]sing mates” in a world of social madness and hierarchical inversion. Martin blasts, “horrible and blasphemous beastes / whither will your madnes growe in a while / if you be not restrained?”<sup>37</sup> In the anti-Martinist tracts, elements of the carnival grotesque become explicit and predominant, as Martin’s own rhetorical strategies are turned against him with full force. Lyly specifically invokes Martin’s strategy: “for whatsoeuer shall seeme lauish in this Pamphlet, let it be thought borrowed of *Martins* language” (*Pappe*, sig. A4<sup>r</sup>). Anti-Martinist authors portray Martin as “the Ape, the dronke, and the madde”:<sup>38</sup> he copulates, vomits, drinks, gorges himself and gives birth. In *An Almond for a Parrat* (1589) Nashe overtly asserts he will attack the puritan “Hipocrites” by “imitating . . . that merry man Rablays.”<sup>39</sup>

In the anti-Martinist pamphlets, Martin becomes the Bakhtinian grotesque body *par excellence*, the archetype of Bakhtin’s description: Martin’s form “discloses its essence as a principle of growth which



exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation. This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body, the link in the chain of genetic development, or more correctly speaking, two links shown at the point where they enter into each other.<sup>40</sup> Nashe and Lyly depict Martin and his “neast” as a swarm of monstrous, intertwined beings; death, birth, sex, and bodily functions coexist. Martin’s birth, as described by Nashe, becomes a defecatory process of Gargantuan proportions: “thinke that nature tooke a scouring purgation, when she voided all her imperfections in the birth of one *Martin*.”<sup>41</sup> Elsewhere, Martin epitomizes the grotesque merging of birth and death. In *A Countercuffe given to Martin Junior* (1589), the self-proclaimed cavalier Pasquill responds to the rumors of Martin’s death, “If the Monster be deade, I meruaile not, for hee was but an error of Nature, not long liued: hatched in the heat of the sinnes of *England* . . . The maine buffets that are giuen him in euery corner of this Realme, are euident tokens, that beeing thorow soust in so many showres, hee had no other refuge but to runne into a hole, and die as he liued, belching” (I: 59). This simultaneity of dying and hatching recurs in Lyly’s description of Martin in *Pappe with an hatchet*:

I sawe through his paper coffen, that it was but a cosening cor[p]se, . . . drawing his mouth awrie, that could neuer speake right; goggling with his eyes that watred with strong wine; licking his lips, and gaping, as though he should loose his childes nose, if he had not his longing to swallowe Churches; and swelling in the paunch, as though he had been in labour of a little babie, no bigger than rebellion; but truth was at the Bishoppes trauaile: so that *Martin* was deliuered by sedition, which pulls the monster with yron from the beastes bowells. When I perceived that he masked in his rayling robes, I was so bolde as to pull off his shrowding sheete, that all the worlde might see the old foole daunce naked.<sup>42</sup>

A man in a coffin, feigning death yet childlike, giving birth through his bowels, masquing in a shrouding sheet: this, to many, was a sixteenth-century image of the puritan.

Such caricatures were soon translated onto the stage. While the texts for these theatrical entertainments have not survived (if they ever existed<sup>43</sup>), both Martin and his foes repeatedly and pervasively allude to the popular anti-Martinist lampoons which played in private and public theatres.<sup>44</sup> In *The iust censure and reproofe of Martin Iunior*, Martin Senior writes that “the Canturburie Caiphias, with the rest of his Antichristian beasts, who beare his abominable marke,

were content in a maner to turne his purposes from a serious matter, to a point of jesting, wherewith they would haue onely rimers and stage-players . . . to deale” (sig. A2<sup>r</sup>). In *Theses Martinæ*, Martin Junior writes of “the stage-players, poore seelie hunger-starued wretches” who “for one poore pennie . . . will be glad on open stage to play the ignominious fooles, for an houre or two together. And therefore, poore rogues, they are not so much to be blamed; if being stage-players, that is, plaine rogues . . . they in the action of dealing against Maister Martin, haue gotten them many thousande eie witnesses, of their wittlese and pittifull conceites” (sig. D2<sup>v</sup>). These “conceites” – by Martin’s own account extremely popular – appear to have been, in the words of Charles Nicholl, “coarse, sensational performances, full of violent antics.”<sup>45</sup> An especially brutal staging by the boys of Saint Paul’s probably caused the company to be shut down in 1589.<sup>46</sup> Pasquill writes in *A Countercuffe* of “the Anatomie latelie taken of [Martin], the blood and the humors that were taken from him, by launcing and worming him at *London* vpon the common Stage.”<sup>47</sup> In another performance described in *The Returne of . . . Pasquill*, a battered and scratched character named Divinity is brought forth “holding of her hart as if she were sicke, because *Martin* would haue forced her” (1:92). Unsuccessful in his rape attempts, Martin then “poysoned her with a vomit which he ministred vnto her.” In addition to accounts of actual performances, the anti-Martinist pamphlets also invited audiences to imagine Martin as the subject of dramatic representations.<sup>48</sup>

The city magistrates and church authorities who commissioned the vicious anti-Martinist attacks had sought to disarm Marprelate’s subversive, carnivalesque appeal; like a public execution, the pamphlets and performances were intended (borrowing a phrase from Michel Foucault) to “reactivate power.”<sup>49</sup> The attempt failed. Made a “*Maygame* vpon the *Stage*,” Martin is “*drie beaten*, & therby his bones broken, then whipt that made him winse”<sup>50</sup> – but within this “*Maygame* vpon the *Stage*” Martin also appears cross-dressed as Maid Marian, with a cloth covering his beard.<sup>51</sup> Thus even as he is made an object of ridicule, Martin plays a central role in a traditional festive ritual. The “many thousande” who flocked to the anti-Martinist performances begin to resemble not so much a jeering mob seeking retribution for Marprelate’s affront to ecclesiastical authority as a crowd of carnival celebrants enjoying the antics of a lord of misrule.

By placing Martin Marprelate on the stage, however vicious the representation, the anti-Martinist authors merely replicated the role that Martin had created for himself within his own writings. The Marprelate tracts, as Ritchie D. Kendall has discussed, are inherently theatrical, full of dialogue, scene changes, and asides to the audience. Kendall writes, “The theatrical world Martin Marprelate creates in his satires is vibrantly alive with a kaleidoscopic assembly of colorful characters, shifting settings, and varied incidents . . . Keeping this maddening host of plays and players in check is the master of ceremonies, Martin Marprelate himself. Never in the course of his work does the satirist’s persona surrender his claim to the center stage.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, as Raymond A. Anselment observes, Bancroft’s decision to license anti-Marprelate plays “unwittingly played into Marprelate’s hand by making the basic fiction of the satires a reality.”<sup>53</sup> The anti-Martinist authors are frequently self-conscious about Marprelate’s carnivalesque, theatrical role. The author of *Mar-Martine* accuses Marprelate of copping jokes from the famous Elizabethan clownish actor, Richard Tarleton: “These tinkers termes, and barbers iestes first *Tarleton* on the stage, / Then *Martin* in his bookes of lies, hath put in euey page.”<sup>54</sup> Similarly, the anti-Martinist persona Marphoreus has Martin “confess” that his “fond phrases” were learned “in Alehouses, and at the Theater” (*Martins months minde*, sigs. F1<sup>v</sup>–F2<sup>r</sup>).

Having mastered his trade in the theatre and the alehouse, Martin cannot himself be easily subdued through carnivalesque attacks; rather, even within anti-Martinist pamphlets offering scathing satire, he continues to act as a carnival center. In *Martins months minde*, a text which clearly aims to sound Marprelate’s death knell, the author ridicules the reception of Martin’s pamphlets, scornfully depicting a riotous tavern scene with a Marprelate tract serving as the evening’s attraction:

[Martin], together with his ribaldry, had some wit (though knauish) and woulde make some foolish women, and pot companions to laugh, when sitting on their Alebenches, they would tipple, and reade it, seruing them in steede of a blinde Minstrell, when they could get none, to fiddle them forth a fitte of mirth.<sup>55</sup>

This lively vignette provides a glimpse into early modern reading practices, as we see an illegal pamphlet being read aloud to a ribald crowd, Martin’s anti-episcopal tirades serving as a viable substitute for musical entertainment. As an attempt to dissuade an audience

from reading Marprelate's tract, however, the scene proves a poor disincentive. The seduction of this scenario, with the warm camaraderie of the "pot companions" and the hilarity of the "fitte of mirth," overwhelms its satiric purpose.

Through his initial carnivalesque pamphlets, Martin Marprelate had seized a rhetorical terrain that could not be wrested from him, since descriptions of his tactics inevitably reproduced them. Even the anti-Martinist authors are not immune to Martin's charm. Lambasting Martin's opinions and scoffing at his prose style, authors such as Nashe and Lyly nonetheless display a sense of affinity with him, and they begin to blur the distinction between the satirizer and the satirized.<sup>56</sup> "Even as he attacks Martin," writes Evelyn Tribble, "Lyly inadvertently implies a sort of fellowship with him; momentarily they become two ruffians drinking together."<sup>57</sup>

The authorities who had orchestrated the anti-Martinist attack looked with horror on the turmoil they had created. Rather than quelling public desire for Marprelate's writings, the anti-Martinists had spurred the popularity of the offending Marprelate tracts and had produced an appetite for all things Martin; rather than eliminating him from the cultural landscape, they had made Martin ubiquitous. The anti-Martinist theatrics themselves were "to the greate offence of the better sorte," as John Harte, Lord Mayor of London wrote to Lord Burghley.<sup>58</sup> The Privy Council soon sent a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Mayor of London, and the Master of the Revels requesting strict censorship of the theatre, and in 1589 the theatres were closed due to the nature of the anti-Martinist performances. The Council wrote to the archbishop that "there hath growne some inconvenience by common playes and enterludes in & about the cyttie of London, in [that] the players take upon [them] to handle in their plaies certen matters of Divinytie and State, unfit to be suffered."<sup>59</sup> By initially sanctioning the assault on Martin Marprelate, the authorities had in fact only furthered Martin's very aim of making the intertwined issues of "Divinytie and State" a point of discussion in an emerging public sphere.

Marprelate did not succeed in his attempts to overthrow the bishops (although, significantly, his legacy was resurrected in the 1640s when episcopacy was abolished<sup>60</sup>). But Martin did demonstrate, in a highly public and dramatic way, the limits of authoritative discursive control. Religious nonconformity had long revolved around contested textual and verbal forms. The Lollards, for

example, with their emphasis on literacy, the vernacular Bible, and secret study groups, had challenged the ecclesiastical authorities' privileged relationship to sacred text. While the early Lollards had circulated copied texts and translations of the Bible, the introduction of the printing press enabled the wider dissemination of dissenting literature; the later Lollards were increasingly associated with the underground dissemination of books and the posting of illegal broadsides.<sup>61</sup> From the beginning of the sixteenth century, authorities feared the subversive implications of print; in 1531 the Bishop of London forbade the reading of thirty books, among them several Lollard texts – including *A boke of thorpe or of John Oldecastelle*. Throughout the 1530s and 1540s a stream of illicit religious texts, many of them Lollard, justified the church's fears of underground printing.<sup>62</sup> For the rest of the century, religious dissent was associated with an uncontrollable flow of small illegal texts, easy to transport, easy to conceal, easy to destroy. The widely circulated Marprelate tracts flagrantly transformed the authorities' nightmare into a reality.

The Marprelate tracts not only represented the threat of hidden textual infiltration, but also exploded the very boundaries of orthodox discursivity. Martin's rejection of traditional ecclesiastical hierarchy, as Tribble notes, finds a parallel in the printed form of the texts themselves, which play extensively with the authorial relationship between center text and marginalia.<sup>63</sup> The profoundly subversive nature of these tracts was duly observed by the authorities, even by Queen Elizabeth herself. Tribble writes: "In her proclamation [against "Schismatical Bookes"] Elizabeth characterizes the pamphlets as attacking the bishops and the church as a whole 'in rayling sort and beyond the boundes of good humanitie.' 'Beyond the boundes': these words sum up the nature of the Marprelate threat. The pamphlets enact a grotesque breaking of the boundaries of the text and of conventional ecclesiastical discourse."<sup>64</sup> For Martin's opponents, then, not only his body, but his body of text was perceived as grotesque.

Though intended to suppress religious dissent, the anti-Martinist attacks ultimately revealed the fragility of orthodox discursive control. The bishops and city magistrates eventually did suppress the Martin phenomenon, suspending their own hired pens, seizing the Marprelate press, torturing the printers, and executing suspected Marprelate author John Penry.<sup>65</sup> (Significantly, the authorities also

turned their wrath on separatist leaders Henry Barrow and John Greenwood, indicating the degree to which Marprelate contributed to fears about religious sectarianism.) Martin Marprelate's legacy, however, continued to thrive long after the silencing of the tracts and sensational stage manifestations. Martin surfaces again in popular texts such as Nashe's *Pierce Penilesse* (1592),<sup>66</sup> and his traces can be seen in passing literary references. Indeed, this irreverent fictional spokesman for the reformist cause remained a vivid cultural figure for the next fifty years. Most importantly, the Marprelate controversy spawned a new mode of representing religious zeal. In both textual and theatrical representations, religious nonconformity was now portrayed primarily through the images and language of the grotesque.

Six or seven years after the Marprelate tracts were silenced, Shakespeare's *Oldcastle* took the stage. *Oldcastle* was already a familiar theatrical character from *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, a play which was popular enough to merit repeated performances and printings for over three decades (1585–1617).<sup>67</sup> *Oldcastle* was also well-known to Elizabethan audiences through the texts of Bale, Foxe, and historiographers such as Raphael Holinshed *et al.* These various and varied accounts of *Oldcastle* contain numerous biographical details. Bale, for instance, describes *Oldcastle* as an intellectual who wrote religious tracts calling for a "reformation." Holinshed tells how *Oldcastle* spent several years in hiding, constantly evading his pursuers; borrowing a tale from Walsingham's *Historia Anglicana*, Holinshed relates how *Oldcastle* was once tracked down by the authorities and only narrowly escaped, leaving in his wake a stash of subversive books. Walsingham records how *Oldcastle* promised that he would be resurrected a few days after his death, a promise which, as Annabel Patterson suggests, was perhaps "even at the time only a metaphor for the vitality of his own legend, for the iterability of the great tales from the distant past of resistance and nonconformity."<sup>68</sup>

As an intellectual reformist writer associated with illegal tracts who was pursued by the authorities and constantly on the run until he was finally tracked down and killed, *Oldcastle* begins to resemble Martin Marprelate. Martin, too, promised a resurrection of sorts: "For the day that you hange Martin / assure your selues / there will 20. Martins spring in my place" (*Hay*, 20). Even Marprelate's

enemies were quick to commend this resilience; when the Martinist tracts resumed after a short silence, one pamphleteer proclaimed, "Welcome Mayster *Martin* from the dead, and much good ioy may you haue of your stage-like resurrection."<sup>69</sup> The legend of Oldcastle and the story of Marprelate thus share striking structural similarities. Patterson observes Holinshed's fascination with Oldcastle's fox-like "capacity to slip through the government's fingers," and comments that "the most obvious reincarnation of Oldcastle's elusive spirit at the end of the Elizabethan era is neither Shakespeare's 'old lad of the castle' nor the defensively disengaged Oldcastle of the rival play, but the irrepressible Martin [Marprelate], whose persona survived the destruction of his secret presses in the country, to reappear half a century later."<sup>70</sup>

Shakespeare's Falstaff, however, is a literary creation that does "reincarnate" elements of both Oldcastle and Martin Marprelate. (Falstaff also clearly has genetic links to a host of other literary traditions and characters, such as the *miles gloriosus* and the Vice figure of earlier morality plays.) While Shakespeare does not rely upon the agile, elusive Oldcastle of Holinshed's account, he does draw upon one of Oldcastle's personality traits as it is described even in Bale's hagiographical narrative; there, Oldcastle admits "that in [his] frayle youthe [he] offended the (lorde) most greuoulye in pryde, wrathe, and glottonye, in couetousnesse and in lechere."<sup>71</sup> In addition to Oldcastle's propensity for gluttony, Falstaff incorporates Martin Marprelate's role as a lord of misrule, who "together with his ribauldry, had some wit (though knavish) and woulde make some foolish women, and pot companions to laugh, when sitting on their Alebenches." Shakespeare's portrayal of a famous Lollard thus interweaves elements of Oldcastle's history with Marprelate's characteristics, merging together these two notorious reformist leaders.

Not only does Falstaff assume Martin's general personality traits, but within the texts of *1 and 2 Henry IV* we detect more specific resonances of the Marprelate controversy. The Marprelate phenomenon was so politically explosive, and the suppression of both Martinist and anti-Martinist authors so extreme, that direct and sustained invocations of Martin would have certainly invited the censor's wrath. Yet a few possible allusions to the anti-Martinist tracts glimmer in the background of Shakespeare's plays. Act 2, scene 4 of *2 Henry IV*, for example, contains a number of lines which

seem to resonate of the controversy. The Prince's observation "Look whe'er the withered elder hath not his poll clawed like a parrot" (256–57) is suggestive of the anti-Martinist *An Almond for a Parrat* ("elder" being a term frequently used for describing a hierarchical position within separatist congregations); similarly, Doll's exclamation to Falstaff, "Alas, poor ape . . . let me wipe thy face" (213–14), echoes the title of one popular anti-Martinist pamphlet, *A Whip for An Ape*, a text which appears to have inspired earlier stage representations of Martin Marprelate.<sup>72</sup> Pistol's earlier question, "Fear we broadsides?" (178) is also intriguing in this context. Taken on their own, such references may not appear rich in significance. The rapid succession of these lines in one scene, however, suggests a running gag. Most interesting is Quickly's question to Falstaff, "Are you not hurt i' th' groin?" (207), after he has drawn his sword on the warring Bardolph and Pistol. The line does not seem justified by the skirmish that precedes it, and Doll (who has just spoken to Falstaff to commend his valor) makes no mention of the possibility that he could be wounded; Quickly's comment receives no response from the other characters. It is possible that this gratuitous line invokes the anti-Martinists' claim that Martin Marprelate had been killed at the Groine, and is added only as a winking intertextual reference for the amusement of the audience.<sup>73</sup> In addition to such possible glimpses of Martin within the text of the play, the original performances of *1 Henry IV* may also have invoked the Marprelate controversy through the casting of Will Kemp as Falstaff – the same actor likely to have portrayed Martin in the anti-Martinist theatrics.<sup>74</sup>

These connections between Falstaff and the Marprelate controversy are admittedly speculative; but a more thorough and sustained comparison can be made through Falstaff's consistent speech patterns. Modern editions of the Henriad (such as the Arden, the "New" Arden, the Riverside, the Folger, the New Variorum, the New Shakespeare, and the New Cambridge Shakespeare) all acknowledge Falstaff's theatrical origins in the character of Sir John Oldcastle from the *Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, and critics have often commented on Falstaff's "puritanical" characteristics and habits of speech. J. Dover Wilson noted that "traces of Lollardry may still be detected in Falstaff's frequent resort to Scriptural phraseology and his affectation of an uneasy conscience," and that the passages on repentance, "together with the habit of citing



Scripture, may have their origin . . . in the puritan, psalm-singing temper of Falstaff's prototype."<sup>75</sup> Alfred Ainger, one of the earliest twentieth-century critics to discuss the Falstaff–Oldcastle connection, similarly observed, "What put it into Shakespeare's head to put this distinctly religious, not to say Scriptural phraseology into the mouth of Falstaff, but that the rough draft of the creation, as it came into his hands, was the decayed Puritan? For the Lollard of the fourteenth century was in this respect the Puritan of the sixteenth, that the one certain mark of his calling was this use of the language of Scripture, and that conventicle style which had been developed out of it."<sup>76</sup>

Falstaff does indeed quote extensively from Scripture; of the fifty-four biblical references identified in *1 Henry IV*, twenty-six are his.<sup>77</sup> He quotes indirectly from Genesis, Exodus, 1 and 2 Samuel, Psalms, Proverbs, Matthew, Mark, Luke, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and 1 Thessalonians. The parables of Dives and Lazarus and the Prodigal Son in particular, as Ainger notes, "seem to haunt him along his whole course" (*Lectures and Essays*, 142). In addition to biblical allusions, Falstaff's speech is also rich in sixteenth-century godly jargon. He speaks of his "vocation" (*IHIV* 1.2.101–02) and repeatedly mentions the "spirit," a cornerstone of radical theology of the "light within" (as opposed to the conformist emphasis on ecclesiastical authority). In both Parts 1 and 2, Falstaff makes references to psalm singing, a key element of the sixteenth-century puritan stereotype.<sup>78</sup> He wishes he "were a weaver" so that he "could sing psalms" (*IHIV* 2.4.130) (weavers, who often sang at their work, were particularly notorious for their reformist psalmody), and later claims, "For my voice, I have lost it with hallooing, and singing of anthems" (*2HIV* 1.2.188–89). (Ainger points to the puritan in *The Winter's Tale* who "sang Psalms to hornpipes.") Critics have also commented on Falstaff's repeated allusions to salvation by faith alone, and his death-bed reference to the Whore of Babylon, "the customary Puritan term for the Church of Rome."<sup>79</sup>

Modern literary scholars are not the only ones to note these reformist speech patterns; Falstaff's companions also appear to identify him as a man of religion. Hal, who prides himself on his chameleon-like ability to speak to various social groups in their own languages, repeatedly uses biblical idiom when speaking to Falstaff/Oldcastle. In their very first scene together, Falstaff and the Prince engage in an exchange rife with religious language.

FALSTAFF: But Hal, I prithe thee trouble me no more with vanity. I would to God thou and I knew where a commodity of good names were to be bought: an old lord of the Council rated me the other day in the street about you, sir, but I marked him not, and yet he talked very wisely, but I regarded him not, and yet he talked wisely, and in the street too.

PRINCE: Thou didst well, for wisdom cries out in the streets and no man regards it.

FALSTAFF: O, thou hast damnable iteration, and art indeed able to corrupt a saint: thou hast done much harm upon me, Hal, God forgive thee for it: before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing, and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked. I must give over this life, and I will give it over: by the Lord, and I do not I am a villain, I'll be damned for never a king's son in Christendom.

PRINCE: Where shall we take a purse tomorrow, Jack?

FALSTAFF: 'Zounds, where thou wilt, lad, I'll make one; an I do not, call me villain and baffle me.

PRINCE: I see a good amendment of life in thee, from praying to purse-taking.

FALSTAFF: Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal, 'tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation.

(1.2.79–102)

Falstaff's repetitive speech patterns typify those of the reformist stereotype, and his concern with the distinction of the "saints" and the "wicked" reflects the language of the late sixteenth-century separatists. Hal's responses, which paraphrase the books of Proverbs, Matthew, and Acts of the Apostles, mimic and engage with Falstaff's own biblical style. Later, however, Hal becomes exasperated with Falstaff's religious jargon, and refuses to play along: "Is she of the wicked? Is thine hostess here of the wicked? Or is thy boy of the wicked? Or honest Bardolph, whose zeal burns in his nose, of the wicked?" (2*HIV* 2.4.324–27). ("Zeal," of course, being another godly byword.) This rhetoric is neither incidental nor a moment of local humor, but a consistent characteristic of this fallen Lollard.

Falstaff's religious associations, then, are pervasive and unmistakable. Most critics noting his tendency to speak in biblical idiom and godly jargon have assumed that Falstaff is actively mocking the zealous reformers. They comment that Falstaff himself is a self-conscious satirist making "jibes at the Puritans," that his part "involves Puritan posturing," and that "his 'religiousness' is a joke at this stage of his life."<sup>80</sup> Several editors have shared this opinion. Samuel Hemingway, who edited *1 Henry IV* for the New Variorum Shakespeare, maintains that "in mimicry of the Puritans Falstaff

here uses one of their canting expressions” (a reference to his use of “the wicked”), and that “Falstaff here repeats in ridicule another Puritan shibboleth” (a reference to his use of “vocation”), to cite two examples.<sup>81</sup> A. R. Humphreys, editor of the New Arden edition of the *Henriad*, also observes that Falstaff uses “frequent Puritan idiom,” or more precisely, that he “mimics Puritan idiom.”<sup>82</sup> Humphreys asserts that in his godly speech patterns Falstaff devises “Puritan parody” and “parodies . . . mealy-mouthed Puritanism.”<sup>83</sup> Critics frequently agree that Falstaff speaks in a “parody of liturgical language,” that he “is given to parodying Puritan preachers,” and that his lengthy speeches often smack of the “scriptural style of the sanctimonious Puritan.”<sup>84</sup>

It is difficult, however, to reconcile Falstaff’s religious identity with such explanations of deliberate parody. How can an audience perceive Falstaff both as a representation of Oldcastle, and as a character who mocks reformist religion? This seeming incongruity has puzzled scholars, who have long relied upon a notion of the puritan as a fun-hating, dust-breathing fogy.<sup>85</sup> This figure is clearly in opposition to the bacchanalian character of Falstaff. Taken as polar opposites, any “puritan” speech in the mouth of Falstaff must thus be considered insincere, ironic or parodic. But this oppositional relationship is built upon a false premise; the apparent incompatibility of these two roles emanates from anachronistic assumptions about the early modern image of the “puritan.” As we have seen, in the wake of the Marprelate controversy the predominant image of the stage puritan was that of a grotesque, carnivalesque figure. While the dour (and most often hypocritical) moralist was one species of puritan representation, the carnal and grotesque figure was far more prevalent. Falstaff, more so than Malvolio, epitomizes the predominant late Elizabethan expectations for a stage puritan.<sup>86</sup>

Falstaff does not, therefore, parody the self-styled saints in a determined, willful way. Rather, Falstaff – in and of himself – is a parodic representation of a “puritan.” (Indeed, his very name, “False staff,” could be read as a spin on such godly names as More Fruit, Faint Not, Perseverance, Deliverance, etc.<sup>87</sup>) In Shakespeare’s portrayal, Falstaff/Oldcastle becomes an object of playful ridicule – much like Martin Marprelate in the anti-Martinist theatrical performances (although Falstaff’s treatment is certainly more benign). The discrepancy between Falstaff’s gluttonous lifestyle and the more

abstemious conduct expected of a reformist leader becomes a basis for satire that runs throughout both parts of *Henry IV*.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, the distinction between the belligerent religious leader of historical accounts and the coward of the *Henriad* is just as obvious a source of satire. Falstaff is emptied of Oldcastle's dangerous qualities, and is even written out of the Scroop–Grey–Cambridge plot, in which Oldcastle was implicated in accounts such as Holinshed's.<sup>89</sup> Instead, Falstaff is made the object of practical jokes and the consistent butt of humor.

But just as Martin Marprelate maintained his role as comic center even as he was being lampooned and ridiculed, so too Falstaff, as a parodic representation of a reformer, becomes the lord of misrule. Martin's manner of heckling the bishops and kicking away their pedestals (reducing Cooper to a cooper), enables him to taunt them as equals. Martin explodes sanctioned hierarchies and pieties; it is this leveling tendency that makes him so threatening, and so appealing. Falstaff, too, respects neither hierarchy nor social order, and in his irreverent jests he assumes a voice – and a role – similar to that of Marprelate.

Falstaff's speech itself reverberates with Martin's own grotesque, carnivalesque tone. The banter between Falstaff and Hal often resounds of Marprelate's fictional dialogues with the bishops, or the taunting exchanges between Marprelate and his textual opponents such as Cutbert Curryknave or Pasquill.<sup>90</sup> Falstaff hails the Prince as his “dog” (2*HIV* 1.2.145), “the most comparative rascalliest sweet young prince” (1*HIV* 1.2.78–79), and “a good shallow young fellow” who “would have made a good pantler, a would ha' chipped bread well” (2*HIV* 2.4.234–35). He also hurls such tangy insults as “you starveling, you eel-skin, you dried neat's-tongue, you bull's pizzle, you stock-fish” (1*HIV* 2.4.240–41) and tells Hal to “hang thyself in thine own heir-apparent garters” (1*HIV* 2.2.42). Twice Falstaff even threatens treason: “By the Lord, I'll be a traitor then, when thou art king” (1*HIV* 1.2.141); “A king's son! If I do not beat thee out of thy kingdom with a dagger of lath, and drive all thy subjects afore thee like a flock of wild geese, I'll never wear hair on my face more” (1*HIV* 2.4.133–36). In addition to mocking the Prince, Falstaff lacks all respect for the Lord Chief Justice and undermines the very code of chivalry (“honour is a mere scutcheon”) that was to become so central to the way nostalgic Elizabethans viewed Henry V; in Part 2 he boisterously sings, “‘When Arthur first in court’ – Empty the

jordan. – ‘And was a worthy king’ – How now, Mistress Doll?’ (2*HIV* 2.4.33–35), intermingling allusions to the legendary paragon of chivalry with references to chamber pots and prostitutes. In Falstaff, as in Martin Marprelate, social and discursive order are undermined and overturned.

Falstaff thus plays the role of satirist even as he is the object of satire. Bakhtin draws a useful distinction between modern satire and the satire of carnival: “The [modern] satirist whose laughter is negative places himself above the object of his mockery, he is opposed to it . . . The people’s ambivalent laughter, on the other hand, expresses the point of view of the whole world; he who is laughing also belongs to it.”<sup>91</sup> From this ambivalent position, Falstaff reproduces a fundamental dynamic of the staging of Martinism. These burlesque performances provided Shakespeare not only with a performative model for representing puritans in terms of the grotesque, but also with a vivid example of the staging of satire and the use of the carnivalesque. Falstaff, like Martin, inhabits a pivotal position from which he is able to toy with the boundaries of orthodoxy and subversion. The duality as satirist and object of satire that lies at the heart of the Marprelate controversy is largely a function of the social and discursive boundaries Martin and his adversaries begin to erase. In his irreverent attacks on the bishops, Martin challenged ecclesiastical hierarchy and the traditional borders between laity, clergy, and episcopacy. The anti-Martinists, too, inevitably played with, rather than policed, the boundaries they were assigned to defend. The tantalizing appeal of the Marprelate controversy is located along this quivering border between the authoritative and the subversive, the orthodox and the heretical.

This same play at and with social boundaries infuses the Henriad with much of its dramatic energy. These plays, *1 Henry IV* in particular, are largely driven by Hal’s flirtation precisely with this border between authority and subversion. Like the anti-Martinist authors (or, like the bishops and magistrates who hired the anti-Martinist authors), Hal enters into the terms of carnival subversion, represented and embodied by Falstaff, while still maintaining his position of authority. The danger, however, is that the tension between these two positions might prove stronger than Hal’s ability to control and define his own situation, that the boundary distinguishing the role of the Prince from that of the reveler could snap

before Hal can orchestrate his glorious return to orthodoxy and filial duty – his “reformation,” as he puts it (*IHIW*, 1.2.208). In Act 3, scene 2 of *1 Henry IV*, King Henry explicitly warns his son of the dangers of slipping over this line, lamenting that Hal “hast lost [his] princely privilege / With vile participation” (ll. 86–87). Henry advocates a strict division between community and king. Describing Richard II’s fall and his own rise to power, Henry prides himself on not becoming “stale and cheap to vulgar company”; instead, he kept his “person fresh and new . . . like a robe pontifical” (3.2.41, 55–56). By contrast Richard II, “the skipping King” (l. 60) in Henry’s version of events,

Grew a companion to the common streets,  
 Enfeoff’d himself to popularity,  
 That, being daily swallow’d by men’s eyes,  
 They surfeited with honey, and began  
 To loathe the taste of sweetnessesse . . .

. . .

So, when he had occasion to be seen,  
 He was but as the cuckoo is in June,  
 Heard, not regarded; seen, but with such eyes  
 As, sick and blunted with community,  
 Afford no extraordinary gaze,

. . .

Being with his presence glutted, gorg’d, and full. (3.2.68–84)

By “mingl[ing] his royalty with cap’ring fools” (as Henry says of Richard [l. 63]), Hal risks losing himself in the bowels of the common people, risks being absorbed and swallowed so that the distinction between the crowd and the Prince is no longer recognizable.

The *Henriad* thus reenacts issues of discursive and political control presented by the Marprelate controversy. This breakdown of hierarchical division described by King Henry is what Oldcastle threatened in leading a mob against the king, and what Marprelate proposed in seeking to pull down “robe[s] pontifical.” Within the *Henriad*, Falstaff assumes a voice and role similar to that of Martin Marprelate, becoming a swelling carnival force that threatens to consume Hal’s “princely privilege.” The ever “glutted, gorg’d, and full” Falstaff virtually embodies the removal of social, hierarchical boundaries: Falstaff becomes the community which can, through jest, ingest its leaders. His rotund, expansive figure, emblematic of carnivalesque festivity, potentially signifies absorption and loss of

social distinction. Like Martin, Falstaff thus challenges the very hierarchies that constitute the structure of church and state. And like the anti-Martinists, Hal confronts Falstaff's festive social force by engaging in its own terms, for a time reveling in the playful contest of insults. But ultimately the Prince, like the London magistrates before him, discovers that the boundary between authority and subversion is too fragile to be long toyed with in this way, and that hierarchies cannot be restored while the discursive play continues: Falstaff has to be banished just as Martin's press has to be crushed and the anti-Martinists have to be suspended.

In the anti-Martinist productions, the audience is obviously intended to be ridiculing and laughing at the abused Martin; but, as in the anti-Martinist tracts themselves, the legacy of Martin's popular appeal overwhelms the pressures of satire, and the audience finds itself in the position of laughing with the target of the attack. Similarly, the translation of the martial Oldcastle into the comic Falstaff seems to require mocking laughter, but even as a butt of satire Falstaff exudes such inviting carnival energy that the audience engages with him: he is, in his own words, "not only witty in [himself], but the cause that wit is in other men" (2*HIV* 1.2.8–9). For a short time, the audience becomes Falstaff's "pot companions," and they too are "fiddled forth" into mirth – subversive laughter often at the king's expense. It is this wit that draws the spectators into "vile participation" with a historical figure who led an army against the king. From the position of the satirized, both Falstaff and Martin Marprelate entice the audience to join their carnival revelries. The spectators simultaneously laugh at and with subversive forces, are simultaneously disapproving and participating: this is the play of the play.

The character of Falstaff helped to give shape and form not only to the image of the puritan, but to the very concept of "puritanism" as a category of religious dissent. In his essay "The Theatre Constructs Puritanism," Patrick Collinson remarks that "it is a remarkable fact that the word 'Puritan' hardly ever appears in the thousands of pages written against those we call Puritans in the 1590s";<sup>92</sup> yet around the turn of the century the term achieved currency, and the "puritan" emerged as a cultural and theatrical category. Speculating on the possibilities of "art anticipating life," Collinson contends that "it may have been the stage-Puritan who invented, or re-invented,

the Puritan, and not the other way around” (164). Collinson claims the Marprelate controversy as the moment “when, where and why the stage-Puritan made his entry” (167) and then turns his attention to Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* for the further dissemination of this image. *1 and 2 Henry IV*, however, mark an earlier and crucial stage in this figure’s development. Falstaff, Shakespeare’s notorious and widely recognized rendition of a Lollard, established a model for the grotesque, carnivalesque puritan which would predominate for decades to come.

Even as art anticipated life, art retrospectively changed history. For many contemporaries, Falstaff quickly became fact. John Speed was alarmed at how quickly the theatre could re-form history; in 1611, Speed attacked the Jesuit Robert Parsons’s *Treatise of three Conversions of England* (1603), contending that the “author of the three conuersions hath made *Ouldcastle* a Ruffian, a Robber, and a Rebell, and his authority taken from the *Stage-plaiers*.”<sup>93</sup> Shakespeare’s gluttonous fictional character quickly became inscribed in the popular imagination and in historical accounts. With his extended appearance in Foxe’s *Actes and Monumentes*, Oldcastle clearly gained cultural stature; with his appearance in Shakespeare’s *Henriad*, Oldcastle clearly gained weight. In Stowe, Bale, Foxe, Polydore Vergil, *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, and his numerous other pre-*Henriad* appearances, Oldcastle is never described as corpulent (despite his confession of youthful gluttony). Yet by 1604 the Lollard appears to have become as synonymous with obesity as, say, Falstaff; in *The Meeting of Gallants* a character inquires, “Now *Signiors* how like you mine Host? did I not tell you he was a madde round knave, and a merrie one too: and if you chaunce to talke of fatte Sir *John Oldcastle*, he wil tell you, he was his great Grandfather, and not much unlike him in Paunch.”<sup>94</sup>

The tendency to view earlier historical accounts of Oldcastle through the lens of Falstaff has informed literary criticism as well. Ainger, in his early examination of Falstaff’s Lollard origins, performs acrobatics of logic to justify Shakespeare’s representation of Oldcastle. In this influential essay, Ainger proclaims that “there seems to have been always a tradition (likely enough a true tradition) that [Oldcastle] was *very fat*” (original italics) – a statement which is oddly supported by a footnote acknowledging “I am not aware of any reference to Oldcastle’s fatness earlier than 1597, the date of Shakespeare’s play.”<sup>95</sup> Lacking such evidence, Ainger concocts his



own, describing how a wandering friar could have used Oldcastle's confession of youthful gluttony to demonstrate the failings of Lollardy; here, Ainger's imagined commentary of the friar by a "villager's fireside":

'Why, my friends, you have but to look at him to see the effects of his wicked life. *What does that great fat paunch mean?* What *can it mean* but one thing – a career of gluttony and drinking of old sack and canary' . . . We can imagine Oldcastle's old enemies using this kind of language . . . and we can understand how, as the story was told over and over again . . . it would depart more and more from historic truth, and get the ludicrous incidents, real or fictitious, more and more accentuated . . . Just so the fat knight Oldcastle would be sure to be made as ridiculous as possible for popular presentation; and at the time when Foxe printed his famous work there is good reason to know that there was current a popular conception of Oldcastle as a bloated old sensualist . . . Let me quote two or three passages from writers of the seventeenth century in proof of this. (original italics)<sup>96</sup>

Ainger's description again concludes with anachronistic proof: the "good reason to know" that Foxe was confronting a popular image of a "bloated" Oldcastle is provided by decidedly post-Falstaffian references. In all, Ainger devotes four pages to this question, "*What does that great fat paunch mean?*"

Asking the same question of Martin Marprelate, we might find an answer from Lyly, who writes of Martin's "swelling in the paunch, as though he had been in labour of a little babe, no bigger than rebellion" (*Pappe*, sig. E1<sup>r</sup>). Martin Marprelate, by his own admission, is a source of endless reproduction; as his enemies claim, he "will spawne out [his] broyling brattes, in euery towne to dwell."<sup>97</sup> Martin's pamphlets, and his followers, seem to proliferate wildly. Falstaff, too, assumes a pregnant form, as Valerie Traub has argued.<sup>98</sup> Falstaff's "womb" (2*HIV* 4.3.22), like Marprelate's belly, becomes at once a site of voracious consumption and endless reproduction.<sup>99</sup> By inflating Oldcastle into Falstaff, Shakespeare created a character who embodies the seduction and the subversion of radical religion. At the center of the tavern world, Falstaff, for a time, is a figure of popular religion. While Falstaff (like Shakespeare) does not directly engage in the issues of ecclesiastical governance raised by Oldcastle and Marprelate, Falstaff's consistent reformist idiom reminds us of the consequence of religious discourse in the alehouse. The Marprelate tracts realized the possibilities of print culture in religious debates, and testified to the role of polemical

literature in the simultaneous development and exploitation of an emerging public sphere. Having entered the tavern, the Marprelate tracts create communal laughter among those “sitting on their Alebenches.” Martin’s foes derided this popular appeal. In *A Friendly Admonition to Martine Marprelate, and his Mates* (1590), Leonard Wright comments, “Alasse, *Martine*, I pittie thy want of discretion, who in publishing thy unprofitable and immodest conceites, breaking the unities of the Church, hindering the course of the Gospell, & disquieting the peaceable state of the realme: hast set thy selfe uppon an open stage, in the view of the whole world, to bee scorned, hated, and detested for euer” (sig. A2<sup>r</sup>).

But even those who detest him are not immune from the effect of Martin’s “publishing.” In a later passage, Wright again expresses his disdain for Martin’s method of alehouse dissemination. The marginal note, however, is telling: “whereby (though against their wils) the people are broght by experience to know and feele, that pub like reading (in some measure) is preaching” (sig. A4<sup>r</sup>). Wright admits what many are intuiting, that public reading usurps the privilege of the pulpit, serving as an alternative forum for spreading religious and political opinions. Even when it is mere “pub like reading” (in the wonderful anachronism created by this orthographic rendering of “public”), the discussion of religious reform in the tavern created the beginnings of what Jürgen Habermas has deemed the “public sphere.”<sup>100</sup> This sphere would more fully emerge in the mid-seventeenth century, when, in the words of one contemporary, “Religion is now become the common discourse and Table-talke in every Taverne and Ale-house.”<sup>101</sup> Over the course of the *Henriad*, Falstaff withers and dies as a force of carnival communality. As a rotund vision of religious discourse taken into the alehouse, however, Falstaff was quickly resurrected, and his sons multiplied. Through Falstaff, “certain matters of Divinity and State” were taken out of the pulpit and played upon the stage, becoming matters of “common discourse.”