Introduction

> O that thou shouldst give dust a tongue/ To crie to thee/ And then not hear it crying!
>
> (George Herbert)

> One could say that Martin Luther was the first great antihumanist: modern subjectivity is announced not in the Renaissance humanist celebration of man as the 'crown of creation', that is, in the tradition of Erasmus and others (to whom Luther cannot but appear as a 'barbarian'), but, rather, in Luther's famous statement that man is the excrement that fell out of God's anus. Modern subjectivity has nothing to do with the notion of man as the highest creature in the 'Great Chain of Being', as the final point of the evolution of the universe: modern subjectivity emerges when the subject perceives himself as 'out of joint', as *excluded* from the 'order of things', from the positive order of entities (Slavoj Žižek).[1]

1

In a book called *The Christians Apparelling By Christ* published in 1625, the Protestant writer Robert Jenison offers this interesting piece of advice to his readers: 'know, that the thing which laies hold of Christ, applies and puts him on, *is Faith*, and not *feeling*, and that therefore thou mayest hold him fast enough though thou feelest him not'.[2] Immediately noticeable here is the dichotomy between faith and feeling. Indeed, for Jenison, to have faith in Christ is not to feel him at all. To modern ears this may sound like a strange sentiment, perhaps even a paradoxical one: is it possible to have faith without feeling? How might we 'put on' Christ, represent him in mimetic terms, without subjectively 'feeling' him?

These questions go to the heart of what this book is about, namely the relationship between early modern Protestantism, subjectivity and the representative practices of early modern drama. As the Bible makes clear, mankind is made in the image of God: 'God created the man in his

image.'[3] In the West, this idea has often been expressed as the 'imitation of Christ' or *imitatio Christi* and it is a crucial ontological starting point for all Christian thought.[4] From its historical and philosophical inception, Christianity posits a relationship between the human subject and the divine object that is, at its basis, mimetic. Just as God images the subject, so the subject images God. Despite the calamity of the fall, much pre-Reformation theology and religious practice assumed this potential contiguity of divine and man, a contiguity that was further manifested through signs and instantiated in the representational practices of popular piety. In such a religious system it was an invariable, indeed necessary possibility that man might 'feel' the presence of the divine through devotional practice. Christ's presence could be subjectively encountered here on earth and the practices of much popular late medieval worship were oriented to this end. In this book I examine how this assumption is manifested and challenged in a range of early modern discourses and how this impacts upon conceptions of subjectivity during the period.

Traditionally, scholars have argued that the way in which such issues are conceptualised marks a shift in the metaphysical ambits of pre- and post-Reformation religion. In the pre-Reformation period, this mimetic imaging is predicated upon a theological assumption that man and God are at some metaphysical level potentially reconcilable. This in turn feeds into a cultural assumption that there is an analogous relationship between man and God, one that is reflected in broader structures of civic society: political systems, the law, social hierarchies, gender relationships and language all mirror to some extent that relationship. In countries like England that embraced, however problematically, the ideas of the Reformers, the metaphysical beliefs that structured these pre-Reformation practices came under sustained critique. Ideas that in the medieval period had tested the boundaries of orthodoxy were now recuperated within the Reformed faith: Protestants of whatever hue found themselves having to rethink man's relationship to the divine.[5] At the basis of this was the potentially idolatrous biblical assumption that man was indeed made in the 'image' of God. I say 'idolatrous' for if idolatry is understood as the mistaken worship of any sign over the divine object then the argument that man is made in God's 'image' could potentially involve man investing human images or signs with wrongful power. The idea that man is made in God's image is a problematic one in early modern England and it has religious and cultural implications that need to be closely analysed: no longer encouraged to 'feel' the divine via outward signs as they had pre-Reformation, the subject was now encouraged to find Christ internally through faith. To

take one of the main contentions of this book, if Christ is central to the formation of Christian identity then how might the Christian engage with Christ without 'feeling' him? How was Christ to be made present to the subject under a Reformed dispensation? These questions also have a more 'secular' applicability in early modern England. How do these models of religious identification signify in a fallen realm of worldly materiality that can often seem at odds with, indeed critical of, religious ideology? How might this new account help us to reorient current scholarship concerned with such questions? And how does the drama debate, interrogate and critique such issues through its investment in the figurative sign? In answering these questions I offer an account of religion and subjectivity which, although it engages with the foundational work of cultural materialist and new historicist criticism of the past thirty years, differs substantially from the models of religion and subjectivity that dominate these critical schools. What emerges is a reading that also challenges current critical conceptualisations of religion and subjectivity by arguing for a new understanding of the political and philosophical import of Reformed theology in early modern England.

II

Throughout his anti-Christian polemic *The Anti-Christ*, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche argues that Christianity is instituted upon principles of blood sacrifice and an almost insatiable instinct for revenge. In particular, this is what he says about Jesus' death on the cross:

the sacrifice of the *innocent man* for the sins of the guilty! What atrocious paganism! – For Jesus had done away with the concept 'guilt' itself – he had denied any chasm between God and man, he *lived* this unity of God and man as *his* 'glad tidings' ... And *not* as a special prerogative! – From now on there is introduced into the type of the redeemer step by step: the doctrine of a Judgement and a Second Coming, the doctrine of his death as a sacrificial death, the doctrine of the Resurrection ... for the benefit of a state *after* death! ... Paul, with that rabbinical insolence which characterizes him in every respect, rationalized this interpretation, this *indecency* of an interpretation, thus: '*If* Christ is not resurrected from the dead, our faith is in vain'.[6]

Nietzsche's argument that the Pauline emphasis on sacrifice opens up a 'chasm between God and man' that would otherwise have remained fused in the person of Jesus is especially pertinent. This gap is absolute since 'The Christian's world of ideas contains nothing which so much as touches upon actuality'.[7] Nietzsche accuses Saint Paul of being responsible for

'rationalizing this interpretation'. The philosopher seems to have in mind the fundamental distinction that Paul makes in Romans between the flesh and the spirit. As he notes, man should aim to live according to the Spirit because 'if ye liue after the flesh; yee shall die' (Romans 8:13). Yet according to Nietzsche such antinomies are not only false, they are untenable for the human subject.

Christ's redemptive act is remarkable not because of its universality but because of its singularity: 'in reality there has been only one Christian, and he died on the Cross.'[8] Actually living 'like' Christ and imitating him is, for the philosopher, 'merely a psychological self misunderstanding' that is masked by the comforting fiction of 'Faith' and a belief in the second coming, a confusion that he interestingly associates with Martin Luther.[9] Indeed, at the moment when an alternative to this repressive system was within grasp during 'the harvest of *Renaissance*',[10] it is the figure of Luther who once again re-institutes Paul's 'insolent' philosophy. What Luther fails to realise is that in the supposed 'corruption' of the Catholic Church and the secular mendacity of the papacy lay the seeds of a potential freedom from all Christian structures, a possibility that Nietzsche signals in the wonderfully ironic cry: '*Cesare Borgia as Pope*'.[11] He notes that by the early sixteenth century when Luther's impact was being felt in Rome, 'the old corruption, the *peccatum originale*, Christianity no longer sat on the Papal throne!'[12]

I will address the historical validity of these claims in a moment. But what others have traditionally seen as the worldly secularity of the early modern papacy was in fact, for Nietzsche, a philosophical and political opportunity; a means of *saving* humanity from the 'original sin' that is Christianity. In a way that to a certain extent chimes with the methodological approach of some modern revisionist historians and theologians,[13] Nietzsche does not see Luther as a uniquely forward-looking reformer who swept away the corruption of the late medieval church in favour of a new theological and political dispensation. In fact, the precise moral and political status of the early modern papacy is not really the philosopher's central concern. He is interested instead in the philosophical impediments of certain doctrinal movements. For him, the Reformation is so problematical because, not to put too fine a point on it, it is predicated upon a theological lie, namely that man may be 'like' Christ in the realm of the secular. The reason for this stance can be traced to the profound antipathy towards Luther that Nietzsche, the son of course of a Lutheran pastor, feels. As he notes earlier in *The Anti-Christ*: 'The Protestant pastor is the grandfather of German philosophy, Protestantism itself is its *peccatum originale*.

Definition of Protestantism: the halfsided paralysis of Christianity – *and* of reason.'[14] The *peccatum originale* that is Protestantism is a belief, bolstered by the exegetical weight of the Pauline epistles and ratified by an essentially Lutheran conception of faith, which maintains that the realms of human and divine experience can in some way be made to coalesce through the sacrifice of Christ. As the philosopher Gary Shapiro points out: 'Nietzsche's Jesus does not develop from a theological perspective because he is not a supernatural figure; no divine interventions mark off the different stages of his career.'[15] Understood in this way, original sin is not the doctrine that man is inherently sinful thanks to the fall and that he requires the redemptive sacrifice of Christ in order to release him from that burden. Rather, original sin is the erroneous belief that the chasm between man and God was ever reconcilable in the first place.

Protestantism paralyses reason because it is predicated upon a false assumption; one that insists that Christ and the human subject may ultimately be united in the secular realm. In Shapiro's words: 'Nietzsche's Jesus could be thought of as the metaphorical or symbolic principle itself; for there is always such a large discrepancy between experience and its representation that he fails to establish any determinacy of meanings.'[16] Indeed, unmediated reason is an inadequate means of countering such claims precisely because the heirs of the rationalist project fail to acknowledge their own philosophical reliance upon this Protestant *peccatum originale*. It is for this reason that Nietzsche offers the half optimistic, half despairing conclusion that Reformed religion is 'the uncleanest kind of Christianity there is, the most incurable kind, the kind hardest to refute'.[17]

Nietzsche exemplifies a central argument underpinning *Protestantism and Drama in Early Modern England*: that the shift from 'feeling' Christ to a non-feeling 'faith' in Christ is far from straightforward, mediating as it does a fundamental tension between the religious and the secular. There is no doubt that the sixteenth century saw a profound alteration in the religious thought and practices of late medieval Europe. This is not to say that there were not profound continuities as well.[18] This book does not argue for, nor seek to map, an easy trajectory that sees the exchange of a fixed pre-Reformation metaphysic for an equally fixed post-Reformation metaphysic. Rather, it traces an amalgam of ancient, patristic, medieval, humanistic and Reformed ideas that coalesce during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and that give rise to the range of complex and interrelated theological, institutional and ideological tensions that characterise the post-Reformation landscape. These constitutive tensions had a

profound impact not only on how various forms of Protestantism represented the subject in the world but also on the linguistic and political construction of subjectivity in early modern England. This fact is acutely explored in the drama of this period. In the plays that I examine, the models of subjectivity that are available to dramatists are invariably religiously derived or inflected. Yet these plays are also concerned to test whether these models can be sustained within the realm of the secular, particularly when the subject is exposed to the workings and contradictions of state power.

For the moment though, I want to consider further the place of religion in contemporary literary criticism. I will argue that certain critical truisms about early modern subjectivity are intimately bound up with important but problematically partial readings of what early modern Protestantism was. Examining how criticism currently conceives of Protestantism will not only enable me to situate my own critical approach to the relationship between Protestantism and early modern culture; it will also permit a better understanding of the strange but compelling paradox that Jenison presents us with: 'hold [Christ] fast enough though thou feelest him not.'

III

Traditionally, both new historicist and cultural materialist studies concerned with theological matters have been characterised by the attention that they have paid to Protestantism and to the kinds of subject positions produced in relation to it. More recently, however, this critical focus has shifted. Taking their lead from the work of revisionist historians, critics have begun to re-examine longstanding *conceptions* of Protestantism, as well as paying more attention to the relationship between Catholic theology and subjectivity in sixteenth and seventeenth century England.[19] Though more work remains to be done, it is fair to say that, by and large, scholars now argue for a much more doctrinally contested culture where subjectivities, rather than fixed according to predefined theological lines, were in fact consistently being renegotiated. In Katherine Eisaman Maus' formulation, early modern subjectivity should be viewed as a 'loose and varied collection of assumptions, intuitions, and practices that do not all logically entail one another and need not appear together at the same cultural moment'.[20] This construction is indebted to a flexible revisionist historiography concerned with religious change and affiliation in the early modern period. As the historian Andrew Pettegree has noted, 'historians have begun to talk of a "Long Reformation", a process requiring many

generations before the changes in belief and behaviour anticipated by the reformers could be accomplished'.[21] Or as the literary scholar Jeffrey Knapp has pointed out: 'there was no single religion suffusing Renaissance England … but rather many religions from which to choose: not simply Catholicism or Protestantism, for the Christian believer, but also kinds of Catholicism and kinds of Protestantism.'[22]

As the field stands, it is no longer desirable or indeed possible to view the Reformation in England as a singular event that sees the substitution of 'unpopular' Catholicism with 'popular' Protestantism, or that either of these confessional positions can be reduced to a pre-existing theological checklist of neatly contrasting subject or doctrinal positions. The corollary of such a shift is a credibly adaptable picture of religious change and affiliation in the period. This plural, revisionist agenda sees early modern belief in terms of a spectrum, one that can accommodate a surprisingly wide range of doctrinal opinion, from Catholic recusancy at one end to Puritan separatism at the other: recent books by Jean-Christophe Mayer and Beatrice Groves can also be seen in this light.[23] Undoubtedly, much of this revisionism has proved a necessary corrective to an older historiographical celebration of the inevitable ascendency of Protestantism, emergent rationality, and the triumph of the British nation-state. Nevertheless, I want to argue that revisionism has become its own worst enemy.[24] In respect of theoretical practice, historical and conceptual indeterminacy is now taken for granted in far too many revisionist constructions of the period. In literary criticism, the claim that identity is endlessly appropriable, consistently malleable, or 'hybrid' to use Jean-Christophe Mayer's term, too often fails to offer any serious discussion of what 'identity' might in fact mean.[25] If early modern identity is always 'hybrid', then its social, linguistic and political constitution becomes less important than the mere assertion of that fact.

The theoretical paradigm underpinning this pluralist/revisionist approach to early modern culture can be seen, as Antony Easthope has pointed out, as an inevitable endpoint in the advance of a certain version of post-structuralism within critical and cultural studies more generally, one that a number of historians have also assimilated, wittingly or not. According to Easthope, such readings often lead to what he calls a 'utopian privileging of difference'.[26] This shift also underscores the recent emergence of 'Spiritualism' as a critical movement. Writing of early modern religion, Ewan Fernie has encouraged us to think 'not so much of spiritual truth as *truths*' and, like Mayer, he identifies Shakespeare as the emblem of such 'pluralism'.[27] In this theorisation of subjectivity and conceptualisation

of religious affiliation, the plurality of history and the (critical) history of plurality are virtually interchangeable. The ultimate indeterminacy of subjectivity or of doctrinal position sees an almost imperceptible elision of criticism and history, an elision that becomes creditably hybrid because of its very discretion. As Easthope writes, such indeterminacy is able to operate precisely because it 'defines itself in a cluster of effects: in disparaging the signifier, ignoring the imaginary, and relegating, reducing, or even trying to evade altogether the insistence of subjectivity'.[28] I would not claim that 'inwardness' and 'religion' are anything but ideologically contested, indeed over-determined categories of historical analysis.[29] But the time has come to challenge the pluralist constructions that dominate so much criticism in the field.

In fact, the religious debates, controversies and convulsions that mark the early modern period reveal it as a time when the truth claims of various doctrines were seen as absolute, inviolable and *fundamental*. This applies to Catholicism as much as it does to Protestantism. It also underwrites the polemical insistence that shapes so much of the writing of this period. In the realm of theological debate, early modern 'pluralism' was a minority pursuit.[30] Certainly I bring Protestantism into dialogue with Catholicism throughout this book because this is what contemporary writers did. However, after 1559 Reformed Protestantism was the official state religion in England. Whatever the complications of this fact (and there are many), to declare that Protestantism was the dominant religion in England after this date is not to sanction the long history of Protestant historiographical and cultural triumphalism: we can be deeply sceptical of early modern Protestantism while at the same time acknowledging its dominant ideological position. Peter Lake's account of this period as one where religious identities were invariably 'unstable, labile' is certainly attractive, but it misrepresents early modern culture in the service of a liberal, modern paradigm that does not pertain to the period under question.[31] As James Simpson has importantly argued, 'What was achieved in the sixteenth century is better characterized as the origin of fundamentalism than of the liberal tradition.' Nevertheless, this tradition has been far too quick to dismiss the fundamentalist ethos of this period as 'reactionary and "conservative"'.[32] It is unhelpful to project modern conceptions of 'plurality' back on to a period that, whether we like it or not, largely adhered to an unapologetically pre-Enlightenment ethical agenda on such matters. We may value pluralism today: it is far from clear that our early modern forebears did.

In the case of early modern subjectivity, its historical insistence is of such importance that it cannot constantly be reduced to a process of 'endless transformation'[33] without problematic consequences both critical and political. If, as Maus suggests, subjectivity is essentially a collision of multiple, indeterminate forces that coalesce as quickly as they disperse, then the historical and political forces that contribute towards that production can become less important than the critical assertion of an endlessly transformative, 'plural' difference. The political urgency that animated and underpinned Reformed theology (and those who vehemently opposed it) is too often downplayed in such criticism. In dealing with early modern religious culture, it is useful to remember that, for the most part, Catholics and Protestants had fairly clear views on what it was that divided them.[34] Acknowledging this does not have to imply a critically sectarian account of religion in the period. Protestantism and Catholicism were defined through an ongoing mutual antagonism that, while generative, was also messy and unpredictable. Yet any claims for commonality were invariably tempered by the restatement of fundamental doctrinal, cultural and political differences and the relative superiority of whichever religion was being argued for: not even that great 'pluralist' Erasmus was above such assertions.[35] By the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean period on which this book focuses, there were basic theological dividing lines separating Protestantism and Catholicism, they were reasonably clear cut, and they had political implications. I want to reassert the polemical and doctrinal *insistence* of early modern religious discourse and its sharply contested modes of political production. Certainly we can speak of a 'spectrum' of religious beliefs. But criticism needs to recover the polemical tang of this period.

My use of the terms 'Protestant' and 'Protestantism' is informed by the fact that there are varieties of Protestantism and degrees of sympathy with and controversy within even such a broad definitional purview and I try to acknowledge this throughout. Still, when I refer to Protestantism or Reformed theology in late Elizabethan and early Jacobean England, I am referring to a broad religious outlook that is in sympathy with a range of the central tenets of Reformation theology as mediated through the work of the magisterial continental Reformers and their followers. In addition to the fundamental doctrines of justification by faith and the power of God's grace to save the elect, these might also include (but are not limited to) *sola scriptura*, the rejection of material or idolatrous intermediaries between man and God and a broadly defined anti-Catholicism. Since Calvinism was the predominant religious and doctrinal movement in the period I am dealing with, I examine in greater detail throughout this book its assimilation

within early modern culture. Clearly, Protestantism and Calvinism are not the same thing but they do share a common theological lineage. Therefore, I use 'Calvinism' to mean an adherence to all these aspects defined above but also in a more specific doctrinal sense. Here I draw upon the work of Nicholas Tyacke who has defined early modern Calvinism as 'centring on a belief in divine predestination, both double and absolute, whereby man's destiny, either election to Heaven or reprobation to Hell, is not conditioned by faith but depends instead on the will of God'.[36] There are varieties of Calvinism and considerable controversy between moderate and high Calvinists. But for the purposes of what follows, whenever I discuss Calvinism I will implicitly be drawing upon this definition.

The forms of Protestantism that I examine here are largely those of moderate and high Calvinist or Puritan thinkers. It is certainly possible to focus on these forms of Protestantism while also acknowledging that the spectrum encompasses other expressions of doctrine and worship. Nevertheless, to be *any* kind of Reformed Protestant in late Elizabethan and early Jacobean England it was necessary to come to terms with the doctrines outlined above and in particular the controversial and complex doctrines of justification by faith alone and grace. Not all Protestants state and explore the consequences of such doctrines in stark terms. But by their controversial nature the views of the high Calvinists invariably help to define other positions on the religious spectrum in early modern England. Such individuals are commonly termed high Calvinists or Puritans and are often classified as extremists. I want to argue that such a classification is problematic because it implies that such thinkers are somehow deviating from a more benign, gentle Protestantism, one that shies away from the stark divisions expressed by these writers. I have chosen not to focus more fully on joyous explorations of Protestant doctrine because, as I will argue, the theology that informs *all* considerations of justification by faith and grace in early modern England is not benign or gentle. Reformed theology is a rigorous, extreme expression of Christian doctrine, one whose central tenets are severe and uncompromising.

The fact remains that to be a Reformed Protestant of *any* kind in late Elizabethan and early Jacobean England, it was necessary to grapple with the uncompromising message found in Calvin: the world is divided into the elect and the reprobate and saving grace can only fully extend to the elect.[37] This marks a fundamental difference from Lutheranism where grace and so salvation is potentially available to all. Just because these fundamentals are played down, skirted around or ignored by some in early modern England, or by some modern critics, does not invalidate their