‘Sendyth to hym Concyens’:
Contested Orthodoxies in Fifteenth-Century East Anglia

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Chapter 1

Introduction

He sendyth to hym Concyens, pryckyd ful pore,
And clere Confescyon with Penaus-doynge.
Thei mevyn Man to mendement that he mysdyd before.1

And clear Confession and Penance with him
They move Man to reform his prior misdeeds.

This is a study of the changes in the expression of conscience within East Anglia in the fifteenth century. For historians, this century is known for the relative cultural sterility of medieval England as a consequence of war, disunity, economic stagnation, as well as the dislocation of the population due to successive plagues. Yet for this period, East Anglia was the exception. It generated a new and unique literary genre, whilst experiencing the extremes of economic wealth along with the poverty, squalor and disease associated with urban growth and expansion of the textile industry. East Anglia was a focal point for the acquisition of political and military power; it was the epicentre of political intrigue linked to the sustained national and cultural disunity. Social fragmentation, economic boom and bust, the political thuggery of the likes of the Duke of Suffolk co-existed with the refinement and elegance of manorial culture. East Anglia was also one of the key regions for the emergence of the convulsive changes that gave rise to the conflict between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, between the hegemony of the institutional church and new expressions of belief that were to challenge its traditions.

What happened to evoke such a change? What was unique about East

Anglia that triggered divergent expressions of secular and ecclesiastical culture? What gave rise to changes in the expression of belief, to different oral and gestural performances that stimulated attempts to blend institutional power with the free will of the individual? This thesis argues that the fifteenth century in East Anglia was a period of socio-cultural adjustment. It saw the formation of new social power relationships that gave greater prominence to the individual, and influenced the way traditional institutions communicated with and influenced their audiences. It was a period that can be analysed and explained by reference to the central role of performance as a verbal and gestural art. The thesis claims there is a direct causal relationship between performance, its context, its audience, and the expression of conscience.

This century of change was not uniform in scope, or in outcome. It was not a widespread revolutionary force that wrought large-scale, irreversible or peaceful transformation. Rather, it was characterised by its complexity, its preoccupation with power and its use of new technologies. It was a cultural transformation informed by the wide-ranging application of new sensibilities to age-old human circumstances. Within this complexity, a common feature is the sense that people were in an oral world and belonged to a place where the performances they engaged in were local, insular and isolated. Yet, the broader forces were defined by theological and philosophical discourse about the nature of human society, its purpose, its governance and its ideological structures. These changes touched their conscience, compelled a response and ultimately

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2 For example, the fifteenth century saw an expansion in the production of textiles, particularly wool. This was accompanied by the spread of new technologies supporting production and trans-Continental trade. See Eric Kerridge, 'Wool Growing and Wool Textiles in Medieval and Early Modern Times', in John Geraint Jenkins, ed., *The Wool Textile Industry in Great Britain*, (Boston: Routledge & Regan Paul), pp. 27-32.
necessitated an accommodation.

In the midst of this significant social, economic and political change, there emerged a new literary tradition – the morality play – that expressed the essence of the contest for change. Importantly, the morality play centralised the ordinary person as the primary actor, and named him as such: the Everyman. These uniquely East Anglian plays examined the life, death and salvation of Mankind through the generalised and allegorical figure of the Everyman. These plays reflected a growth of ideas, the positing of moral questions, and the widespread debates about the role of the institutional Church and the individual in mediating morality.

This thesis examines the relationship between performance, speech and conscience and the part these dynamics played in late medieval East Anglian society. This was a society on the cusp of multi-faceted change, linked to religious reform and the beginnings of a literate world where debates about the nature of society were to eventually lead to the emergence of the early modernity period with its emphasis upon individual choice, notions of liberalism and rationalism as the basis for expressions of faith. East Anglia provides the historian with resources that allow for the identification and assessment of the many facets of this change process. This is the examination of complex and competing forces on the Everyman and the changing appreciations of conscience as a shared human feature. The focus of this thesis is on the Everyman as an

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3 For a discussion of the emergence of the ‘Everyman’ as a theatrical character, see Dorothy Wertz, ‘Mankind as a Type-Figure on the Popular Religious Stage: An Analysis of the Fifteenth Century English Morality Plays’, Comparative Studies in Society and History 12 (January 1970).
inclusive metaphor for the common people as well as for the social elite. Here the Everyman represents both a literary and historical figure, one who behaves with reference to the performance witnessed and enacted. This response gives expression to conscience.

Performance as an analytical device responds to a range of theoretical and practical influences and constraints. Here, the use of performance moves beyond the Clifford Geertz notion of a ‘theatre state’, with its concentration on cultural interpretations of myth, ceremony, ritual and symbolism, and its emphasis upon spectacle. This thesis responds to the work of Patrick Geary in reimagining the significance of the intersection between oral and written traditions, of memory and forgetting, as the consequences of record keeping and the flux of time. Important to this thesis is Robin Chapman Stacey’s seminal work, *Dark Speech* and her use of performance as a means to focus on gesture and verbal art as revelatory devices. Stacey finds performance a useful tool in interpreting the theatrics of medieval law courts, and that vision is adapted here in order to explore the performative traditions of speech and gesture within the social interactions of East Anglia. The interplay between the verbal and gestural qualities of social actors with the response of audience as observer has implications for the formulation, expression and evolution of individual conscience. The morality plays are a case study of dramatic performance – a theatrical pattern of verbal and physical gesture. However, they are also

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representative of the world beyond the theatre, where performative responses are made to those temptations or doctrinal issues depicted on stage. The morality plays constitute one type of social and cultural performances that this thesis will address.

Stacey alerts the historian to the ability of performance to be defined narrowly, ‘solely in terms of formal, framed procedures whose ritual aspect makes them easy to differentiate from more ordinary forms of social interaction.’ However, she goes on to elaborate that performance can also be defined more broadly, ‘in a way that encompasses a wide variety of public demonstrations of status or affiliation, however brief and unpatterned.’ Such an expansion must resist performance becoming a formless categorisation; instead, it is a subset of conduct in which the actors assume ‘responsibility to an audience for a display of a communicative skill.’ Importantly, Stacey emphasises that performance does not occur in isolation, but exists as ‘part of a larger nexus of beliefs about language and the exercise of power.’ The latter definition is central to this thesis as it recognises the power of speech and its central role in the shaping of culture and conscience.

Performance represents different modes of speech and expression – from the institutionalised to the interpersonal. That is, there is a continuum of performance wherein the Mass and processional displays exist as largely

7 Stacey, *Dark Speech*, p. 3.
8 Stacey, *Dark Speech*, p. 3.
10 Stacey, *Dark Speech*, p. 4.
didactic, ritualised and transmissive exchanges, compared to more fluid presentation of the morality plays and the dynamism of political exchange and protest speech. Importantly, these performances represent not just the expression of conscience, but also the shaping of it.

Stacey emphasises that performance is more than the use of ritual, more than drama and theatre. It is cultural and hierarchical and invokes the use of speech as a means not just to communicate verbal meaning but to also reinforce a complex set of values, beliefs, and understandings. Performance allows for the familiar to be re-imagined, altered or adapted so as to bring about new relationships, new ways of seeing. In this thesis, performance is an appeal to the senses. Its gestural, verbal and theatrical features impact upon the individual so as to shape thinking, perception and ultimately conscience.

Speech is a critical feature of performance as it is persuasive and empowers the performer by bestowing on him status. However, speech is also inherently dangerous, allowing individuals to speak for themselves and thereby to threaten those who traditionally have the status to speak. Performance can be subversive, when it is unauthorised or when it is presented in such a way as to allow for the individual interpretations of audience members. Performance can also fail – it can expose the performer to ridicule or censure. Whatever the reaction, performance invokes memory in the audience and allows for the transfer of the experience to a new context. For example, to witness a public execution, to see the priest bless the sick or to hear representations of good and evil performed within a play are all part of learning whereby the observer builds
experiences and perceptions that become the basis for learning and the progressive refinement of conscience.

Performance conveys status and moral worth in that the perception of the status and authority of the performer influences the way an individual responds and that, in turn, hones conscience. In this analysis, performance is adaptive, and helps to shape thinking, behaving and responding.

Conscience is a pervasive feature of human behaviour that has formed the basis of much philosophical and theological work by Greek and Roman masters and well as Early Christian theologians.\textsuperscript{11} Significantly for this paper, Augustine’s \textit{Confessions} influenced the definition of conscience as a voice that moved between the inner and the outer self, the arbiter of private inclination and public consensus.\textsuperscript{12} Conscience was central to religious performance made secure by a body of doctrinal principle informed by Christian theology, biblical reference points and the institutional practices and authority of the Church.

For the medieval Church, a proper application of conscience meant that the believer did not stumble or err outside doctrinal precepts and did not recognise the possibility of heresy or error. Aquinas espoused in the thirteenth century that, ‘A rule by which other things are governed must always be unfailingly correct. But \textit{conscientia} is a rule of human deeds. Therefore

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item For an indepth analysis of the conception of conscience in medieval Europe, see Timothy C. Potts, \textit{Conscience in Medieval Philosophy} (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1980). For extracts from the work of Augustine (c. AD 354-430) and Aquinas (AD c. 1225-1274) on conscience see Potts, \textit{Conscience}, pp. 81-89 and 122-129.
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*conscientia* must be correct.'\(^{13}\) Conscience was orthodox and well intentioned, and the theological debates of Aquinas and others did not recognise the existence of heretical forms of conscience, as 'Unbelievers do not have any gnawing of *conscientia* about their lack of faith. But lack of faith is a sin.'\(^{14}\) Aquinas recognised the possibility of people having a conscience that was outside the doctrinal and faith based beliefs of the Church. For such people salvation was not possible. Conscience with faith was the orthodoxy of the Church and only through submission to God’s will, as mediated by the Church, was one to be saved.\(^{15}\)

Salvation represented the core religious axiom at the beginning of the fifteenth century; Augustinian and Thomistic theology validated the interpretative role of the Church in mediating the individual’s relationship with God. God's will was interpreted, taught, and guarded by the Church as a form of religious hegemony.\(^{16}\) The traditional view of the Church was that all knowledge, power and reference was derived from an all knowing and merciful God. All earthly activity, by all people – King and commoner alike – was subject to the will of God and thus to the Church in its role as the earthly mediator of God’s word. One morality play expressed it in these terms;

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Kyng, kayser, knyt, and kampyoun,
Pope, patriark, prest and prelat in pes...
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\(^{13}\) Thomas of Aquinas, 'Debated Questions on Truth' in Potts, *Conscience*, p. 132.
\(^{15}\) For elaboration, see Richard Schechner, 'From Ritual to Theater and Back' in Essays on Performance Theory (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 112-69. Schechner examines the Mass as a ritual performance in which the audience can choose to participate and attend, or to reject it. He continues, ‘ritual is an event upon which its participants depend; theater is an event which depends on its participants’, pp. 137-138. This claim supports the argument of this thesis – that is, as the expression and influence on conscience moved from ritualised to theatrical performance, so too did individuals become increasingly interpretive.
Little and meek, the more and the less,
All the states of the world are under [God's] control;  

The institutional Church was expected to shape conscience on matters of virtue and morality, and people were to respond accordingly. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, individual conscience was linked to the overwhelming moral power of church teachings. All good decisions were moral decisions, with morality based on the word of God as interpreted by the Church. Importantly, the notion that conscience might allow and empower the individual to stand alone was yet to take shape.

Various examinations of the nature of conscience were proffered in the later medieval period. For example, the Midlands Ayenbite of Inwyty (1340), a confessional prose work, speaks of a self-generated sense of guilt and correlates the welfare of the conscience with that of the soul. The Northumbrian Pricke of Conscience (c. 1349) talks of the nature of doctrine more than it does about the behaviour of individuals and choices they make. Insights into the nature of conscience were being proffered at the end of the fourteenth century too in Langland’s Piers Plowman (c. 1370). This allegory has conscience operating inside the mind of Will – the protagonist – influencing and shaping his response to the temptations he confronts. Piers Plowman precedes the morality plays of the fifteenth century, wherein conscience represents orthodoxy, and through the

17 Klausner, The Castle of Perseverance, p. 102, lines 3612-3615.
interaction of performance, language and audience, stimulated issues of interpretation. The morality plays went further, presenting the orthodoxy of the Church through the dynamics of performance designed to capture the interpretative imagination of the audience. This engagement represented the progressive refinement of conscience.

In the fifteenth century the notion of conscience as a construct steeped in the institutionalised expectation of the medieval Church evolved to become one driven by individual perceptions. This shift can be explained with reference to the relationship between performance, language and audience. The writings of John Wyclif (1330-84), the actions of religious dissidents, and the growth in interactive forms of performance influenced the way conscience was conceived. Religious dissent was but one part of a change process within a century of contest, conflict, and debate over the nature of truth and role of conscience, as well as the expression of these debates in performance. Such performance by individuals and groups occurred across a range of theatrical forms, from ritual and theatre, to a wide range of institutionalised forms as well as individual behaviours and responses. The use of performance as a construct allows for everyday exchanges to be read through recorded and observable sources. The dramatic forms of fifteenth-century plays provide signifiers of the way people purported to perform when confronted by temptation events and challenges to conscience.

Within fifteenth-century East Anglia, conscience was expressed in new and diverse ways, as its power and purpose in understanding and controlling
human behaviour became increasingly sophisticated. As the society evolved out of feudal institutional power blocs, so too did expressions of human conscience come to perform individualised beliefs as to what was moral, ethical, right or wrong. There emerged, over the century, a perception of multiple truths and multiple paths to salvation. The writings of medieval theologians had acknowledged this element of diversity, but conscience had been used as the basis for encouraging the laity to comply with the doctrinal principles of Church teaching. That is to say, in theory diversity was acknowledged but in practice discouraged, as expressed by Augustine;

You saw how deep I was sunk in death, and it was your power that drained dry the well of corruption in the depths of my heart. And all that you asked of me was to deny my own will and accept yours.21

For Augustine, to deny one’s will was the ultimate surrender to the will of God. He expresses to God his sorrow for transgression and acknowledges that salvation comes through submission, whereas free will of the individual could corrupt the soul. However, as the fifteenth century evolved, the divergence of views about the relationship of conscience to the individual became a far more prominent element in the patterns of performance by significant individuals and groups.

This thesis posits conscience as the fulcrum for individual and, in many instances, collective decision-making, as it informs the actions of each. That is, performance reflected individuals coming to terms with the nature of change as they confronted it on a day-to-day basis. These performances could be formal

21 Augustine, *Confessions*, Book IX, Chapter I.
(sermon, proclamation and invocation), as well as informal (work, recreation and worship). At a fundamental level, conscience derived its influence from the human search to make *right* decisions by reference to the prevailing value system. Conscience was the agency for decision-making and this was espoused in the fifteenth century. For example, the preacher of the East Anglian collection of sermons, *Jacob’s Well* speaks directly to the Everyman as parishioner;

I haue told you here-be-forn how ye schul castyn out of þe pytt of youre conscyens þe corrupt watyr of þe gret curs with þe scope of penauns...\(^{22}\)

Amidst the volatility of East Anglia society, individuals and groups performed roles, rituals, and rites of passage, reacted to circumstances and responded to the daily exigencies of eking out a living. All of these acts demanded performative responses to social and collective expectation. For the many who followed the Church or conformed to the dictates of social codes, the behaviour was compliant. The individual responded to these expectations with reference to an inner voice – a conscience – that informed their decisions about how to behave, what was right and about the choices available.

However, one of the central challenges in fifteenth-century East Anglia came from the development of social practices, customs, and traditions difficult to reconcile with the Church and its teachings.\(^{23}\) This suggests a society far more complex, where there was a hierarchy of speech that reflected superstition, a


\(^{23}\) For a discussion of social, cultural and religious tensions in fifteenth century Norwich, for example, see Benjamin R. McRee, ‘Peacemaking and its Limits in Late Medieval Norwich’, *English Historical Review* 109, no. 433 (September 1994), pp. 831-866.
wide range of learning, social and cultural hierarchies and patterns of wealth. Succinctly stated, a new welter of voices competed with the institutional Church. In the fifteenth century, there was also an increase in individual and group responses to the tensions and conflicts derived from social, economic, political and religious forces. This social tumult – expressed in dissent and revolt – required the Church to respond to internal and external forces for change, which increasingly required a new relationship to be forged between Church and individual. Individual moral autonomy was developing, influenced by competing religious theologies and economic and political change. This change was also brought about by new sensibilities amongst the laity that were to influence conscience-driven decisions and interpretations of what they observed.

East Anglian society progressively shifted its emphasis from institutional expectations to individual response and motivation. That is, new forms of social discourse allowed individuals to perform their choices based on an internal sense of right or wrong. The expectation of individual moral judgment can be seen in Mirk’s Festial:

As a hownd gnawyth a boon, ryght soo þat synne schall gnawe hys concyens.  

As a dog gnaws at a bone, so shall sin gnaw at his conscience.

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By the end of the century, the power of the traditional sources of performance – institutions that dominated and attempted to control behaviour, such as Church and guild – had been overshadowed by the increased power of the individual to interpret them. This is not to say that the traditional institutions were abandoned or rendered impotent. Rather, they had more competition for the allegiances of the individual. This competition was derived from increased use of the English language with its empowering potential for wider education.\footnote{For a discussion of the growth in literacy in the fifteenth century, see M. B. Parkes, ‘The Literacy of the Laity’, in Malcolm B. Parkes, ed., \textit{Scribes, Scripts, and Readers}, (London: Hambledon Press, 1991), pp. 275-97; Nicholas Orme, \textit{Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England} (London: Hambledon Press, 1989); Nicholas Orme, \textit{Medieval Schools: From Roman Britain to Renaissance England} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 59-60.} This occurred within literary texts and selected legal frames as well as within the theological discourse.

The individual could not have been immune from or untouched by these changes and the intellectual energy that drove them. Competing perspectives can be expressed when there is a common language that integrates the range of social classes. It can give rise to textual, oral and gestural patterns of performance that are the basis for explaining the historical shift in conscience that emerged within fifteenth-century East Anglia. The historian cannot directly observe conscience, and yet its expression through performance is tangible, observable, varied, and adaptive, and it evolved as a function of individual experience. The morality plays signify and exemplify this performative pattern where common language, human interaction and contested moral dilemma confront the audience. Again, conscience is expressed in religious verse, legal and property records and vernacular sermons as well as a wide range of
performances known as ritual. One opportunity to observe conscience is in the speech hierarchy or pattern of performance observed in everyday exchange.

In this period, East Anglian literary culture flourished. A new genre of play, the morality, relied for its effectiveness on establishing a new relationship with the audience. It engaged the observer, encouraging interaction, interpretation and response to the themes of the play. This was a relationship that demanded the audience have a voice. The Everyman – a figure who derives his literary heritage from these plays – was employed to model a response to the exigencies of everyday life. This thesis will examine the Macro Plays, *The Castle of Perseverance* (c. 1405-25), *Mankind* (c. 1471-9) and *Wisdom* (c. 1480-1500). Each is written with a very real awareness of the presence of audience and is dependent upon a dynamic interaction with it to convey the themes of morality. Moreover, the Macro Plays signified a broader and pervasive insight into the nature and the development of conscience. As Davidson notes,

“The Macro moralities of East Anglia are, then, highly theatrical and visual elements driven by phenomenological considerations, especially by the perception of human fragility and mortality that we recognize as typical of the age.”

This is to say, the challenge of the morality plays was to engage audience in a *discussion* of moral issues not possible within the rituals of the church, where the institutional focus was on closed catechism, not on open debate or interpretation. This thesis links the role and significance of these plays to what

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they reveal about the nature of conscience – how they encouraged people, audiences, to think, behave and respond.

The intersection of performance, of its audience and response is pivotal to identifying the change in this formulation and shaping of conscience over time. As Seth Lerer demonstrated in his work on the spectator as participant in the violence of medieval drama, the cultural habits displayed in performative traditions facilitate the blurring of the lines between practice and performance. Members of the East Anglian audience defined themselves as witnesses to models of morality by means of cultural performances. That is, the audience reaction could be ‘public or private, decorous or transgressive, participatory or voyeuristic...’ An examination of the performance-audience relationship reveals the dynamic nature of emerging individual conscience and the circumstances of its adaptation, accommodation and evolution over the century. These changes, as embodied in the behaviour of the individual, group, organisation or institution, reflected the broader mentalities of East Anglia and greater England.

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31 Lerer, “”Representyd Now in Yower Sight””, p. 32.
Chapter 2:

Ritual and Orthodoxy

In this section of the thesis, the ritualistic dimensions of performance are considered regarding the way they demonstrate authority within a variety of performative settings. Performance is used as an analytical tool to describe, define and explain behaviours that, by reference to normative and ritualistic experiences, allow for reasoned inferences about individual orthodox conscience. This then is the examination of institutionalised forms of conscience, the expectations placed upon the Everyman so that he will conform to the ritualised traditions of Church and social structure.

Performance is hierarchical; it exists on a spectrum. At one end is ritual – formal, predictable, repetitive – and at the other end is spontaneous and reactive behaviour that responds reflexively to social or cultural stimuli. The performance culture of the medieval Church utilised theatrical elements as ritual in the celebration of its sacraments. So too did civic organisations in fifteenth-century East Anglia attempt to shape and formulate audience behaviour and response to a predictable pattern of performance through a range of performance activity that included ritualistic modes of expression. These ritualised performances sought to shape and influence the behaviour and responses of their observers and participants. These rituals as well as the less formal performances used language in the form of oral, verbal or textual appeals

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to the audience. This chapter examines the rituals of medieval East Anglia for what they revealed about the nature of the interaction between institution and individual. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the speech and action embodied in these rituals shaped behaviour and conscience. However, over the century these performances were increasingly challenged by the manifold voices of individuals.

A broad range of ritual observances in the medieval Church utilised performance as a means of communicating the values of the religion. Performative ritual was integral to the function of worship from early pagan times. It was grafted onto the early Christian forms of worship, as demonstrated by Tertullian (c. AD 197-202) who declared that *spectacula* or theatrical rituals within the framework of the liturgy represented the only ‘pleasures and the spectacles fit for Christians’.33 By the middle ages this liturgy was the ‘officially prescribed canon of worship, the chief feature of which was the observance of Divine Offices [daily prayers], including the Mass.’34

The fundamental principle of Man’s salvation through Christ was reinforced and remembered through the sacrament of the Mass, done in remembrance of Christ.35 According to a fourteenth-century entry in the *Lay Folks’ Mass Book,*

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For of alle thinges in þe werlde is þe mes The worthyest and maste of gudnes.\textsuperscript{36}

Of all things in the world is the Mass the worthiest and best.

From the tenth century, biblical narratives were being dramatised in order to create an emotive response amongst parishioners.\textsuperscript{37} The Mass was the central public ritual of the Church from the thirteenth century to the Reformation, and of the Roman Catholic Church thereafter.\textsuperscript{38} A mid-nineteenth-century theological exchange between monks in Corbie saw the first discussion of the Eucharist as a sacrament, rather than as a devotional, communal ritual.\textsuperscript{39} The legacy of Augustine, which interpreted the Eucharist as both a physical and symbolic representation of God, stimulated theological debates on the nature of the Eucharist and, in particular, the dogma of transubstantiation. These debates, led by the University of Paris, were silenced in 1059 by the intervention of Pope Nicholas II.\textsuperscript{40} He decreed that,

The bread and wine which are laid on the altar are after the consecration not only a sacrament but also the true body of ...Jesus Christ, and they are physically taken up and broken in the hands of the priest and crushed by the teeth of the faithful, not only sacramentally but in truth.\textsuperscript{41}

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\textsuperscript{36} Dan Jeremy and John Lydgate, \textit{The Lay Folks' Mass Book; or, the Manner of Hearing Mass, with Rubrics and Devotions for the People, in Four Texts, and Offices in English According to the Use of York, from Manuscripts of the Xth to the Xvth Century}, (London: Early English Text Society, 1869), updated 18 March 2010, John M. Kelly Library Online hosted by The University of Toronto, Canada, <http://archive.org/stream/layfolksmassbook00simmuoft>, viewed 2 September 2012, p. 61.

\textsuperscript{37} Fraser, 'Introduction', p. 3.


\textsuperscript{40} For an explanation of the Eucharist and Pope Nicholas II, see Rubin, 'The Eucharist and the Construction of Medieval Identities', pp. 46-7.

Discourse over transubstantiation defined the relationship between the performance of the Mass and the individual observer of it. These debates were supposed to end with the intervention of the Pope. The doctrine of transubstantiation invokes a mandate to believe, to have faith and through this demand, the individual’s conscience is both shaped and controlled. In short, the propagation of dogma demanded that the individual conscience fall into accord with official doctrine. This dogma required an expression of faith in order to meet the requirements for salvation. Significantly, transubstantiation exemplifies the scope and nature of debate about matters of faith and ultimately gave sharp focus to key differences that were to emerge inspired by quite fundamental interpretative conflicts, theological discourse and patterns of oppression, suppression and sanction instituted by a Church intent on ensuring that the papal decree was honoured. Central to this theological discourse was the relationship between transubstantiation and notions of free will. The demand upon the faithful to believe in transubstantiation as an act of faith did little to eliminate theological and philosophical tensions within the Church, and during the fifteenth century contributed to significant levels of dissent that ultimately led to the alienation of many. This dynamic dominated much of the social, religious and civic dissent recorded within the urban records of Norwich and Bury St Edmunds in the fifteenth century.42 There was an institutional move to consolidate and propagate doctrine and this was to ultimately come into conflict with a wider, multi-vocal articulation of what faith should be.

In terms of ritual as performance, the status of the Eucharist was powerful, and it was a central and recurring motif within the Mass as well as other sacramental rituals. Within the Mass, the Eucharist was exposed and uncovered to devotees and was borne in communal processions. Its presence, whenever it was exposed, required a responsive act of reverence by the faithful. This took the form of genuflection, the blessing of oneself or the uttering of an invocation. That is, the Host was central to performance and a catalyst for a physical response whereby the faithful spoke of their belief. In the early fifteenth century, there was an outpouring of sermons, miracle stories, and liturgical innovations that highlighted the salvific power of the Host and its transubstantiation from bread to Christ’s flesh.

The power of the Eucharist was embodied in the way its ritualistic observance engaged with audience. The ability to handle the Eucharist was exclusively given to the clergy who would re-enact (rather than symbolise) the sacrifice of Christ. Handling the Eucharist gave the priest power and, with that, status and authority. The priest was a significant actor and this power was reinforced by the dramatic, theatrical, linguistic and aesthetic elements characteristic of the medieval Mass. The Mass facilitated the bloodless re-enactment of Christ’s Passion, and demanded of the faithful an outpouring of

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45 The significance of this distinction rests in the belief that the Mass is the literal reenactment of the sacrificial death of Christ. See Rubin, ‘The Eucharist and the Construction of Medieval Identities’, pp. 46-47.
religious and reverential behaviour whereby their conscience spoke. They publically affirmed their faith. They became part of the ritual, part of the performance. By doing so, the faithful were enacting, performing a ritualised expression of the conscience that was expected of them.

The preparation of the Eucharist for consecration was increasingly ritualised from the twelfth century, with the resplendent vessels containing and concealing the consecrated Host intended to heighten their visual effect, once revealed by the priest to the audience.47 The moment of revelation of the Host as the consecrated body and blood of Christ came with the expectation that those who bore witness would acknowledge the sacredness of the moment and in doing so, speak to their faith, their allegiance and their conscience The elevation of the Host saw Christ raised in the hands of the priest and ‘Seeing the Host became the high point of lay experience of the Mass’. The congregation, having responded to this sacred moment by appropriate speech and gesture, then affirmed their faith by receiving communion.48 The Mass, by its very ritual, invoked a broader set of demands for the faithful in that, to participate fully by taking communion, one was also signalling that he/she was in a state of grace. That is, they were without sin, made possible by having received confessional absolution and penance. These sacraments were ritualistic embellishments required to ensure a clear, clean conscience.

The Mass as spectacle fostered a participatory form of worship through action, such as the rituals of kneeling and standing or the recitation of prayer.

The veil and screen in parish churches functioned as a temporary ritual deprivation in order to heighten ‘the value of the spectacle it temporarily concealed.’⁴⁹ Such devices, ‘redolent of the mechanics of stage prop, costume and scenery form... a frame for the liturgical drama of the Mass’.⁵⁰ This was a drama in which the congregation became both spectator and participant. The Mass was performative and theatrical in that it used costume, staged movements, lighting and sound (in the form of chants and choir) so that it was, in every significant way, sacred theatre.⁵¹ As theatre, it required the congregation to engage actively in the communion with Christ, the central feature of Mass. The offertory, wherein the priest prepared bread and wine for sacrifice, was complemented by a sacrifice of money or goods by the parishioners, who could contribute to the support of the clergymen.⁵² The devotional verse and public sermons of the later fifteenth century appealed to the emotional response of the Christian conscience in visualising the wounds, body and blood of Christ.⁵³

The ideology of Christian communion saw the formation of community around the shared consumption of Christ.⁵⁴ The Mass was the ultimate performance of piety wherein the ritual – in its performative character – formed the basis of sermons for teaching and inculcating values. It was a performance that had hierarchical patterns of power and speech that allowed the clergy to validate their role and confirm their authority through observing the response of

⁵¹ See the description given in Zika, 'Hosts, Processions and Pilgrimages', pp. 32-4.
their audience. So significant was this validation that audience participation could become a privilege, making it more valuable in both a social and religious sense. For example, only those in a state of grace could receive the sacrament of the Eucharist and in doing so the communicant was not only claiming to be in a state of grace but performing a ritual to validate it. This was an act of religious conscience ritualised. These patterns of inclusion gave conscience the extra dimension of meaning, in that it wasn’t enough to believe and express belief, but required membership of a privileged group.

The tension between audience participation and audience exclusion is well documented within historical analysis of the medieval Mass. Church historians usually characterise the late Middle Ages as a period in which the laity was being excluded from the regular performances of the liturgy. One means of restricting lay participation was in the use of Latin in chants and readings. Since the late eighth century, the Canon of the Mass was inaudible, with limits imposed on the sight and hearing of the congregation. Thus, the physical space of the church was utilised in order to regulate audience experience. The priest monopolised performative action within the Mass. Lay participation in the Church’s liturgy was generally limited to the reading of marriage bans and social information and the receiving of blessing at the close of Mass, as well as sporadic involvement in baptism, marriage, and obsequies.

The Mass was the central theatre for promoting religious observance. However it was not the only ritual in fifteenth-century East Anglia used to evoke patterns of performance and influence conscience. The liturgical year contained formal as well as informal performances derived from the demands of the liturgy and the doctrinal principles of the Church. These utilised hierarchical speech, ranging from the formal prayers of the Mass, the sermons with their local appeal and presentation by the preacher, through to the performance of the office and the reflective moments of meditation. These examples of hierarchical speech included the prayers and the liturgy of special events associated with the Easter and Lenten celebrations, Holy Days offered to commemorate a saint, the distribution of sacraments within a community as well as, contentiously, the promotion and sale of indulgences as a means of coping with the doctrine of purgatory.

Community events and traditions (some derived from superstition or pagan practices grafted onto the liturgical year) also expressed the interplay between Church and performance. These activities were also ritualised, but did not always possess the rigidity of the formality associated with the Mass. Rather, the dimensions of gesture, speech and theatre would move across the spectrum of performance towards a freer expression of belief, a less structured engagement of people. Beating the bounds was one such custom, which constituted a ‘parochial perambulation’ of the limits of the parish on the Feast of Ascension or in the lead up to Holy Thursday. The cleric, accompanied by churchwardens and parishioners performed the dual act of seeking God’s

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blessing for the community and preserving the rights and properties of the parish. Led in a religious procession, this act was intended, in the words of one seventeenth-century antiquarian:

That ev'ry man might keep his owne possessions,
Our fathers us'd, in reverent Processions,
(With zealous prayers, and with p raiseful cheere),
To walke their parish-limits once a yeare;
And well-knowne markes (which sacrilegious hands
Now cut or breake) so bord'red out their lands,
That ev'ry one distinctly knew his owne;
And many brawles, now rife, were then unknowne.59

The ritual of beating the bounds demonstrates how religious and social relationships can be formed, not only through landmarks and demarcation, but through a performative act. To anthropologist A. David Napier, the beating of the bounds becomes one of the 'those stages upon which objects become marked images through imaginative acts.'60 Napier suggests that the physical boundaries central to this ritual formed part of the imagined state of the participants and enshrine space as part of conscience. Thus, ritual was used to delineate between and enforce boundaries, demonstrating a link between the physical and spiritual worlds. This was a public performance, an example of how social custom, integrated with religious belief, could be a performance where conscience was expressed, reinforced and perhaps even celebrated. The formal, predictable, repetitive qualities of this ritual disabled the expression of variable individual conscience, with expressions of conscience expected to conform to a predetermined outcome.

This intersection of the physical and spiritual dimension of performance can also be seen in the establishment of shrines across England and East Anglia. In East Anglia, shrines were established at, among other sites, Walsingham and Ely.\(^{\text{61}}\) The *Historia Aurea* of Bury St Edmunds, written in the fourteenth century, details the development of shrines and local centres of devotion to St Edmund within East Anglia.\(^{\text{62}}\) The site of Bury itself attracted pilgrims throughout the later Middle Ages.\(^{\text{63}}\) These shrines formed the basis of a pilgrimage culture with its strong expression of conscience in that the act of pilgrimage involved sacrificial performance. Many of the actions relating to the completion of pilgrimage were ritualised, although it did allow for some individual expression and interpretation. Conscience formed a part of this expression of ritual, as the completion of the pilgrimage both revealed and honed the conscience of the faithful. The pilgrimage embodied and emphasised the importance of a physical display of repentance and piety through travel. It was a powerful forum for the articulation of belief, as it allowed the pilgrim to voice conscience through action.\(^{\text{64}}\)

Many aspects of fifteenth-century life, whether economic, social, political or religious, were played out in public in performances linked to the expressions of values and social customs drawn from belief. In fifteenth-century East Anglia, the expression of a religious conscience, based upon the individual search for salvation, was increasingly complemented by a more diverse conception of

\[^{\text{63}}\text{Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, p. 81.}\]
conscience. The latter was composed of responses to broader life circumstances than the attendance and participation in Church rituals. Cultural traditions linked to social, economic and political behaviours used performance to shape not only the religious conscience of the individual, but also their behaviour as part of a secular society. Early in the fifteenth century, the sense of right and wrong linked to personal action extended to notions of collective action or expressions of a social conscience. East Anglia experienced civic dissent, strikes, and unrest linked to the election of town officials, taxation and tithes.\textsuperscript{65} These behaviours and interactions of the laity encouraged the intermingling of religious, political and economic notions of good civic behaviour. In every sense, it was moral to serve God through good work. This work, no matter its esteem or commercial value, could function as a prayer for those who sought salvation by the application of their conscience to their work.\textsuperscript{66} As spoken by the eponymous character of the play \textit{Mankind},

\begin{quote}
Wyth my spade I wyll departe...
Ande lyve ever wyth labure to corecte my insolence.\textsuperscript{67}
\end{quote}

Conscience was expressed within many functions of the laity as part of their secular life. Secular performances of home and work were embedded with behaviours that were based on a sense of right or wrong. This conscience, reflected in social issues, political concerns and economic decision-making,


shared in common with a religious conscience a set of values or principles that were performative in behaviours, in speech and in gesture.

The most significant expression of economic conscience in the fifteenth century was the organisation of labour supported by a guild system. Modern scholars, whilst invariably acknowledging the influence of medieval guilds on social and municipal affairs, have not agreed on their nature, impact and purpose. Guilds have variously been interpreted as the device of urban elites to control workers, the promoters of workers’ rights and brotherhood, or as primarily political actors. The mutual organisation of guilds centralised collective conscience and a communal distribution of profits, services and duties. This thesis argues that the fundamental feature of the guild system at the beginning of the fifteenth century was to prioritise morality as a measure of quality workmanship. Guild statutes were supplemented by rules facilitating the mutual aid of members, the arbitration of disputes, and the procuring of spiritual benefits.

Gary Richardson argues that ‘all craft guilds pursued pious goals’, since the collective would benefit spiritually and monetarily by upholding moral

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These moral codes were drawn from the Bible and encouraged members to be pious, never to gamble, lie, steal or drink in excess. The behaviour of individual members affected the collective as their spiritual fate was connected, as too was their economic well-being. The more pious the membership, the more powerful were their joint prayers and thus, the sooner they would progress through purgatory. Moreover, members were usually initiated into the group through a performative ritual wherein they professed loyalty to the collective, Christ, and the patron saints. They were given a mark of acceptance, ‘a garland’ to symbolise membership and the acceptance of guild laws, obedience to the alderman and peaceful relationships with other members. Importantly, these ritualised performances exercised inclusion-exclusion dynamics. To historian Heather Swanson, guild membership embodied ‘hierarchical and above all male-oriented’ power structure, rather than reflecting the realities of the economic structure. The guilds were, in some respects, a civic version of the Church. Both shared a patriarchal culture and possessed a pattern of power distribution that was based on status and ascribed authority.

Guilds enforced predictable patterns of member participation in religious and civic events. The guilds held participation as a condition of membership, but did allow for some divergence and discretion in the way decisions were made and outcomes of work life were followed. Participation through worship was

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71 Richardson, ‘Craft Guilds and Christianity in Late-Medieval England’, pp. 138-140.
expected of guild members, such as the collective attendance at church on Sunday. Some guilds also met during the week and on religious holidays to attend Mass. Guild responsibility could include the obligatory attendance of funerals and praying for the souls of deceased brethren. Before the body was interred, members lit candles, said prayers and sang dirges around the body.\textsuperscript{75} Similarly, many guilds commissioned priests to pray for deceased members to speed their progress through purgatory. According to Ben R. McRee, funeral rites and prayers would cost an independent townsman two years worth of wages.\textsuperscript{76} Collectively guilds could raise funds for private masses as well as for religious paraphernalia including vestments, ornaments and candles; fellow guildsmen supported impoverished members and thereby helped to sustain moral expectations and guild unity.\textsuperscript{77} Members’ participation in guild traditions and performances ensured the dual advantages of religious and monetary solidarity. These features acted as motivators for guild members to abide by guild rules as, if expelled, they would lose business and religious benefits. This mutual organisation of guilds centralised collective conscience and a communal distribution of profits, services and duties.

The guild system can be located on the performance spectrum as a blend of discretionary and non-discretionary activity wherein both a group and individual sense of economic conscience prevailed. Conscience was an integral feature of decision-making within the guild, with a blend of the religious principles set within a secular designed and managed work place. The ritual of

\textsuperscript{75}Richardson, ‘Craft Guilds and Christianity in Late-Medieval England’, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{76}McRee, ‘Unity or Division?’, p. 191.
the guild was in large measure self-generated and reflected the respective goals of the group. Accordingly, each guild had its own distinctive set of worshipful practices that allowed for a unique set of performances – and thus expression – of economic conscience.

In the fifteenth century, the world of work was, for the faithful, an extension of the various religious rituals that were part of their life. That is, work was the extension of belief and conscience wherein ‘labure’ with the ‘spade’ corrected ‘insolence’, as cited in Mankind above. For the fifteenth century, the work of the guilds was a service to God. It expressed fidelity and the hope of salvation through good works. With this notion of good works, guilds brought to the world of work a crucial element in Catholic soteriology: that charity, loyalty and communal cooperation promised salvation. These religious principles of conscience were readily translated by the guild system into a form of community support, making religious conscience intrinsic to labour-based articulations of conscience as well. Moreover, whilst the guild philosophy can be satisfactorily explained in religious terms, it also experienced the progressive shift in values during the fifteenth century. The world of work offered the opportunity for the development of new values reflective of an emerging economic conscience wherein good labour was valued in its own right, independent of the formalism of religious belief.78 The guild system provided protection and scope for the individual to do good work not only for the celebration of God but also for one’s earthly betterment.

78 The influence of guilds on the community, particularly in Norwich, is explored in McRee, ‘Unity or Division?’, pp. 190-194. See also Barbara Hanawalt, ‘Keepers of the Lights: Late Medieval Parish Gilds’, Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies 14, no. 1 (1984), p. 21; Gervase Rosser, ‘Communities of Parish and Guild in the Late Middle Ages’, in S.J. Wright, ed., Communities of Parish and Guild in the Late Middle Ages (London: Hutchinson, 1988), 29-55.
Guilds engaged in a range of performances other than work. Guilds emphasised shared values and beliefs by exhibiting them publicly in a show of solidarity and piety. In particular, performances such as processions and pageants conveyed social unity, wealth and power of the collective to the wider community.\(^79\) The city of Norwich, for example, strictly legislated how guild members could behave and participate within processions.\(^80\) The mayor needed to be forewarned of any guild processions or gatherings, and those clothed in guild livery were obliged to participate in the procession. The Norwich Records stipulate that all guild members ‘have the duty on all occasions to participate in all processions...to attend religious services in honour of the saint to whom the craft is dedicated... and in other obligations such as are set out above or below.’\(^81\) This regulation of guild participation highlights how performance gave a civic voice to individuals and organisations, under the auspices of town governance.

Moreover, these urban displays which may have had their origins in religious affiliation, increasingly performed a social and function. This is a useful example of the transition of conscience from purely a religious expression of belief to one where work, civic agency and authority could legitimately claim allegiance and compliance. For Norwich, the guild was an important representation of the town’s civic culture. The guild’s performative tradition was a blend of religious, economic and social values, which saw the hegemony of the


\(^{81}\) Hudson and Tingey, eds., *The Records of the City of Norwich*, pp. 287-88.
church replaced by a civic agency. Conscience, as part of this performative tradition, had become far more complex due to the integration of a range of overlapping orthodoxies and by the scope this presents for individualised interpretation.

The guild was a significant and substantial socio-economic group. It had authority, a civic, economic and religious voice. As an institution, it performed a range of rituals both public and private. Membership gave status and with that some reciprocal responsibilities. The guild promoted identity and a shared vision as informed by a cultural subset of values that informed the way it as an entity and the individuals within it behaved. The important dynamic is the level of interpretation, discretion and choices it allowed or empowered its members to pursue. Conscience here is derived not so much from the hegemonic and centralising power of one agency but rather an amalgam derived from a collection of individuals with a sufficient sense of freedom to offer an individualised interpretation or response to moral issues that gave greater weight to the individual than might be the case with the institutionalised Church.

Guilds were communities of individuals with a shared economic and religious affiliation. They were influential in the way they organised labour and communicated their communal power. But, in fifteenth-century East Anglia, there were other communities emerging. In some cases, such as within municipal government, these formed around a powerful individual. In others, such as mendicant and mystic communities, they reflected opposition to some prevailing practices and doctrinal principles of the institutionalised Church. In fifteenth-
century East Anglia, intersecting, competing and at times complementary arguments over the nature of belief focused on how best to perform faith. Individuals spoke to their concerns, and in doing so, attracted a community of support for their position of conscience.
Chapter 3:

Contesting Orthodoxies

A growing number of East Anglians exercised individual free will by contesting the primacy and legitimacy of prevailing power groups. Their argument was one of moral autonomy, for, as one of our morality plays notes:

...God hathe govyn Man fre arbitracion
Whethyr he wyl himself save or hys soule
spyll.\(^{82}\)

God has given Man free will
Whether he will save himself or destroy his soul.

The fifteenth century saw the English language emerge increasingly as a tool to influence and shape public ideas and attitudes, and to facilitate social discourse.\(^{83}\) Throughout the fifteenth century, promotional writing was used to influence government as well as society and public life, and so to shape social conscience.\(^{84}\) The use of English as the common language within official documents such as records, accounts and wills increased in this century.\(^{85}\) Legislation was enacted in 1402 that forbade the composition and distribution of


\(^{83}\) By the fifteenth century, English was used across all classes of the society from the Court, aristocracy and merchants to the commoners. Access to language and the capacity to write facilitated the access of the Everyman to knowledge, reasoning and expression. As the capacity of the laity to read and write advanced, so too did their ability to interpret both spoken and text-based information. The writing of Chaucer and Lydgate helped to propogate this national language, as did the support of Henry IV and V. Town and court records are indicative examples of the scope of texts prepared in English during this century. Within ecclesiatical and specialised areas such as theology and philosophy, the historical pre-eminence of the Church saw Latin retained. The latter makes the vernacular rendition of Morality Plays that much more significant. For discussions of the above see Paul Strohm, 'Chaucer's Fifteenth-Century Audience and the Narrowing of the "Chaucer Tradition"', Studies in the Age of Chaucer, 4 (1982), pp. 3-32; Catherine Nall, Reading and War in Fifteenth-Century England: From Lydgate to Mallory (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012).


\(^{85}\) John H. Fisher, The Emergence of Standard English, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), pp. 26-35. The first English wills date from the 1370s and the first English petitions to parliament date from the 1380s. For elaboration, see Emily Steiner, Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 2003), pp. 53-55.
political prophesies and protests. These writings were seen as dangerous as they had the potential to contest prevailing viewpoints and present alternative ones. Verses were both commissioned as influential expressions, as well as suppressed by local and national authorities. Henry V encouraged the use of the vernacular and almost all fifteenth-century political verses are in English rather than French or Latin. This, John H. Fisher argues, formed part of a deliberate policy to engage the support of Parliament and English citizenry for the Lancastrian claim to the throne.

The rise in literacy in the fifteenth century saw the power of the written word increase. Thus, pamphlet circulation increased amongst the lower classes, and it was increasingly posted in public places such as the doors of churches and town gates. This practice, too, was ultimately banned by proclamation as it was seen as inciting disunity – it was a threat to the prevailing values and traditions of the East Anglian socio-religious conscience. As early as 1418 in Cambridge, scholars were accused of posting ‘on the mayor’s gate a certain schedule’ of political propaganda, with thirty lines of verse. Public verse was used here as a form of theatre to facilitate social discourse. It could also be used as a public

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Whyche me comaundad the drery pitus fate
Of hem of Troye in englyshe to translate...
By-cause he wolde that to hyge and low
The noble story openly wer knowe
In oure tonge...

Commanded me to translate the story of the Trojans into English because he would have The noble story known widely to high and low in English

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forum for private disputes, with William Paston recording that in 1424 he had been subject to threatening bills posted on church doors in Norwich, that;

so many maneces of deth and dismembryng maden and puttyne by certyns Englishche billes rymed in partye...  

made many menaces of death and dismembering in rhyming English.

In these cases, the concerns of the lay citizen – expressed through the public use of language – formed part of a broader discourse that, in turn, shaped opinions and impacted upon social conscience.

During this period, other notions of conscience were expressed that reflected choices made by individuals in terms of their worship and religious practices. In this century, a variety of heterodox groups – religious and political – articulated new platforms of thought. These individual and alternative interpretations of religious belief – with all that that implies for conscience – were early and perhaps tentative attempts to radicalise the relationship between the individual and the Church.

From the late fourteenth century, the doctrinal hegemony of the Church was threatened by ideological and theological expressions of division and dissent. The Great Schism of 1378 to 1417 fed division amongst the Church hierarchy, undermined the authority of the papacy, and encouraged political

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90 James Gairdner, ed., The Paston Letters: A.D. 1422-1509, Vol II (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1904), p. 13. The letter continues that bills were posted,

...up on the yates of the Priorie of the Trinite chyrche of Norwiche, and on the yates of the chyrche of the Freres Menures of Norwiche, and the yates of the same Cite called Nedeham yates and Westewyk yates, and in othre places wyth inne the seyd Cite...

...up on the gates of the Priory of the Trinity church of Norwich and on the gates of the church of the Friars of Norwich, and the gates of 'Nedeham' and 'Westewyk' in the same city and other places within the city.
divisions at international and national levels. As the competing popes fought to
be recognised as the head of the Church, they sought the support of secular
rulers.91 An important consequence of the Schism was the difficulty the Church
faced in regaining and retaining the same spiritual and secular authority it had
prior to 1378.92 Concurrent to these broad-scale developments, at the local level,
individual clergy fostered anti-clerical sentiment by their conduct widely
perceived as inconsistent with the teachings of the Church.93 This included
irreligious personal behaviour as well as the sale of indulgences, perceived at the
very least as preferential to the wealthy and, at worst, corrupt. Civic dissent in
Bury St Edmunds during the late fifteenth century expressed these strains upon
local churches and society. The townspeople of Bury revolted against the
perceived excesses of the abbey, which for over three hundred years had
dominated the civic functions, regulations, and economy of the town. The Bury
uprising exemplifies a shift that this chapter examines: a systematic social
challenge that East Anglians posed to the institutional church’s exercise of
politico-spiritual authority. That is, this event demonstrates the rise of the
capacity of the Everyman to observe, interpret, adapt and accommodate changes
in conscience which, for many, was becoming individualised.

91 For a discussion on the Schism and, in particular, its resolution and the response of England
and France, see F. Donald Logan, A History of the Church in the Middle Ages (New York:
regards to Wyclif see David Aers and Lynn Staley, The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, And
Gender in Late Medieval English Culture (University Park, The Pennsylvania State University,
92 Robert M. Stein, ‘ Sacred Authority and Secular Power: The historical argument of the Gesta
Episcoporum Cameracensis’, in Lawrence Besserman, ed., Sacred and Secular in Medieval and
Early Modern Cultures (New York: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 150-165.
Again, the sale of indulgences generated much hostility and tested the affiliation and allegiance of many of the faithful, particularly those who perceived it as inequitable as some could not afford the fee that was involved, with all that meant for the departed soul. Significantly, the management of indulgences and their disbursement was a major source of alienation, conflict and the development of a perception that individuals within the Church were corrupt.94 Such responses speak to how lay East Anglians assessed the validity and morality of official church ministers, whose moral principles appeared suspect.95 Those ministers, the argument went, had to perform and uphold their moral authority if the conscience-driven community of individuals were to follow.96

For a significant population in East Anglia, the Church did maintain its moral authority. A notable feature of this period was the way the upper class supported the institutional Church by significant endowments and bequests. The unprecedented lay investment in the East Anglian parish in the fifteenth century is an example of the expression of piety and religious conscience within the church.97 Much of this benefaction was a performance, an observable and comparable action of piety and display to which others could compare their own values and precepts. The period between 1450 and 1475 saw an expansion of

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94 Philippa Maddern analyses the court records in East Anglia, and highlights those crimes committed by clerics. For example, she details that 17.1% of rape cases in King’s Bench between 1422 and 1442 were brought against clerics. She does suggest some of these cases may represent the admonishment of sexually-erring clerics. See Philippa C. Maddern, *Violence and Social Order: East Anglia 1422-1442* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 102.


Church property, including the construction of many parish churches and the donation of land. The bequest of wealth can be seen as an expression of individual piety by which East Anglians validated and enforced their path to salvation. A characteristic innovation in this period was the construction of chantries: small chapels attached to manorial property where clergy offered prayers for the soul of the owner. Alternatively, the laity also left money for masses so as to speed their journey through Purgatory. In Norfolk and Suffolk, wills containing bequests for adorning local churches exist in the hundreds, and the social profile of the donors crossed all classes of society. Another example of this investment can be seen in East Anglian rood screens. Eamon Duffy has argued that these are the best surviving sources of medieval popular devotional imagery in East Anglia. Rood screens in parish churches featured as the centre of devotional attention for the laity, and were a popular way for the wealthy to donate part of their estate to the church. Knowledge of these bequests gave the benefactor status in the eyes of the observer and was a concrete example of a performance inspired by religious conscience. The rood screen images reveal late medieval devotional preferences and the relationship between individual pious motivation, as well as corporate activity and the consciousness of the parish. The religious culture of East Anglia was rich and varied, stimulating an outpouring of devotional cultural products – art, literature, theatre, community rituals – that spoke to the drama of belief and to the presence of active community involvement and response.

99 Duffy, 'The parish, piety and patronage in late medieval East Anglia', pp. 133-162.
100 Duffy, 'The parish, piety and patronage in late medieval East Anglia', pp. 133-162.
In the fifteenth century, religious culture not only diversified, but in terms of ecclesiastical teaching and proselytising, abbeys, schools and churches joined with monasteries as links to particular religious communities such as the Franciscan, Dominican and Carmelite orders. Each of these communities had a discrete religious culture providing a unique range of clerical activity; teaching, hospice, conversion and refuge. A few very strict houses, especially those connected with the Carthusian order, attracted lay interest and patronage, sometimes from far afield in England. Bequests made to religious houses in East Anglian wills were frequently made to monastic houses located outside of East Anglia. Indeed, the Brigidine convent at Syon in Middlesex benefited substantially from East Anglian bequests. While testators directed their bequests to small local houses, fewer bequests were directed to larger monastic houses in East Anglia. This trend indicates the weakening significance of local monasteries on the lay people of East Anglia. The strict separation of the monastic life from that of the laity contrasted to mendicant friars’ involvement in people’s lives. The latter provided everyday and direct religious guidance, although they were in turn criticised for a perceived mechanistic piety that encouraged begging.

These developments in East Anglian endowments demonstrate a greater diversification of lay behaviour and a focus on individual initiatives led by the wealthier members of the laity. Diversification also occurred within the communities of the Church, giving rise to distinctive religious cultures associated

with teaching orders that took the church from a monastic to mendicant pre-eminence.

The relative decline of the monasteries reflected disenchantment with many of the practices of the Church. The emergence of dissent and dissatisfaction in fifteenth-century East Anglia was not the wholesale rejection of the doctrinal principles of the institutionalised Church but rather the questioning of selected elements. Corruption might well have been the catalyst, but there were far more fundamental issues of conscience raised and this was the appeal of the religious and philosophical movement, Lollardism or Lollardy. In fifteenth-century East Anglia, Lollards met secretly and formed small communities to worship, with a focus upon the Bible. This was possible because of the vernacular as well as the appeal Lollardism offered to the encouragement of freewill and anti-sacerdotal values.

Lollardism was established under the ideological leadership of John Wyclif (c. 1330–84). Wyclif sought the dispossession of church riches by the king, as well as the removal of clerics from multiple positions of power. He called for institutional reform that would result in a reorganised, poorer church that would be more capable of effective spiritual leadership. For Wyclif and his English followers, almost all of the theatrical aspects of Church practice ran contrary to their conscience. Wyclif objected to the spectacle of the institutionalised Church liturgy – including clerical garb and devotional objects

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such as religious paintings and golden crosses – as well as the elaborate Masses for the dead and pilgrimages.\textsuperscript{105} Wycliffe's motive for translating the Bible into the vernacular language arose from personal convictions about Church corruption, the authority of scripture, and individual responsibility.\textsuperscript{106} Most important to his argument was his conviction that each person was directly and individually responsible to answer to God for the kind of life they lived.\textsuperscript{107}

\begin{quote}
... bo gospels of Crist written in Englische, to moost lernyng of oure nacioun.... Ffor bei may not be saved wi þouten connyng and kepynge of Gods lawe.\textsuperscript{108}
\end{quote}

Wyclif had supported lay access to the Bible, and his early followers produced two English translations of the Vulgate. These translations became pivotal to the Lollard movement, in concert with the growth in lay literacy.\textsuperscript{109} These experiences included greater exposure to the writings of mystics and other religious peoples that, before the fourteenth century, had been the purview only of the clergy.\textsuperscript{110}

Lollards called for an end to the financial and legal privileges of the clergy, seeing them as harmful to the community of Christians.\textsuperscript{111} This anti-clericalism was often accompanied by anti-sacerdotalism. That is, many Lollards did not believe that the bread and wine in the Mass actually or wholly became the blood

\textsuperscript{105} Stein, 'Sacred Authority and Secular Power', p. 13.
\textsuperscript{107} Deanesly, \textit{The Lollard Bible}, pp. 226-7.
\textsuperscript{108} Wyclif, \textit{Wyclif: Selected Works}, p. 393.
\textsuperscript{110} Deanesly, \textit{The Lollard Bible}, pp. 227.
and body of Christ but rather, were signs and remembrances of sacrifice.\textsuperscript{112} Transubstantiation was an act of faith, and belief in it was essential to be able to stay within the Church and reach salvation. This demand was too much for the Lollards who questioned the church's authority by pointing to the problem of clerics who were, or were perceived to be, corrupt.\textsuperscript{113} The dual elements of anti-clericalism and anti-sacerdotalism combined in a Lollard argument that clerical intercession was unnecessary for communication with God. This protestation expressed a different religious conscience, and an indicator that the dominant theological discourse of the Church was being contested.\textsuperscript{114}

Moreover, for the first time, Lollardy provided the opportunity for the lower orders as well as some of aristocratic rank to engage more actively in their religion. That is, Lollardism represented an alternative avenue to express free will. It is important to note that as one moves from the constraints of orthodoxy towards heterodoxy, so the significance of free will as a means of shaping conscience is magnified. The problem was that the institutionalised Church did not see Lollardism as the exercise of free will but as heresy. In East Anglia, Lollardy – and the lay participation it encouraged – nonetheless thrived and towards the end of the century, often in secret, adherents met in private homes under the fear of persecution if discovered. New expressions of faith were emerging through contestation with theological discourses, doctrines, and

\textsuperscript{113} See, for example, Wyclif, ‘Speculum Secularium Dominorum’, pp. 19-20.
\textsuperscript{114} Scholars disagree on how much of a threat Lollardy posed to the established orthodoxy. For example, Sarah Beckwith sees Lollards as more of a concern than does Eamon Duffy. See, for example, Sarah Beckwith, \textit{Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings} (London: Routledge, 1993); Duffy, \textit{Stripping of the Altars}. 
practices within the millennium-long traditions of the Church. With the Lollard movement, a new expression of religious conscience was possible because it offered an alternative to any person dissatisfied with the conduct of the institutionalised Church.

Lollardism in East Anglia was not significant in terms of its scale. Attempts by the Church to eliminate it failed and its persistence spoke not only to the strength of member conviction, but also to levels of support within the broader community.\textsuperscript{115} Lollardism was a protest and within that protest existed a precursor of broader reformist movements that were to follow in the sixteenth century. It was to survive the initial and troubled years, the persecutions, betrayals and the competition for allegiance.\textsuperscript{116}

There is other evidence that individuals articulated a view, if not radical then certainly contested, about the nature of belief and what that meant initially for their conscience, but ultimately for a transformation in the interpretation of faith. Reginald Pecock (c.1395–c.1461), Bishop of Chichester, wrote in vernacular English to ‘challenge the heretical opinions of the Lollards in the language they themselves favoured.’\textsuperscript{117} Pecock wrote and worked within the institutionalised Church to promote the type of debate about matters of


\textsuperscript{116} For an account of the location and numbers of Lollards within East Anglia see, Maureen Jurkowski, ‘Lollardy and Social Status in East Anglia’, \textit{Speculum} 82, no. 1 (January 2007), pp 120-152.

conscience he believed the actions of the Lollards warranted. He was an opponent of the Lollards and was himself accused of heresy in 1457. Pecock defended his belief that church teaching should to be adapted to meet the needs of an intelligent, literate laity.\textsuperscript{118} He stressed the importance of the written and spoken word as a teaching tool, and distrusted the kind of learning to be found in visual experience and bodily participation characteristic of institutionalised ritual.\textsuperscript{119} Importantly, whilst Pecock attacked Lollardism he himself questioned key matters of faith such as articles of the creed and the infallibility of the Church. He wished the Church to,

\begin{quote}
bi clear witte drawe men into consente of trewe feith otherwise than bi fire and swerd or hangement.\textsuperscript{120}
\end{quote}

and in general he promoted the authority of reason and free will.

Historians typically examine fourteenth-century heretical movements like Lollardy as a window into structural problems within the institutional church.\textsuperscript{121} However, they can also be seen as expressions of a growing dialogue amongst the faithful over the best exercise of the individual Christian conscience: new conscience-driven interpretations of faith. Wyclif and Pecock both shared a concern to promote discourse about the nature of conscience. Both framed their arguments in the language of conscience advocating a relationship between scripture – in English – and reason. That is, the Everyman was to apply reason rather than doctrinal authority to interpretations of the Bible. Paradoxically,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[118] James, ‘Ritual, Drama and Social Body’, pp. 21–22.
\item[119] James, ‘Ritual, Drama and Social Body’, p. 23.
\end{footnotes}
Pecock attacked Wyclif’s Lollardism, but it was an attack on emphasis and interpretation, rather than principle. Both figures were concerned to see the individual empowered to express free will within their faith, to make choices about what they judged was moral behaviour rather than complying passively to those institutional interpretations taught by the Church. When Pecock exhorts Christians to use reason he is, in effect, asking the individual to think for themselves, to reflect on truth and thus he speaks and encourages references by individuals to their conscience.

This shift in the discourse of conscience required a response from the institutional Church in England. This response took the form of persecution, trials, and in some instances, death. In 1401, Henry IV signed *De heretico comburendo* (*On the Burning of Heretics*) – an Act that allowed the burning of heretics. However, in East Anglia enactment of the royal decree was slow and unsystematic, reflecting its regionalism, malaise linked to leadership, and isolation from Rome, as well as the progressive disaffection of clergy. The Church’s capacity to respond to this attack upon the nature of conscience was compromised by its own dysfunctional administrative structures within East Anglia.

During the Norwich persecutions of 1428 to 1431 against the ‘doctrinal errors’ of the Lollards, the prevailing attitude towards nonconformist thought was based on ‘bring[ing] the offender back into the fold’ through active

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participation in processions. Thompson suggests that performance obligations may have been customarily imposed on offenders who denied the doctrine of transubstantiation. Similarly, The Croxton Play of the Sacrament (1465) may have been composed as a careful response to Lollard heresy, ‘ingeniously affirming the miracle of the Real Presence and the importance of the sacraments...’ and associating disbelief with paganism. Theatre scholar Cecilia Cutts interpreted the play and its reference to the St Edmund Host miracles of 1464 with ‘combating heresy by the recital or picturing of miracles’. Nevertheless, the play demonstrates the significance of urban performance as political and religious propaganda.

What is significant about the Norwich persecutions and the Croxton miracle play was that they used theatrical performance as a tool of social and religious control. To enforce conformity by obliging participation in a religious procession signifies the inherent power of the performance-audience relationship. Witnesses to these performances would form individual responses and interpretations to the events and in this way, the examples served to shaped conscience. The Norwich persecutions and its punishments were, like the play, a form of theatre.

125 Gibson, Theater of Devotion, pp. 35-36.
In East Anglia, the fifteenth century was marked by conflict between the individuals who were traditional arbiters of power and the rise of common law as the measure for all. Whilst some elements of society moved towards a relaxation of institutional constraints under the pressure of dissent, others moved to introduce constraints or reinstate traditional hegemony. In this context, the Everyman was increasingly aware of his own place in these events and his voice, too, can be heard in the socio-legal conflicts of fifteenth-century East Anglia.

The courts contained elements of ritual and performance – a theatrical quality. Part of the ritualised theatre of medieval civic courts resonated with aspects of the clerical courts, in that the process of the law mediating on an issue attempted to follow strict and predictable processes. This occurred despite well documented attempts by powerful individuals such as the Duke of Suffolk to interfere. The civic court embodied a ritual function that was to have all individuals comply with a common set of laws – a common morality. Its dynamic was in contrast to the shifts in the relationship between doctrinal and ecclesiastical precepts and the individual, wherein free will and the progressive notions of dissent gave rise to a contested orthodoxy. In terms of religion, the movement was towards heterodoxy, but within the legal system, the evolution of principles and precepts was towards orthodoxy and compliance. As the Church was confronting dissent from a range of internal and external sources that contested it doctrinal principles and ecclesiastical hegemony, the law was

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127 For an extensive analysis of the relationship between the law and violence in East Anglia, see Maddern, *Violence and Social Order*, pp. 27-74.
128 For the tension between heterodoxy and orthodoxy, see Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England*, pp. 196-226.
evolving in an attempt to introduce predictable codes and sanctions on behaviour.

The development of law challenged the prerogatives of the powerful upper classes and in a wide variety of responses, it confronted traditional social, economic and political conscience. One example was the political and social influence of William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk during the first half of the fifteenth century. His subversion of the law reveals a clash of power and nascent legal conscience. East Anglia, characterised by its high levels of criminality in this period, appears to have been under the significant influence of Suffolk and his wife, Alice Chaucer. Historian Colin Richmond claims the couple had established a style of ‘mafia’ in East Anglia during the 1440s. This is supported by evidence in the Paston letters, wherein there are direct references to political and legal corruption at work. In 1455, John Paston recorded how Sir John Fastolf had been

vexed and troubled seth he came last into this lande by the myght and power of the Duc of Suffolk and by the labour of his counseill and servaunts in divers wyses, and in gret oppressions, grievous and outrageous amerciemants and manye grete horrible extorcions...

In East Anglia, Suffolk had inherited extensive lands and appears to have used dubious methods to enforce his brand of social order and to reward his allies.

K. B. McFarlane notes that ‘not to be of the Duke of Suffolk’s affinity in East

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131 Scattergood, Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century, p. 159.
Anglia in the 1440’s was to ask for trouble.'\textsuperscript{132} There is evidence that Suffolk interfered with council elections in East Anglia, encouraged Norwich’s ecclesiastical rivals to sue the city over disputed jurisdictions and facilitated his retainers to cause civil disturbances in the streets.\textsuperscript{133}

The local reaction to this behaviour was varied and reflective of the broader shifts in social consciousness amongst the laity. Suffolk’s actions were a form of dissent from the emerging legal system intended to ultimately establish predictability and equity under the law. The primary theme of the Paston letters in the early 1450s expresses the desire to bring Suffolk’s East Anglian allies to justice.\textsuperscript{134} Helen Caston has argued that the principal retainers in question – Sir Thomas Tuddenham and John Heydon – were members of a legitimate local political network that had been assimilated into the duke of Suffolk’s lordship.\textsuperscript{135} However, ‘when the public authority of the crown was compromised by too close an association with private interests’, the reaction of sections of East Anglian society that had suffered from these private interests responded, especially in the wake of Suffolk’s deposition and death in 1450.\textsuperscript{136} This dissatisfaction (compounded by the complaints of the Cade rebels in the same year) led to a general commission in August 1450, headed by the Duke of Norfolk, the Earl of

\textsuperscript{134} See Gairdner, \textit{The Paston Letters, Vol III}.
\textsuperscript{135} See Hudson and Tingey, eds., \textit{The Records of the City of Norwich}, pp. 348-49 for details of violences committed by Suffolk’s retainer Sir Thomas Tuddenham and counselor John Heydon between 1434 and 1450.
Oxford and other members of East Anglian gentry. This was to investigate ‘all trespasses, misdeeds, and other criminal acts committed in Norfolk and Suffolk’. The commission was soon preoccupied with the behaviour of Suffolk’s entourage.\textsuperscript{137} This incident demonstrates the conscience-driven response of the Everyman in East Anglia.

Legal conscience was emerging to help shape the behaviour of the individual. The established privileges of individuals were being increasingly challenged in this period by the increasingly ritualised processes of the legal system. Issues linked to clerical benefit were discussed during the fifteenth century. The significance here is that the courts sought to overcome the socially ingrained demands of powerful power blocs in order to disperse a justice that was fair and equitable. The court of law spoke to the notion of justice in the context of society. In contrast, in \textit{Castle of Perseverance}, the play speaks to the notion of justice in the context of the search for salvation;

\textit{Justicias Dominus justicia dilexit}\textsuperscript{138} \textit{The just Lord had loved justice.}

In this sense, the morality play taught audience about justice and echoed the Church’s teachings embodied in sermon and religious text.

Jessie Dodds, in her study of moralities as dramatic texts, demonstrates the similarities between sermon and morality play.\textsuperscript{139} She focuses on the use of exemplum within sermons as moralising anecdotes to illustrate doctrine as seen

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{137}{Ross, \textit{John De Vere}, p. 30.}
\footnotetext{138}{Klausner, \textit{The Castle of Perseverance}, p. 96, line 3382.}
\footnotetext{139}{Jessie Alexandra Dodds, \textit{The Thematic Structure of The Castle of Perseverance} (Hamilton: McMaster University Press, 1982), pp. 7-10.}
\end{footnotes}
in fourteenth and fifteenth-century literature.\textsuperscript{140} Such writing includes the predominately Latin works of Jacques de Vitry, John Bromyard, as well as John Myrc’s \textit{Festial} and \textit{Instructions for Parish Priests}.\textsuperscript{141} Importantly in this essay, \textit{Jacob’s Well: an English Treatise on the Cleansing of Man’s Conscience} is a vernacular sermon collection punctuated with exempla, and structured around the allegorical ‘well’ of Man’s soul. The didactic purpose is the removal of sin that layers the conscience to reach the virtues beneath.

This text is an important example of a fifteenth-century homiletic compendium, the only surviving in vernacular English.\textsuperscript{142} Although the manuscript copy is in the library of Salisbury Cathedral, its provenance has been linked to East Anglia. Leo Carruthers draws on dialect and vocabulary to argue the place of composition as between Bury St. Edmunds and Ipswich.\textsuperscript{143} The preacher has some knowledge of Latin, drawing many of his exemplars from the original manuscript of the \textit{Alphabetum Narrationum} by Arnold of Liège, as well as the work of Jacques de Vitry, Albetus Magnus and others.\textsuperscript{144} That some quotes and Bible references are not translated suggests, at least in part, a clerical audience.\textsuperscript{145} Carruthers proposes an audience “largely composed of that pious middle class found in England at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of

\textsuperscript{140} Dodds, ‘The Thematic Structure of The Castle of Perseverance’, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{145} Atchley, P. 2
the fifteenth centuries, a class to which Chaucer himself belonged.” Moreover, he suggests that the compendium may have been written in Bury St. Edmunds or a similar town, allowing the preacher access to a library (and thereby the theological works present in Jacob's Well) as well as exposure to a mixed lay and clerical audience. This mixed audience can be seen within the themes, language and imagery of many of the sermons.

Jacob's Well reveals a preacher's methods for conveying complex moral messages to an audience. The preacher used simple imagery and straightforward, clear messages relevant to daily life: a hypocrite is like a spider in the wind; an envious man is like a hound that barks at a man for no reason. The overarching allegory of building a well frames the sermon as a literally constructive engagement. He speaks in a direct manner, using comparative exemplars to demonstrate the negative result of sin and the positive result of correct behaviour. The preacher's use of language and imagery that was familiar to his audience was a powerful tool. For example, he glossed over the tithing regulations and expectations of farmers. He also described the reciprocal relationship of cleric and layman, although he advises the Everyman to show,

...obedience to god, to holy church, and to þi souereyns.149

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146 Leo M. Carruthers, ""Know Thyself": Criticism, Reform and the Audience of Jacob's Well", in Jacqueline Hamesse, ed., Medical Sermons and Society: Cloister, City, University (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1998), p. 240.
147 Atchley, The Audience of Jacob's Well, p. 5.
148 Atchley, The Audience of Jacob's Well, pp. 5-6.
149 Brandeis, Jacob’s Well, vol. 1, p. 272
This work embodies and explores the social turmoil and tensions that played out in fifteenth-century East Anglia. For example, the preacher is a vehement opponent of Lollardy, equating it with heresy and witchcraft;

And alle wyches, & heretykes, & lollardys, & alle þat beleuyn on here heresye... we denounce hem.  

Although his preaching occurs in the vernacular, his beliefs are orthodox and true to the tenets of the Church. He condemns,

alle þat beleue noyt in þe sacrament of þe awtere þat it is godys body, his flesch & blood in lyknes of bread & wyne. And alle þat beleue not in þe o þere sacramentys & in þe articles of feyth... we denounce hem.  

By the late fourteenth century, Lollardy featured in political discourse - anti-Lollard statutes were passed in the parliament of 1388, rebutted by the anticlerical polemics posted on the Westminster door while Parliament was in session.  

Jacob’s Well represents another form of political expression, the attempt to shape the minds and conscience of the people through the mouthpiece of the Church.

As will be seen in the next chapter, the themes of Jacob’s Well parallel those of the morality plays, especially the dangers of idleness and idle words in leading to greater sins –

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150 Brandeis, Jacob’s Well, vol. 1, pp. 59, 63.
151 Brandeis, Jacob’s Well, vol. 1, pp. 59, 63.
The Devil, when he finds a man empty with idleness, he and the seven deadly sins enter the idle man for he is so empty and void, without good works.

Fundamentally, the message of pulpit literature as exemplified in Jacob’s Well, and theatrical literature of the Macro Plays is the same; the Everyman is to lead a moral life, to love and obey God.

In an era of religious dissent and well-documented social change, the morality plays offered a vernacular treatment of key principles of belief that not only complemented the work of the Church but, as is argued here, helped with the communication of dogma and doctrinal principle to the Everyman. The Macro Plays were a powerful example of an alternative form of theatre to the traditions of the Church. They attempted to counter the reformist energies of dissenting forces. However, the work of the Lollards, the role of the guilds, and the rise of the courts are all evidence of diverse opportunities for the individual to exercise moral choices and to have them tested, and thus express their conscience. The morality plays also utilised a new means of entertaining, influencing and shaping the conscience of the Everyman – by empowering the audience through interpretation. The morality plays represented another outlet of individualism – this time under the purview of orthodoxy.

Chapter 4:

Performing Orthodoxy and Expressions of Conscience

Goode Aungel coveytith evermore Mans salvacion
And the Badde bysytith hym evere to hys damnacion,
And God hathe govyn Man fre arbitracion
Whethyr he wyl hymself save or hys soule spyll.\textsuperscript{154}

Good Angel
yearns for Man’s salvation
And the Bad besets [harasses] him to his damnation,
And God has given Man free will
Whether he will save himself or destroy his soul.

The Macro morality plays are representations of orthodoxy that provided the opportunity for the individual to respond and shape conscience. Each of the plays argued that man had ‘free arbitration’ to follow the doctrinal precepts of the Church or to accept the consequences of unrepentant sin. This chapter will examine the fifteenth-century Macro plays as case studies to demonstrate this change in orthodox approach. Moreover, they will demonstrate an overarching shift in the relationship between performance, speech and audience. This chapter interprets the plays’ texts to identify the relationship between the dialogue, the message and levels of audience interpretation and participation. These plays gave the audience the opportunity to interpret and respond to performance; indeed the premise of these plays demanded that interpretation work on the part of viewers. The audience was prompted to respond to the doctrinal themes of the morality plays and in doing so, make choices based upon their conscience and its interplay with their free will. In fifteenth-century East Anglia, the individual was increasingly empowered to form morally imbued decisions, independent of the prerogatives of the traditional institutions.

The theatrical traditions of East Anglia were widespread and not limited to the few urban centres located in the region. John C. Coldewey identifies Norwich as the only centre with the civic structures capable of supporting large-scale theatrical enterprises. Accordingly, East Anglian theatre outside of Norwich grew out of a culture free from the well-established civic and social frameworks in place in other parts of the country. The predominately rural, densely populated networks of parishes and small towns developed a performative culture that drew on all aspects of life in the creation of participatory and instructive traditions. This theatre depended upon the governance and guidance of the parish priest or churchwarden, rather than financially independent guilds. It is a conundrum that the richest regional tradition of late medieval English theatre has left few documentary traces. Indeed, beyond the survival of the plays themselves, there is little evidence of plays being performed within the region. The records of medieval performative activities in East Anglia yield some evidence of local habits of staging and theatrical organisation, such as theatres in the round and multi-community productions. However, the plays’ existence alone speaks to the

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160 Peter Happé, English Drama Before Shakespeare (New York: Addison Wesley, 1999), pp. 41-42.

potential levels of persuasion at work within East Anglia to influence audience
and shape conscience.

The three morality plays that form the basis of this chapter each emerged
out of the region in southwest Suffolk – the Bury region – and nearby
Cambridgeshire. These Macro Plays, *The Castle of Perseverance* (c. 1405-25),
*Mankind* (c. 1471-9) and *Wisdom* (c. 1480-1500), are named after their
eighteenth-century owner, antiquarian Reverend Cox Macro (1683-1767). The early history of these texts is unclear although *Wisdom* and *Mankind* both
carry the signature of ‘Hyngham’, possibly the abbot of Bury St. Edmunds from
1474 to 1479. The use of dialect in these plays, rather than Latin or French,
speaks to the plays’ purpose as part of the regional dialogue for a popular
audience.

The sublime structures of the moral dilemma within the morality plays,
team with the writer’s working knowledge of Latin and the Bible suggests that
the plays were written by clerics. This thesis argues that some of the most
critical forms of dissent on moral matters developed from individuals seeking to
express reservations about a range of doctrinal precepts. Morality plays
responded to those reservations by posing moral decision-making at the centre

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164 This writer would agree with Happé, Bruster and Rasmussen in attributing the morality plays
24-31; Douglas Bruster and Eric Rasmussen, 'Introduction', pp. 5-6.
Further, I would suggest that any author of the plays would have a strong link to his community,
given the familiarity that the allegories present about daily life – One example of such a
community was the monastery of Bury St. Edmunds which had a close (if not untroubled)
relationship with its environs in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. Much of the extant
literature from this period has direct connection to this monastic community. C.f. Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, pp. 108-113.
of these plays' allegorical plots; at the same time, these plays intended to reinforce orthodoxy rather than open a space for doctrinal disputation. They were a newly fashioned genre that ultimately aimed to uphold traditional structures. The morality play represented a new means for the orthodox message of the church to be dispersed. The morality plays provided the audience with the opportunity to interpret and participate in the performance, to engage and interpret moral dilemma, and in doing so, retained influence over the conscience of the Everyman as audience. The use of regional language and theme aligns these plays to the vernacular sermonising tradition on the rise in the fifteenth century. That is, each Macro play contains elements of sermon and rhetoric, and by way of comparison, these elements can be linked to themes within Jacob’s Well. Sermonising was intended to exhort and relate theoretical moral ideas with convincing examples in order to stir emotions through the power of words.

The ‘Mankind’ character within each of the plays is central to building a moralising message. The morality play presents allegorical lessons for man's spiritual benefit. The basic conflict between good and evil, the fall of Mankind, and his redemption all formed part of medieval religious teaching. Instruction in the form of the morality plays appears to have thrived, with the extant plays indicating the capacity of the medieval mind to construct and enjoy moral allegory. Mankind was the allegorical personification of the Everyman. In a way that was new to English drama, Everyman represented each member of the audience and, like them, sought salvation. Mankind was ultimately confronted with the fear of death and damnation and, ultimate salvation represented the
‘triumphant expression of Christian faith and Catholic doctrine.’ Thus, the morality plays embodied the homiletic messages in medieval spiritual discourse – Mankind in his weakness was covered with sin and, through repentance and faith, was ultimately able to overcome temptation and despair. The allegorical figure of Mankind offered schematisation of the Christian experience, from the pilgrimage of life, the coming of death to the fall and salvation of the sinner. Fundamentally, the allegorical figures in each of the Macro plays demonstrated the ability of Mankind to exercise an element of free will. When this independence led him to repentance and faith, other forces emerged to support and defend him, respectively.

The themes of the Macro Plays focus upon theological and devotional discussions current in the mid-fifteenth century. They represent quintessential examples of the refinement, growth and enhancement of the audience’s conscience within the unique literary traditions of fifteenth-century East Anglia. These themes included the role of the individual within society, the nature of God’s power, whether absolute or conditional, and the realities of free will. The latter relates to the development of an informed conscience and the emergence of independent decision-making. That is, the morality plays develop the character of Mankind to be increasingly self-determined, rather than subject to the sole guidance of Vices, Virtue, Devil and God. Central to this development is the changing depiction of the relationship between Mankind and God explored within these plays. The depiction of this relationship would have a powerful

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166 Happé, English Drama Before Shakespeare, p. 81.
impact upon the perception and reaction of the audience, in particular any individual concerned with reconciling Church teachings with their own behaviour. For example, in *Wisdom*, the personification of Mankind’s Will bemoans,

My wyll was full gove to syne,
By wyche the Soule ys so abhonynable.
I wyll retorne to Gode and new beginne
And in hym grondre my wyll stable.168

My will was given over to sin,
Which has made the Soul so corrupted.
I will return to God and a new beginning
And in him ground my will.

The Macro Plays all deploy negative examples as a teaching method within the dialogue.169 They utilised a combination of parody and sermonising to transmit their moral messages to the audience. Again, the examination of the consequences of sin complements the style of medieval sermon within a new and different form of theatre to that of church ritual. However, unlike the ritualised admonishments built into fifteenth-century preaching, such as found in *Jacob’s Well*, the plays invariably offer a positive message to the audience – salvation.170

The figure of Mankind in each play receives salvation through the will and mercy of God.171

*The Castle of Perseverance* is the most theologically comprehensive of the surviving East Anglian morality plays, spanning the life of Mankind from birth to salvation. The play, written between 1400 and 1425, is 3649 lines in length and

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170 The list of admonishments according to the preacher of *Jacob’s Well* for which the sinner will suffer damnation include, but are not limited to, laymen detaining goods or persons of the church, lords that forbid trade with churchmen, causing miscarriage, disinheriting children, the torments of an adulterous couple, and the polluters of churches. See Brandeis, *Jacob’s Well*, vol I, pp. 48-62.

171 Wertz, ‘Mankind as a Type-Figure’, p. 90.
contains the earliest known English drawing of a stage setting. It depicts a castle, with a bed beneath it, encircled by ‘water about the place’ or similar defence.\textsuperscript{172} The plan also depicts five scaffolds, reigned over by World, the devil Belial, Flesh, Covetousness and God. This complex staging – including the possible digging of a ditch – does not indicate a movable performance, as may have been the case for the later Macro plays. The scale of the play suggests a significant investment of human, physical and financial resources. Clearly, for it to be performed, there needed to be some endorsement by either the church or community.

There has been some debate over the placement of the audience in this stage arrangement. F. J. Furvinall argues that the ‘audience, if not let into the enclosure, must have been a movable one, going from one scaffold to another as its occupants spoke.’\textsuperscript{173} Richard Southern, on the other hand, asserted that the audience sat within ‘the place’ or ring.\textsuperscript{174} This feature is significant as it speaks to the notion of inclusion or exclusion. An audience inside the circle would have a greater sense of belonging or connection to the performance, whereas outside has the connotation of \textit{not} belonging. In any event, the audience of \textit{Castle} is not involved in Mankind’s search for salvation; it is character’s individual journey. The playwright does, however, overtly place the onus of performance interpretation on the audience;

\begin{center}
\textit{The case of oure comynge you to declare,} \quad \textit{It is for you to declare the reason for out coming}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{Every man in hymself for sothe he may fynde.} \quad \textit{Every man can find truth in himself}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{172} According to Mark Eccles, the play cannot be dated precisely, but may have been written between 1400 and 1425. ‘This is consistent with an allusion to crakows, pointed toes on shoes… The known references to crakows as a current fashion were probably written between 1382 and 1425.’ Mark Eccles, ‘Introduction’, p. xii.
\textsuperscript{173} See Eccles, ‘Introduction’, xxi.
\textsuperscript{174} Eccles, ‘Introduction’, xxi.
\textsuperscript{175} Klausner, \textit{The Castle of Perseverance}, p. 11, lines 14-15.
Castle examines the right way of living, presenting the virtues of a moral life through the personification of good and evil. It traces the life and death of Mankind and the battle for his soul. The main theological themes in this morality are ‘the coming of Death to Mankind, the debate of body and soul, and the parliament of heaven or the debate of the four daughters of God.’ The play dramatises Man’s progression from a life on earth that errs between good and evil, sin and repentance, to his death and judgment. At the beginning of the play, the ‘newborn’ Mankind emerges from the Castle robed in a white chrisom.

Bare and pore is my clothynge.
A sely crysme myn hed hath cawth
Dat I tok at my crystenyng.\(^\text{177}\)

Here, clothing acts as a theatrical indicator of the cleansing of original sin through the sacrament of Baptism. The unity of the play is drawn from the actions of Mankind, whose story corresponds with orthodox expectation. Thus, under the guise of providing audience with interpretative choices, the play presents themes that help to hone conscience that accords with doctrinal principles of the Church.

Fundamental to this play is Mankind’s ‘fre arbitracion’ or free will to resist the personified Vices or to indulge in sin.\(^\text{178}\) In Castle, the seven Virtues stress Mankind’s ability to choose between the Good and Bad Angels, to leave virtuous company in order to join the sin, Covetous, which he does. This freedom to exercise choice is reinforced by the withdrawal of God on his ‘stage’. God does


\(^{177}\) Klausner, *The Castle of Perseverance*, p.18, lines 293-95.

\(^{178}\) Klausner, *The Castle of Perseverance*, p. 11, line 25.
not speak (or, presumably, reveal himself) until line 3246, after Mankind’s death. However, this exercise of free will by Mankind is tempered by the active participation of other characters in his decision-making. The various supernatural actors physically lead Mankind from stage to stage, and his final redemption comes only through the mercy, love and forgiveness of God;

My mercy, Mankynd, geve I thee.
Cum syt at my ryth honde.
Ful wel have I lovyd thee,
Unkynd thow I thee fonde.\(^{179}\)

I give you my mercy, Mankind
Come sit at my right hand.
I have loved you well
Although I have found you unkind.

This procession of Mankind’s life and salvation reinforces the precept that the Everyman could not be saved without the intervention and grace of God. That is, individualism had its limits.\(^{180}\)

The theatrical depiction of the seven deadly sins contributes substantially to our understanding of the way sin was perceived in the medieval period.\(^{181}\) These perceptions infiltrated everyday life, and the sins were often personified as men and women, and visualised in literature and art.\(^{182}\) The Gregorian conception of the seven sins, with pride the ‘root of all evil’ was influential in medieval literature. It formed the basis of manuals and treatises of the clergy, including the thirteenth-century *Ancren Riwle (Treatise on the Rules and Duties of Monastic Life)* (1225).\(^{183}\) This monastically-produced work developed imagery

\(^{179}\) Klausner, *The Castle of Perseverance*, p. 102, lines 3598-3601.

\(^{180}\) Wertz, ‘Mankind as a Type-Figure’, p. 90.


\(^{182}\) See Morton W. Bloomfield, *Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1952). Bloomfield analyses the imagery associated with different sins in art and literature. For example, he notes that the imagery associated with Envy has been a serpent (p. 214), venom (p. 233), leprosy (p. 242), etc. Sloth has been linked to the barrenness of the sea (p. 214), dead flesh and palsy (p. 233), and Avarice linked to old age and figures counting money.

around the seven sins as well as the defence of a castle from the devil.184 As in
*Castle*, sins were classified according to their affiliation with the world, flesh or
devil respectively. What is significant here is that the personification of sins
within a monastic setting in the twelfth century was to be progressively
integrated into cultural performances for a wider audience, from the sermonic
Myrc’s *Festival* of the fourteenth century, to *Jacob’s Well* and the theatrical *Castle
of Perseverance* in the fifteenth. These typologies were prevalent in both lay and
clerical thinking.

The personification of the virtues and vices adds to the emotional power
of the play.185 Mercy, for example, pleads for Mankind, for ‘Mankynd is of our
kyn’ (Mankind is our kin).186

‘Mercy’ shal I synge and say
And ‘Miserere’ schal I pray
For Mankynd ever and ay.

Backbiter and the Bad Angel are merry devils, adding to the humour and a social
message to the play. However, while the Vices are able to outwit and defeat
Mankind, they are ultimately no match for God. In each of the Macro plays, the
devil figures place the onus on the play’s observer to recognise and categorise
the devils’ actions as sinful. Each enters, declaring his evil intent and, throughout
the plays, overtly states his immorality to the audience.187 Belyal of *Castle of
Perseverance* boasts to the audience of all his ruined followers.188

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186 Klausner, *The Castle of Perseverance*, p. 97, line 3452.
187 For further discussion, Rainer Pineas, ‘The English Morality Play as a Weapon of Religious
Controversy’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 2, no. 2, (Spring, 1962), pp. 161-163.
188 Klausner, *The Castle of Perseverance*, p. 15, lines 196-221.
Some characters within *The Castle of Perseverance* embody important thematic messages to be found in other contemporary writing. These figures alert the historian to social concerns of the fifteenth century. For example backbiters, according to the anonymous poet of the *Speculum Vitae* (*The Mirror of Life*) (c. 1370), are characterised as those of the community who fashion themselves as vehicles for other people’s gossip, and who expand upon them for their own ends. Speculum Vitae warns that such behaviour is akin to the venial sin of envy, in taking pleasure from publishing the sins of others. Similarly, *Jacob’s Well* compares the backbiter to the adder, who hears and spreads the sins of others. In other words, the morality plays do not canvass new doctrinal themes but restate orthodoxy using new forms of verbal and gestural expression within a theatrical performance. In this way, the plays existed to influence and shape the audience’s interpretation.

Covetousness, too, represents an important character both thematically and in the context of fifteenth-century East Anglia. *Castle* depicted this vice as the supreme sin, with his own scaffold and responsible for ultimately overcoming the defences of the castle. When the other sins have been overthrown by the Virtues, Covetousness tempts Mankind with the promise of financial security at the end of his life, ‘if thou be pore and nedy in elde’. Mankind accordingly forsakes the protection of the castle in pursuit of material wealth. In *Castle*, Covetousness rather than pride is the primary cause of Mankind’s downfall. The

192 Klausner, *The Castle of Perseverance*, p. 74, line 2529.
play, therefore, provides a mirror by which the audience can observe themselves. This is a reflection that leads to the formulation of a response to the moral dilemma presented;

All men example here-at may take
To mayntein the goode and mendyn here mys.
Thus endyth oure gamys.\(^\text{193}\)

Interestingly, the character ‘Concyens’ (Conscience) is mentioned in the banns (that is, the announced players), but does not appear in the play itself.\(^\text{194}\) Instead, the character Penance and Confession come to assist the Good Angel in reclaiming Mankind from the vices. Penance strikes Mankind in the heart – pricking his conscience – making him penitent and ‘sorwe of hert’.\(^\text{195}\)

Wyth poyn of penaunce I schal hym prene
Mans pride for to felle.\(^\text{196}\)

Here, the audience is expected to respond in much the same way as they would to a sermon or sacerdotal experience. They are to reflect on the moral principles and the relevance to the life of the Everyman.

This reflective element is the unifying feature of all of the Macro plays. Within each is the character of the Everyman represented as an allegorical figure wrestling with moral dilemma. The Everyman motif may well have a character’s name, such as Humanum Genus, Mankind or Anima, but what unites them is their search for salvation and the conflicts they face because of the temptations placed in their path. In this respect, the morality play represented the theatrical

\(^{193}\) Klausner, *The Castle of Perseverance*, p. 103, lines 3643-3645.
\(^{194}\) Klausner, *The Castle of Perseverance*, p. 11, line 44. See Jacob Bennett, ‘The “Castle of Perseverance”: Redactions, Place, and Date’, *Medieval Studies* 24 (1962), p. 142
\(^{195}\) Klausner, *The Castle of Perseverance*, p. 45, line 1381.
simulation of life and the search for salvation that the Church's doctrine espoused.

_Mankind_ is a play that examines the degeneration of venial faults into the mortal sins of lying, theft, and homicide.\(^{197}\) The combination of seriousness and humour is calculated to attract and maintain audience attention, and also to encourage deeper thinking about the themes espoused in this play. The contrast between the representations of the character Mischief and the ‘worldlings’ – Nought, Nowadays and New Guise – to Mercy is stark and intended to emphasise the play's moral teaching. These teachings saw idleness as the cause of greater sins and according to the character Mercy, repentance was needed to gain salvation. Mercy represents the ‘father confessor’, addressing both the audience and Mankind through sermonic dialogue. His 44-line soliloquy at the beginning of the play provides the audience with direct advice –

_O severence, I beseche yow your condycyons to rectyfye._\(^{198}\)

His representation can be interpreted as a priest performing crucial hierarchic function for Mankind. Sister Mary Philippa Coogan compares the speeches of Mercy to liturgical verses of Lenten services.\(^{199}\) Moreover, she emphasises his depiction as a cleric, preaching the necessity of penitence and ‘to encourage people to keep a good Lent’.\(^{200}\)

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\(^{198}\) Ashley and NeCastro, _Mankind_, p. 13, lines 12-13.


\(^{200}\) Coogan, _Interpretation of the Moral Play_, p. 55.
*Mankind* demonstrates how language can be used as a powerful tool of the playwright in influencing audience interpretation and thereby, conscience.

Kathleen M. Ashley has read *Mankind* as a ‘Battle of Words’, a confrontation between good and evil,

‘dramatized as a battle of good words (“predycacyon,” “talking delectable,” “few wordys” and “doctrine monytoyre”) against misleading or evil ones (“ydull language”, “japing,” “many mordys” and “fablys delusory”).’\(^{201}\)

The use of Titivillus as the primary devil in *Mankind* as Titivillus speaks to this power of language to do evil. From as early as the thirteenth century, Titivillus was characterised as a minor (but popular) demon responsible for recording the gossip of churchgoers, unprofitable speech or carelessly recited prayers.\(^ {202}\) The records of these venial sins he carries to Hell in a sack to be reviewed on Judgment Day.\(^ {203}\) Thus, his presence in *Mankind* acts as a signal to audience members to mind their mouths. This concern would have been familiar to the audience because, at this time, gossip and slander were prominent crimes recorded in court records.\(^ {204}\) For fifteenth-century East Anglians, the world was close and based on oral traditions making the play’s moral about loose tongues apt. The play alerted the audience to the importance of language and its capacity to mislead. Mercy warns Mankind of Titivillus from the onset;

Beware of Tytivillus, for he lesyth no wey,
That goth invysybull and wyll not be sen.


He will ronde in yowre ere and cast a nett befor yowr ey.\textsuperscript{205} \hspace{1cm} He will whisper in your ear and cast a net before your eye.

This warning directly follows the bawdy ribaldry of the Worldlings, New Guise, Nowadays and Nought, whose approach comes;

All to son, my brother, I fere me, for yow.\textsuperscript{206} \hspace{1cm} All too soon for you, I fear my brother.

In contrast to the sombre and moralising tone of Mercy, the Worldlings and Mercy use speech marked by lively dialogue, puns and bawdy references. The language used by these characters is worldly – of the everyday – and unlikely to be experienced within the formalism of the language used in Church ritual. This serves to be simultaneously theatrical, shocking, familiar and satirical. Repeated references to bodily functions and jocular expressions add humour to the play. Humour is a powerful theatrical device and helps connect with audience and thus serves the main moralising theme of the play. The worldlings and Mischief mimic Mercy’s elevated speaking style and so ‘deflect attention away from the meaning of the words and onto their more strictly phonetic characteristics.’\textsuperscript{207} For example, Mercy’s sermonising is mocked by Mischief through repetition, sarcasm and nonsense Latin. To Mercy’s declaration that,

The corn shall be savyde, the chaffe shall be brente\textsuperscript{208} \hspace{1cm} The grain shall be saved and the chaff shall be burnt.

Mischief responds,

And ye sayde the corn shulde be savyde and the chaff shulde be feryde, And you said that the grain should be saved and the chaff should be burnt,

And he provyth nay, as yt schewth be this verse: But this is not so, as shown by this verse:

\textsuperscript{205} Ashley and NeCastro, \textit{Mankind}, p. 22, lines 301-304
\textsuperscript{206} Ashley and NeCastro, \textit{Mankind}, p. 22, line 243.
\textsuperscript{208} Ashley and NeCastro, \textit{Mankind}, p. 14, line 43.
“Corn servit bredibus, chaffe horsibus, straw fyrybusque”<sup>209</sup> \[ \text{(nonsense Latin)} \]

Wheat serves for bead, chaff for horses, and straw for fires

There is some debate as to the extent that the Worldling’s spectacle undermines the transferral of moral and doctrinal messages to the audience. That is, it is of note to some historians that the dramatic vitality of the Worldlings and Mischief may have upstaged the substance presented by the sermonising Mercy.<sup>210</sup>

Again, Mischief and the worldlings criticise Mercy’s ‘Englysch Laten’, using it mockingly themselves. New Guise declares,

"Ecce quam bonum et quam jocundum,” quod the Devll to the frerys,
"Habitare fraters in unum."<sup>211</sup>

"Behold how good and how pleasant it is,” said the Devil to the friars,
"For bretheren to dwell in unity.”

Moreover, Nowadays’ call for Mercy to translate his bawdy verse is a revelatory social commentary about the divisive position of Latin in medieval society;

I prew yow hertyly, worschyppull clerke,
To have this Englysch mad in Laten:
"I have etun a dyschfull of curdys,
And I have schetun yowr mowth full of turdys."
Now open yowr sachell with Laten wordys
Ande sem me this in clerycall manere!<sup>212</sup>

I pray you heartily, pious clerk,
To have this English translated into Latin.
"I have eaten a dishful of curds
And have shitten your mouth full of turds."
Now open your bag of Latin words
And say this to me in a clerky [learned] manner!

This stanza comments on the use of liturgical language to reinforce the social structure – Latin. It echoes one of the common criticisms of Wyclif about the remoteness of the Church to the laity. This, he argued, was caused by the use of Latin rather than the vernacular in the Mass. The laity was disempowered by the use of Latin in church and the restrictions upon vernacular translations of the

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<sup>209</sup> Ashley and NeCastro, <em>Mankind</em>, p. 15, lines 55-57.
<sup>211</sup> Ashley and NeCastro, <em>Mankind</em>, p. 23, lines 325-326. See also Psalms 132:1.
<sup>212</sup> Ashley and NeCastro, <em>Mankind</em>, p. 17, lines 129-134.
Vulgate in the fifteenth century speak to this disenfranchisement of the pious layman. Nowadys’ call for a translation of his vulgar verse is an ironic inversion of the social reality – that the Everyman had little comprehension of the Latin they witnessed. It is a comment on the use of language to proffer opinions and speaks to the monopoly on Latin by the Church and a learned minority.

Mankind extends this critique to show how Latin, used in a ‘clerycall manere’, was not indicative of or exclusive to spiritual legitimacy. Dillon argues that Mankind offers the opportunity for the audience to distance themselves from the conception of a ‘priestly dialect’ that linked ‘Latinity and truth’. This disassociation is reinforced by the actions of Mankind, whose Latin recitations are closely followed by his own temptation and fall. Moreover, Mankind recites primarily liturgical Latin, such as ‘In nomine Patris et Spiritus Sancti’ and ‘Pater noster qui es in celis’. This demonstrates a rote response to catechism, with only ephemeral impact on Mankind’s behaviour. Here, the audience is being told that only a genuine engagement with the ritual acts of prayer is right. Moreover, Titivillius enters the stage with a Latin declaration, ‘Ego sum dominancium dominus, and my name ys Titivillus’. Titivillius also parodies church ritual,

I blysse yow with my lyfte honde: foull yow befall! I bless you with my left hand: may bad luck be yours!

Nevertheless, the audience of Mankind was obviously expected to differentiate between a virtuous use of language and a vicious one – whether

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213 Vulgate translations in the vernacular became more propagated in the x century.
215 Ashley and NeCastro, *Mankind*, p. 28, line 475.
216 Ashley and NeCastro, *Mankind*, p. 29, line 522.
that language was Latin or English.\textsuperscript{217} Lynn Forest-Hill goes further, examining the language of \textit{Mankind} as part of a body of fifteenth-century writing that used English as a tool to combat heresy.\textsuperscript{218} Her argument finds support in Bishop Pecock’s declaration in 1450 that the Lollards should be rebuked in the language they themselves were using. Importantly, whilst \textit{Mankind} and the morality plays are visual expressions of moral allegories, they allow for greater audience interpretation by centralising dialogue in the performances. Moreover, these plays highlight the difference between the ritualised performances of the institution and the verbal and gestural performance of the theatre, more in keeping with the oral traditions of the laity.

The dialogue of the play directs the audience’s behaviour to focus on a range of human failings, with the intention that their interpretations speak to their conscience. Mercy’s speeches at the beginning and end of the play frame its doctrinal instruction and bid the audience to pay attention to the moral warnings of the play;

\begin{quote}
Serge your condicyons with dew examinacion.

Thynke and remembyr the world ys but a vanité,

As yt ys provyd daly by diverse transmutacyon.\textsuperscript{219}
\end{quote}

The play’s themes and allusions associate it with the festive season of Shrovetide, which precedes the Lenten period. Lent is a period of penance and confession intended to prepare the soul for Easter.

\textsuperscript{217} Ashley, 'Introduction', p. 9.
\textsuperscript{218} Forest-Hill, 'Mankind and the Fifteenth-Century Preaching Controversy', p. 20.
\textsuperscript{219} See note in Ashley and NeCastro, \textit{Mankind}, p. 51.
Mankind also included its audience in the use of irreligious language by tempting them to participate in a bawdy song. The Worldlings lead the audience in a 'Crystemes songe', which quickly descends into an obscene chant. This song appears to be based on seasonal revels, inverted for comic rather than pious effect.\textsuperscript{220} The audience, too, is involved in the summoning of the 'abhomynabull presens' of Titivillus.\textsuperscript{221} Significantly, this transaction is 'the first recorded instance in England of openly commercial acting', as the spectators are called upon to contribute money if they wish Titivillus to appear.\textsuperscript{222} In electing to summon the devil the audience is empowered, as well as ultimately implicated in the seduction and corruption of Mankind. The audience of Mankind appears to be a diverse one, as the opening address is to

\begin{quote}
\textit{ye soverens that sytt and ye brother that stoned right uppe,}
\end{quote}

suggesting that different classes of people made up the audience.\textsuperscript{223} Importantly, the play actively includes the entire audience in the action of the performance, signifying that moral concerns apply to all levels of society.

\textit{Mankind} responded directly to the realities of fifteenth-century East Anglian life, a society very much dependent upon the agrarian worker that – with the relative growth in urbanisation and fourteenth century population stagnation – was a social role of political and social relevance. However, this characterisation does not limit the prospective audience of \textit{Mankind} to rural workers. It emphasises the economic realities behind real social problems endemic in fifteenth century East Anglia – complaints of agricultural labourers

\begin{footnotes}
\item[220] See note in Kathleen M. Ashley & Gerard NeCastro, \textit{Mankind} (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 2010), p. 51.
\item[221] David Bevington, \textit{Medieval Drama}, p. 901.
\item[222] David Bevington, \textit{Medieval Drama}, p. 901.
\item[223] Ashley and NeCastro, \textit{Mankind}, p. 14, line 29
\end{footnotes}
and rural protests, such as the riotous ‘King of Christmas’ procession, led by the Norwich Guildsman John Gladman against the policies of the local monastic officials in 1443.224 The jokes of the worldlings that Mankind’s labour will never sustain him reflect economic realities of fifteenth century East Anglia.225

Mankind is represented as the allegorical farmer, who sees God in his work and labour. In many ways, this portrayal of the fall of the good worker hails to an earlier period of history wherein tenanted serfdom and tithes solidified social behaviours and the social strata. By the fifteenth century, the relationship of man, Church, lord and land had become more complex than in earlier centuries and this, too is addressed in Mankind. In fifteenth-century East Anglia, the relative shortage of labour saw a new dynamic linked to supply and demand – patronage – emerge in this period. Mankind depicts work as a virtue, hailing the dignity of labour and its work in withholding the temptation of sin. In this play, the itinerant worker has status as a voice expressing the conflict individuals face in addressing moral dilemma. Mankind reinforces the social discourses of the fifteenth century surrounding the notion of good works and the dignity of labour.

However, from the outset Mankind’s labour is defined in terms of his reliance upon God’s mercy and protection. He pleads for God to bring warm weather and begins his work by evoking the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. 226

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225 See Ashley and NeCastro, Mankind, pp. 21 and 23-24.
226 Ashley and NeCastro, Mankind, p. 23, line 323 and p. 30, line 544.
When Mankind’s labour is not as easy as anticipated, despite these calls for assistance, he retires from work to ‘sow my corn at winter and lett Gode werke.’

Mankind relies on the benefits of nature, which is at the mercy of God. Ultimately, he decides to ‘gyff uppe my spade for now and for ever’ and assigns the fields as his church.

Here in my kerke I knell on my kneys.

\[ Pater noster qui es in celis^{228} \]

Here in my church I kneel on my knees

Our Father who art in heaven

This passive spirituality is soon undermined by the urgings of Titivillus to ‘Aryse and avent thee! Nature compellys.’

Moreover, the rejection of an institutional setting of the church in favour of individual prayer reflects such heretical Lollard beliefs as individual prayer. As Mankind is easily deterred from his self-guided prayers, the play presents these beliefs as negative and so, encourages the audience to reject them.

Through the venial sin of idle talk, the worldlings urge Mankind to commit mortal sins. The sins espoused by the worldlings – murder and theft – reflect local conditions in East Anglia during the 1450s and 60s when crime and violence were endemic.

Mankind comically drives the trio away using his spade, and their ensuing injuries are the subject of much jocular diversion; the interlude involves their mock beheading, castration and healing by Mischief. Ultimately, however, Titivillus’s powers of deception succeed in undermining the teachings of Mercy, and Mankind joins the worldlings in their depravity. His

\[ \text{227 Ashley and NeCastro, Mankind, p. 30, line 546.} \]
\[ \text{228 Ashley and NeCastro, Mankind, p. 30, lines 554-555. See Matthew 6:9-15.} \]
\[ \text{229 Ashley and NeCastro, Mankind, p. 30, line 560. ‘Arise and relieve yourself, nature compels you’. Here, Titivillus makes a bawdy pun on the meaning of ‘nature’.} \]
\[ \text{230 Victor I. Scherb, Staging Faith: East Anglian Drama in the Later Middle Ages, (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), pp. 119-126.} \]
\[ \text{231 Ashley and NeCastro, Mkind, p. 26, lines 429-454.} \]
clothing is emblematic of this transformation for, as he falls into sin, Mankind discards his farmer’s clothes and is clothed by ‘New Guise’ in the fashion of frivolous youth. This fashionability was meant to alert viewers to the vanities of mundane pleasures. In all of the morality plays, the devil figures are depicted as the source of temptation, as seducers offering short-term gratification and encouraging the abandonment of beliefs. These overt representations are intended to encourage audience reflection upon behaviour as, again, Mercy declared,

Serge your condicyons with dew examinacion.233

Examine your habits through examination

Unlike the other Macro plays, Wisdom does not directly focus on the trials of an individual character, a central ‘Everyman’ or Mankind figure. Rather, the play focuses on the personification of the human soul, Anima, and her marriage to Wisdom, the representation of Christ. This marriage symbolises the idealised union between the individual in a state of grace and God. However, this marriage is interrupted by the attempts by Lucifer to seduce Anima’s faculties and thus ‘defyle’ the soul. As a character, Anima ‘is a puppet who suffers rather than acts’, with the acts of sin and repentance committed by her male ‘Mights’, Mind, Will and Understanding. These characters combine with Anima and her five senses to form the greater metaphor of Mankind in search for salvation.

Wisdom, like the other Macro Plays, uses costumes to demonstrate the moral condition of each character and as a means of visually transmitting this to

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the audience. The costume changes – described in the expansive stage directions – are central to the meaning and moral message of the play. At the beginning of the play, the Anima enters dressed in white, with black overmantle. This costume represents the soul’s potential for both righteousness and sin, the ‘condycyon contrarye’ of original sin and penitence. The white dress symbolises the soul’s innocence and the role of Anima as the bride of Wisdom. Anima kneels to her spouse and lover, who cleanses her of ‘fylthe orygynall’ (original sin). Thus, Anima exists in a state of righteousness at the entrance of her Wits (five senses), and the Mights (Mind, Will and Understanding).

The three Mights appear to be dressed in a clerical garb at the beginning of the play, and are representations of cloistered monks. Ultimately, Lucifer corrupts the three Mights and thus Anima falls into sin. The Mights change into a ‘new array’, signalling the shift in their characters from a state of grace to one of sin. Their names, too, change from Mind, Will, and Understanding to Maintenance, Lechery, and Perjury respectively. When Anima re-enters she is dressed

in the most horrybull wyse, fowlere than a fende

\textit{In the most horrible manner, fouler than a fiend}

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indicating the fallen state of the soul. Ultimately, Wisdom returns to call the
Mights to repent;

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Turne thi weys, thou gost amyse.} & \quad \text{Change your ways, you are amiss.} \\
\text{Se what thi ende ys, thou myght not fle:} & \quad \text{Look at what your end is, you cannot escape it:} \\
\text{Dethe to every creature certen ys.} & \quad \text{Death comes to every creature} \\
\text{They that lyue well, they shall have blys;} & \quad \text{The ones who live well will have bliss;} \\
\text{Thay that endyn yll, they goo to hell!} & \quad \text{Those who end badly, they go to hell.}
\end{align*}
\]

The acknowledgement of sin and repentance by the Mights leads to forgiveness,
and so Anima is returned to a state of righteousness. Accordingly, she is dressed
once more in white and crowned, alongside the Mights, indicating their defeat of
sin. At this point, Wisdom (as Christ) addresses Anima, the soul of the Everyman;

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Now ye have forsake synne and be contrite.} & \quad \text{Now you have forsaken sin and been contrite.} \\
\text{Ye were never so leve to me verelye.} & \quad \text{You have never been so dear to me, truly.} \\
\text{Now be ye reformyde to your bewtys bryght.} & \quad \text{Now you are returned to your bright beauty.}
\end{align*}
\]

These costume changes visually demonstrate to the audience the power of
repentance to restore the sinner to a state of grace. Moreover, this redemption
reinforces orthodox teachings for

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{in perfeyt penaunce amende the...and ioye schal be to god and} & \quad \text{Be penitent... and God} \\
\text{to alle aungellys of thin amendment, as the gospel tellyth.'} & \quad \text{and the angels will} \\
& \quad \text{rejoice in your} \\
& \quad \text{penitence, as the gospel says.}
\end{align*}
\]

The dressing of the Mights in monastic robes and the beginning and end of
\textit{Wisdom} raises contemporary issues linked to concerns of clerical sin. This
social commentary is emphasised by the Mights’ subsequent fall and the
declaration of Lucifer, that

\[
\text{Many a holy man wyth ys mosyde.} \quad \text{Many a holy man is deceived by me.}
\]

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item 242 Klausner, ‘Wisdom’, p. 52.
\item 244 Klausner, ‘Wisdom’, p. 57, lines 1091-1093.
\item 245 Brandeis, \textit{Jacob’s Well}, vol. 1, p. 36.
\item 246 See p. 42 of this thesis for elaboration of clerical sin.
\item 247 Klausner, ‘Wisdom’, p. 35, line 248.
\end{itemize}
In sin, Mind becomes Maintenance, or the purchasing of support. He is followed by the personifications of similar sins, who carry images of force such as weapons and red beards. Understanding becomes Perjury, and his followers are dressed as jurors wearing two-faced masks. Will becomes Lechery and heads with his followers to the nearest brothel.

Importantly, the ultimate seduction and fall of Anima’s three faculties comes through Lucifer’s perversion of Biblical teachings. Such perversion represented a concern of the fifteenth century, as there was greater secular access to religious writings in the vernacular. The audience is pre-warned of his deception, as Lucifer declares,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Sen I shall schew perfyghtnes}, \\
\text{And vertu, prove yt wykkydnes.} \\
\text{Thus undyr colors, all thynge perverse.}^{248}
\end{align*}
\]

_I shall show [Man] that perfection is sin, And prove virtue to be wickedness._

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{[I will] pervert all things under false pretences.}^{248}
\end{align*}
\]

Lucifer claims first to Mind that though there are times for fasting and prayer, there are times for work and labour.\(^{249}\) He compares clerical contemplation to the sin of idleness,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Vt quid hic statis tota die ociosi?}^{250}
\end{align*}
\]

_Why do you stand the whole day here in idleness?_

and describes the importance of the active life of Martha as well as the passive life of Mary. To Will and Understanding, Lucifer argues that God created Man to like food, wine, and sex.\(^{251}\)


\(^{249}\) Klausner, ‘Wisdom’, p. 39, lines 401-411


\(^{251}\) Klausner, ‘Wisdom’, p. 41, line 475.
In the temptation of Mind, Lucifer calls upon a member of the audience, as ‘...a man that lyyvt wordly’ (a Man who lives a worldly life) and who cannot see his dependents perish while he undertakes ‘preyer and es of body’ (prayer and ease of body). This addressing of the audience, while revelatory to the historian as to the observers of the play, also appeals to the audience's individual interpretation. As in the other Macro plays, this interrelationship between players and audience encourages the viewers to see themselves in universal moral predicaments that can only be reconciled by reference to God’s word and appeal to God’s mercy.

These three plays contributed to the construction of conscience through the facilitation of individual interpretation and decision-making. The Macro plays were public performances, dealing with obligation to and reconciliation with God and appealed to their audience on an intellectual and emotional level. The plays sit outside the rubric of institutionalised ritual, but represent more than drama. As performances, there is an expectation that the audience respond to the plays' themes, with the Macro plays prompting the audience to contemplate their lives on Earth and their relationship to God. The morality plays are performances that offer an allegorical account of the conflicts and temptations faced by the Everyman in fifteenth-century East Anglia. The allegories centralise the role of human weakness and sin that can only be redeemed by reference to God by way of sacraments, prayer and good works. The East Anglian Macro Plays expressed a voice of conscience similar to that of the ritual associated with the institutions of the fifteenth century. Moreover, the

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other instances of dissent addressed in this paper similarly show a relationship between voice, performance and conscience.

The thesis has highlighted the value of performance as a conceptual tool of analysis. Performance and its relationship to speech and audience exist on a continuum, with the formal and predictable patterns of ritual in contrast to the spontaneous, individualised or dissenting forms of expression. In this thesis, the latter centres the individual as the focus for decision-making and as an alternative to the structures of institutionalised authority. Free will, informed by knowledge and experience, increasingly empowered the individual to address and reconcile moral issues.

In this thesis, three dimensions have been examined in the analysis of the individual in fifteenth-century East Anglia. The first was derived from the codes and patterns of ritual, centred on the institution and the paradigms of inclusion and exclusion. The second examined the creative individuality that accompanied free will – the increasing empowerment of the Everyman to drive his/her moral decisions. The final dimension examined the rapprochement of orthodoxy and individualism through the structured performance of the theatre. The study of drama, ritual and theatre within the Macro morality plays allowed for the observation of oral, gestural and theatrical elements of performance at work to hone the conscience of the observer. Within each of these dimensions, conscience has emerged as a unifying benchmark that contains principles relevant to ecclesiastical and secular moral dilemma.
**Chapter 5:**

**Conclusion:**

In fifteenth-century East Anglia, the Everyman was increasingly empowered to express their conscience, independent of the hegemonic voices of established institutions. This individuality developed out of the milieu of dissent, violence and reformation that was reshaping the social, economic and religious structure of the region. Institutions, old and new, were required to respond, and whilst some responses were inclusive and accommodating, others embodied practices of exclusion, isolation and damnation. The resulting tension saw new social performances develop, intended to reconcile the individual and traditional social practices. The morality play was one such example. This was a performance that facilitated individual interpretation and conscience within an intrinsically orthodox and structured setting. Through the interplay of performance, language and audience, orthodoxy shaped individual conscience, not due to compliance, but interpretation.

The thesis investigated the evolution of conscience and did so by reference to human interaction ordinarily invisible and impossible to extract from the conventional use of primary and secondary source materials. It has argued that the application of the concepts of ritual and drama in historical analysis can be extended by reference to a spectrum of performance that includes the use of speech and gesture. The source of language, the reference points for conversation and thus the speech, gesture and tone can be found in the Morality Plays of East Anglia.
The thesis uses these primary sources for two core reasons. Firstly, the plays, irrespective of their themes, offer insights into patterns of conversation through the Everyman as actor. They represent realistic sources of what, how and why speech was employed in the fifteenth-century East Anglia to communicate to audience. What can be heard in these plays, through the voices of the actors, is how the vernacular was used to offer audiences simulations of moral dilemma. The plays are allegorical and, in their unique way, are sermonic teachings that employ language and performative devices to resonate with audience. The three Macro plays were selected to ensure a level of comprehensiveness in terms of the scope of material and the time frame they represent.

Secondly, the plays deal with moral dilemma. These dilemmas are often complex, seductive and provocative in terms of language, context and choices to be made by audience. The temptations portrayed are real, earthly and relevant to the fifteenth-century audience. Accordingly, they are relevant also to the historian seeking insights and understandings into the way fifteenth-century East Anglian society viewed issues of human and social consequence.

As documents, the Macro plays have problematic features, but within this thesis it is the language used and portrayals offered that are significant. The plays contain conversation, patterns of speech, gesture and tone that give insight into voices – of performer and audience – otherwise lost to the historian. Importantly, the presentation of moral dilemma, the manner in which questions
of morality are posed, as well as the behavioural options and responses embodied in the plays, signify the shaping of conscience. These records of speech are essential to drawing meaningful conclusions and making valid comparisons with other aspects of human behaviour in the fifteenth century. These aspects relate to beliefs and the cultural drivers of faith, worship and religiosity in a period when medieval East Anglia confronted dislocation, dysfunction and large-scale social re-adjustments.

As benchmarks for this analysis, the thesis investigates the relationship between ritual and institution as found in the Mass and the operation of the guild system so as to establish the conventional pattern of how audiences and other participants in these ritual exchanges were encouraged to understand and comply with moral and doctrinal principles. These principles and precepts were externally imposed on them by virtue of their membership of congregation or guild. Other exemplars were also used to argue that within the complex patterns of change underway, other dissenting voices competed with the orthodoxy of the institutions and these offered competing interpretations of the theological, moral and doctrinal principles necessary to inform conscience.

Heresy, as defined by the institutional church, was one of these examples. The thesis posits the view that heresy served a valuable function in that through its questioning, through its dissenting voices, it offered choices, and posed moral dilemma in much the same way as the morality plays. These dissenting voices, when heard, shaped responses by individuals, groups and institutions alike. This thesis argues that dissent served a valuable function in necessitating the
empowerment, refinement, affirmation and validation of principle. This was not always the response in the fifteenth century, when some expressions of dissent invoked fierce retribution and sanction. Such responses are revelatory as they speak to the limitations of conscience within a world of expected compliance and conformity.

The language of the morality plays is revelatory too as the vernacular expression of orthodoxy. Moreover, these plays allowed for individualised responses to performance that were not possible within the hegemonic and ritualised performance of the same moral precepts within the Church. In the morality play, one could enjoin with the play at a number of levels, seeing it as mere entertainment or as a discursive exposition of a moral theme, and wherein the audience was invited to participate and interpret.

The fifteenth century in East Anglia can be seen as a struggle for hegemony between institution and individual, between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, between cleric and laity, between sacerdotal expression and biblical inspiration. The common element with each was conscience and how it was expressed through the performance and speech of the individual. This thesis has attempted to highlight the speech, gesture and tone, unique to performative traditions in order to reveal the burgeoning conscience of the fifteenth-century Everyman.
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