

*Falstaff Revisited**Puritan Nonconformity and Loyal Dissent in I Sir John Oldcastle*

As suggested in Chapter 2, Shakespeare rewrote the proto-Protestant martyr John Oldcastle in the person of Falstaff in his *Henry IV* plays as an apologist of dissimulation, in the spheres of both religion and the theatre. However, this reinterpretation of the Lollard dissenter, who had originally given Falstaff his name, did not remain uncontested. *The First Part of Sir John Oldcastle* (1599), written by Anthony Munday, Michael Drayton, Robert Wilson, and Richard Hathaway, presented itself as a deliberate repudiation of Shakespeare's take on Oldcastle/Falstaff.<sup>1</sup> As I argue in this chapter, *Oldcastle* makes a subtle case for nonconformity and can be read as a protest against the silencing of Puritan dissent in the 1590s, which stands in marked contrast to the religio-political quietism displayed in the *Henry IV* plays. Already in the prologue, the authors of *Oldcastle* set the record straight:

It is no pampered glutton we present,  
Nor aged counsellor to youthful sins;  
But one whose virtue shone above the rest,  
A valiant martyr and a virtuous peer. (prol. 6–9)

While Shakespeare's plot in the *Henry IV* plays is substantially indebted to *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* (published in 1598) and follows its dramatic predecessor in largely passing over Oldcastle's religious dissent and subsequent martyrdom, *Oldcastle* follows the historical record, especially John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, more closely.

<sup>1</sup> I cite from Munday, Drayton, Wilson, and Hathaway, 'Sir John Oldcastle, Part 1', in *The Oldcastle Controversy*, eds. Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991, 12–144. For some careful speculation about the division of labour among the collaborators, see Jonathan Rittenhouse's edition of the play (Rittenhouse 50–65). The second part of the play, entered in the Stationers' Register on 11 August 1600 as 'the second and last parte of the history of Sir / IOHN OLDCASTELL lord COBHAM with his martyrdom' (Rittenhouse 1), has not survived. Part 1 was first printed in 1600, without authorial attribution, by Valentine Simmes for Thomas Pavier. The second quarto from 1619 (with a false imprint dated 1600), one of the notorious Pavier quartos, falsely ascribes the play to Shakespeare.

The play (partly) adopts Foxe's narrative that clears Oldcastle from the charge of treason and presents the prospective martyr as a worthy precursor of the English Reformation. Throughout the play, however, Oldcastle is subject to slander by corrupt ecclesiastical detractors, especially the Bishop of Rochester and the comically villainous priest Sir John of Wrotham, who accuse him not only of heresy but also of treason. Against his will, Oldcastle's name becomes a rallying cry for all kinds of malcontents, who eventually march against the King in what came to be known as the Ficket Field rebellion. Even Henry V, who is otherwise reluctant to blame Oldcastle personally for any civic unrest related to the Lollard cause, begins to doubt Oldcastle's loyalty. However, the latter succeeds in reasserting his credentials as a loyal subject when he reveals the Southampton Plot (dramatised by Shakespeare in *Henry V*, but without Oldcastle) to the King. As Henry departs for France, Rochester continues his campaign against Oldcastle, who is eventually imprisoned in the Tower but escapes with the help of his loyal servant Harpoole and is reunited with his wife. For the remainder of *The First Part of Sir John Oldcastle*, the couple are on the run, facing new difficulties such as being falsely accused of murder, but in the end they manage to flee to Wales. Oldcastle's martyrdom would evidently have been reserved for the non-extant sequel.

In this version of the Oldcastle narrative, Munday and his collaborators roll back almost all of Shakespeare's innovations. Falstaff's 'good fellowship' is derided as nothing but the deluded self-conception of a shabby band of thieves. Shakespeare's celebration of dissimulation as a life-giving principle is replaced with conventional anti-theatrical stereotypes and denunciations of Catholic hypocrisy. Unlike Falstaff, Oldcastle is a Protestant hero willing to undergo martyrdom, but nonetheless not a traitor. In the top-down perspective on toleration in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays, toleration for private dissent and the stress on political obedience go hand in hand. In turn, *Oldcastle* addresses the subject of religious dissent from what might be called an oppositional perspective. While Shakespeare denounces religious justifications of political resistance as a hypocritical instrumentalisation of religion, *Oldcastle* dramatises the case of religious dissenters who think of themselves as loyal subjects but find themselves accused of treasonous intentions because of their religious beliefs.

There are several political, religious, and literary contexts in which *Oldcastle* might plausibly be located. The play's explicit repudiation of Shakespeare's lampooning of the proto-Protestant martyr may have been related to the rivalry between the Chamberlain's Men and the Admiral's Men, as well as the different court factions to which their respective patrons

adhered. The Admiral's Men's patron, Charles Howard, was allied to the Elizabethan Lord Cobham, William Brooke, and his son Henry, who possibly took offence at Shakespeare's take on their venerable ancestor.<sup>2</sup> Donna Hamilton has further suggested that the publication of *Oldcastle* and the Earl of Huntingdon plays may be related to the controversy which the Puritan exorcist John Darrell stirred up around the turn of the century. The plays may thus have met a renewed demand to assert the credentials of a moderate and loyalist Puritan party.<sup>3</sup> This ideological stance may also have been related to commercial considerations. Michael O'Connell has suggested that 'what the Henslowe companies appear to have had in mind was the conciliation of moderate Puritan elements among the London citizens and an attempt to entice into the theaters those groups that had previously shunned it'.<sup>4</sup>

As an appeal to a devout Protestant or even Puritan audience, *Oldcastle* did not stand alone. In terms of genre, *Oldcastle* belongs to a brief vogue of hagiographical plays remembering the heroes and martyrs of the English Reformation, which were staged primarily by the Admiral's Men and Worcester's Men from 1599 to c. 1605. Plays such as *Oldcastle*, *Thomas Lord Cromwell*, and *Sir Thomas Wyatt* have been classified as 'elect nation plays', but usually come with a strong biographical bent and a focus on individual choice, moral dilemma, and conscience, which would likely have resonated with those who found themselves estranged from the Established Church.<sup>5</sup> At any rate, with its generic affiliation to the elect nation play and by adapting a prominent character from the repertoire of the Chamberlain's Men, *Oldcastle* fits squarely into the Admiral's Men's commercial strategies of 'cluster marketing and character spin-offs'.<sup>6</sup> That is to say, there are overlapping commercial, ideological, as well as political considerations that might help to account for the remarkably Puritan slant of the play.

### Conscience and Loyalty

While the rebels in *2 Henry IV* freely admit that they are using religion as a propaganda tool, *Oldcastle* repeatedly stresses the need to differentiate between religious dissent and treason. In the 1590s, the nexus of heresy and

<sup>2</sup> For the possibility that *Oldcastle* may have been commissioned by the Cobham faction, perhaps even by the Lord Admiral himself, see White, 'Shakespeare, the Cobhams' 87; Gurr, 'Privy Councilors' 242–3. The role of court factionalism in the genesis of *Oldcastle* has, however, been questioned more recently. See Kitzes 289–90.

<sup>3</sup> Hamilton, *Politics of Protestant England* 90–1. <sup>4</sup> O'Connell 113. <sup>5</sup> See Spikes.

<sup>6</sup> Gurnis 78.

treason concerned Catholics as well as Puritans, who clashed more violently with political and ecclesiastical authority than they had ever done before. The two separatists Henry Barrow and John Greenwood were hanged on 6 April 1593, and John Penry, a possible co-author of the Marprelate tracts, shared their fate six weeks later. The most spectacular case, however, was the self-proclaimed prophet William Hacket, who declared on 12 July 1591 in Cheapside that the Queen had forfeited her right to the Crown because of her suppression of true religion.<sup>7</sup> Hacket was a major embarrassment for the Puritan cause, but provided conformist polemicists with exactly what they had been looking for: a link between Presbyterianism and open rebellion. Anti-Puritan legislation followed suit. In 1593, Parliament passed the notorious Act against Seditious Sectaries,<sup>8</sup> ‘the first and only act of an Elizabethan parliament which dealt exclusively and severely, with protestant sectaries’.<sup>9</sup> In subsequent popular polemics and satire, Puritanism became synonymous with sedition. In Thomas Nashe’s *Unfortunate Traveller* (1594), for instance, the infamous Anabaptist uprising in Munster in 1534–5 serves as a blueprint for Puritan sedition: ‘What was the foundation or groundworke of this dismall declining of Munster, but the banishing of their Bishop? . . . Heare what it is to be Anabaptists, to be Puritans, to be villaines; you may bee counted illuminate botchers for a while, but your end will bee, Good people, pray for vs’.<sup>10</sup> The rejection of the episcopacy, Nashe intimates, was only the tip of the iceberg of Puritan sedition.

As a means to assert their credentials as good subjects to the English monarch, Catholics were also happy to put the boot in. In *A treatise of three conuersions* (1604), Robert Parsons calls Oldcastle ‘a fanaticall Anabaptist’ and describes him as a model for rebellious Puritans like Hacket: ‘Hackett said, he should rise againe the third day, as Oldcastle did: and went as deuoutly to the gallowes, as the other did . . . and at the gallowes railed no lesse bitterly vpon Queene Elizabeth, then Oldcastle did vpon that woorthie King Henry the fift [*sic*]’.<sup>11</sup> Such attempts to discredit the Puritan movement as seditious *in toto* by drawing a line from Oldcastle to the most radical Puritans of the 1590s are also registered in

<sup>7</sup> For Hacket, see Walsham, “Frantick Hacket”. For a survey of the key texts of the debate, see Milward 99–104.

<sup>8</sup> 35 Eliz. c. 1. <sup>9</sup> Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement* 431.

<sup>10</sup> Nashe 2:238, 241. On the use of the Anabaptist comparison in Elizabethan anti-Puritanism, see Black, ‘Rhetoric of Reaction’.

<sup>11</sup> Parsons, *Three conuersions* 2Q6r.

*Oldcastle*. In the play, Catholic villains such as the Bishop of Rochester ventriloquise the same allegations of sedition against the Lollards as were levelled against the Puritans in the 1590s:

... When, like a frenzy,  
 This innovation shall possess their minds,  
 These upstarts will have followers to uphold  
 Their damned opinion more than Harry shall  
 To undergo his quarrel 'gainst the French. (2.13–17)

The threat of popular revolt, their addiction to 'innovation', and their 'frenzy' are all reminiscent of the anti-Puritan stereotypes of the 1590s. However, it is this assumption of the inherent seditiousness of Puritanism that *Oldcastle* purports to challenge and unmask as a polemical fiction.

From the beginning, the play is intensely concerned with the relationship between religious dissent and treason. The prologue proclaims the 'true faith and loyalty' (10) of this 'valiant martyr' (9) '[t]o his true sovereign and his countrey's weal' (11). The play's villains, however, continuously associate his heresy with treason and thereby suggest that religious dissent is *ipso facto* seditious. Early on, the anti-Lollard Lord Herbert sets the scene when he proclaims that 'they were traitors all / that would maintain [Lollardy]' (1.90–1). The play thus strikes a very Foxean note. As the martyrologist points out in his discussion of *Oldcastle*, already the martyrs of the primitive Church 'were wrongfully accused of the Gentiles for insurrections & rebellions against the Emperours and Empire',<sup>12</sup> and this is also the charge against which Foxe defends *Oldcastle*.

Ever since Mary Grace Muse Adkins' article on 'Sixteenth-Century Religious and Political Implications in *Sir John Oldcastle*' (1942), it has been a critical commonplace that the play addresses the plight of sixteenth-century Puritans. As its deliberate anachronisms and references to sixteenth-century religious culture suggest, the fate of *Oldcastle* is indeed not without contemporary relevance.<sup>13</sup> Later critics have further argued that the play distinguishes between a radical, supposedly seditious form of Puritanism and

<sup>12</sup> Foxe, *Acts and Monuments Online* 571.

<sup>13</sup> The Bishop of Rochester, for instance, anachronistically reports that the Lollards 'give themselves the name of Protestants' (2.20). Harpool's insistence that he is 'neither heretic nor puritan, but of the old church' (13.129–30) is an even more glaring anachronism. Finally, *Oldcastle*'s reading materials are firmly rooted in the sixteenth century (13.145–8), including highly popular Protestant literature such as the anonymously published *Treasure of Gladness* (1563) or Thomas Becon's *The Sick Man's Salve* (1558), which Quicksilver in *Eastward Ho*, for instance, is able to recite by heart in his demonstration of repentance (5.2.42–3).

a moderate, politically loyal form of Puritanism.<sup>14</sup> Significantly, *Oldcastle* follows Foxe in exonerating its protagonist from the charge of treason, but does not reproduce the martyrologist's claim that the Ficket Field rebels, who allegedly rose up in Oldcastle's name, 'c[a]me out of Outopia, where belike this figment was first forged, and inuented'.<sup>15</sup> In *Oldcastle*, the rebels embody an all too real alternative to Oldcastle's loyal dissent and are marked by their abuse of the rhetoric of conscience. The priest Beverley protests that '[w]e meant no hurt unto your Majesty, / But reformation of religion' (12.15–16), and the rebel leader Roger Acton tells the King that 'my conscience urged me to it' (12.9). The rich Dunstable brewer Murley even brushes aside any concerns about the legitimacy of regicide by declaring that '[w]e come to fight for our conscience and for honour' (8.34–5), although his motivation is clearly the prospect of knighthood, with which Acton lures him to join the rebellion. King Henry accordingly rejects conscience as a shallow excuse for disobedience in his confrontation with Acton:

Thy conscience? Then thy conscience is corrupt,  
 For in thy conscience thou art bound to us,  
 And in thy conscience thou shouldst love thy country;  
 Else what's the difference 'twixt a Christian  
 And the uncivil manners of the Turk? (12.10–14)

Henry must have in mind Paul's injunction to obey the secular magistrate in Romans 13:5: 'Wherefore ye must be subiect, not because of wrath onely, but also for conscience sake'. Unlike the rebels, the play's protagonist has understood that conscience may justify religious dissent, but not political rebellion:

One solace find I settled in my soul:  
 That I am free from treason's very thought.  
 Only my conscience for the Gospel's sake  
 Is cause of all the troubles I sustain. (13.93–6)

By distinguishing between rebellious radicals and the politically loyal protagonist, *Oldcastle* apparently confirms Marsha Robinson's observation that the 'elect nation' plays 'both celebrate conscience and struggle to contain its anarchical, individuating impulses that threaten a Protestant consensus'.<sup>16</sup> However, the commonly asserted distinction between

<sup>14</sup> See Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics* 256–9; OCCS 16; Lake, 'Politics of Conscience' 165–7; Lake, *How Shakespeare Put Politics* 422–8; Gurnis-Farrell 189–90.

<sup>15</sup> Foxe, *Acts and Monuments Online* 573. <sup>16</sup> Robinson, *Writing the Reformation* 77.

moderate and loyalist Puritans on the one hand and an extreme, revolutionary wing on the other is a problematic heuristic because the distinction between religious dissent and treason was in itself subject to controversy in the late sixteenth century. It was by no means clear, even fundamentally contested, to what extent religious dissent could be accommodated within a framework of political loyalty and at what point it turned into treason by virtue of its disregard for the monarch's ecclesiastical authority as supreme governor of the church. Hence, the distinction between moderates and radicals does not simply describe an ideological conflict; it also reproduces an already highly charged interpretation of it.<sup>17</sup> One question that was particularly pressing for Puritans in the 1590s was whether loyalty entailed nothing but obedience to the monarch's secular commands or whether it also required the acknowledgement of the monarch's supremacy over the Church and conformity to the Elizabethan settlement. This political precariousness of Puritan dissent is also reflected in *Oldcastle*, which complicates any clear-cut distinction between moderate and radical dissent and puts a spotlight on the fraught relationship between secular and ecclesiastical authority in early modern England.

When King Henry and Oldcastle eventually discuss the Lollard problem, the King formulates what might be characterised as a *politique* or conformist religious policy that delimits secular authority in religious matters according to a distinction between private and public religion:

We would be loath to press our subjects' bodies,  
 Much less their souls, the dear redeemèd part  
 Of Him that is the ruler of us all;  
 Yet let me counsel ye that might command:  
 Do not presume to tempt them with ill words,  
 Nor suffer any meetings to be had  
 Within your house but, to the uttermost,  
 Disperse the flocks of this new gathering sect. (6.19–26)

In other words, Henry urges Oldcastle to conform to the established religion. Oldcastle's 'heretical' views are tolerable as long as they do not manifest themselves in any public form.<sup>18</sup> However, the play problematises

<sup>17</sup> For an important methodological caveat to the same effect, although in a different context, see Lake and Questier, 'Puritans, Papists'.

<sup>18</sup> For such an interpretation of the play's ideological stance, see Bevington 258; Lake, 'Politics of Conscience' 161–2.

such a neat pairing of conscience and private faith on the one hand and political allegiance and public action on the other and thus veers dangerously close to the breakdown of Henry's policy of outward conformity. When the rebel leader Acton falsely claims that Oldcastle supported their cause, even the King, for a moment, loses faith in Oldcastle and starts to distrust merely outward obedience:

I think the iron age begins but now,  
Which learnèd poets have so often taught,  
Wherein there is no credit to be given  
To either words, or looks, or solemn oaths;  
For if there were, how often hath he [i.e. Oldcastle] sworn,  
How gently tuned the music of his tongue,  
And with what amiable face beheld he me,  
When all, God knows, was but hypocrisy. (12.74–81)

As soon as Oldcastle's dissent becomes tainted with the charge of treason, the distinction between inwardness and outwardness no longer serves to demarcate a sphere of legitimate private dissent from the reach of royal authority. Instead, this disjunction is re-conceptualised as suspicious hypocrisy and a dangerous cloak for treasonous intents. For religious dissenters, the iron age of distrust and suspicion was an iron age of persecution. Henry's concerns thus chime in with a political trend towards increasing intolerance and distrust in outward conformity in the 1580s and 1590s, which I will describe in more detail in Chapter 4. However, when Acton admits that 'we have no other ground / But only rumour to accuse this lord' (12.113–14), Henry steps back from the brink and acknowledges Oldcastle's loyalty. Placing such trust in the loyalty of dissenters would have been unusual in an Elizabethan context. In fact, the King's refusal to succumb to anti-heretical paranoia embodies an ideal of kingship that was rather wishful thinking than reality in the late sixteenth century and that would have reflected unfavourably on the period's increasingly harsh measures of persecution.

### Oldcastle's Nonconformity

In *Oldcastle*, the *politique* distinction between inward dissent and outward obedience is problematised not only by distrust and fear of treason but also by the protagonist's own behaviour. As it turns out, it is not so much Henry who violates the policy of outward conformity as Oldcastle himself, who cannot content himself with playing the Nicodemite. Throughout the play, Oldcastle denies treasonous intentions, but he



never denies the nonconformist stance imputed to him by his enemies. Suffolk, for instance, says early on that Oldcastle 'will not be compelled to come to mass' (2.109). Attendance at the Mass was indeed the main target of Calvin's anti-Nicodemite campaign and marked the touchstone of the true Christian's duty to avoid idolatry in Catholic territories.<sup>19</sup> As Calvin further argues in one of the sermons published by Munday, 'we are not taught of God, onely for our selues, but that euery man, after the measure of his faith, should brotherly communicate, with his neighbours, and distribut vnto them, that thing he hath learned, and knowen in Gods schole'.<sup>20</sup> That is to say, Henry's conformist programme clashes with the duty of the godly to proselytise. As the Bishop of Rochester points out, Oldcastle has apparently been doing just that:

Grievous complaints have passed between the lips  
Of envious persons to upbraid the clergy,  
Some carping at the livings which we have,  
And others spurning at the ceremonies  
That are of ancient custom in the Church,  
Amongst the which Lord Cobham is a chief. (2.5–10)

Oldcastle's supposed 'spurning at the ceremonies' would presumably have resonated with Puritan complaints about clerical vestments or the form in which the sacraments were administered, such as the making of the sign of the cross in the Baptismal rite or kneeling when receiving the communion.

When the King urges Oldcastle not 'to suffer any meetings to be had / Within your house', he likewise suggests that Oldcastle, who does not deny having done so, was indeed actively supporting the Lollard cause. Importantly, even though Henry frames his admonition as advice at this point – 'let me counsel ye that might command' (6.22) – Oldcastle has indeed violated previous royal commands not to hold Lollard meetings. As one of the judges proclaims in the first scene of the play, the King's command was that

<sup>19</sup> As Calvin puts it in one of the sermons published by Munday in 1584, 'the Masse is cheefe' among 'certaine kindes of Idolatries, which are of most estimation in these dayes'. According to Calvin, 'nothing can be imagined more fowle and wicked' (F2r) because in its Catholic understanding as a sacrifice, it 'is a denial of Jesus Christes death, and a certaine Sacrifledge inuented and ordeined by Sathan, to abolishe the Sacrament of the Supper' (*Two godly and learned Sermons* F2r-v).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. D7v–D8r.

There be no meetings; when the vulgar sort  
 Sit on their ale-bench with cups and cans,  
 Matters of state be not their common talk,  
 Nor pure religion by their lips profaned. (1.120–3)

Henry's command resonates with medieval as well as with Elizabethan legislation of religious dissent. As for Henry's command that '[t]here be no meetings', it is not entirely clear whether *Oldcastle* is drawing on historical legislation and, if so, what laws exactly.<sup>21</sup> At any rate, Foxe is quite clear that there *was* legislation that penalised conventicles in the sharpest terms. Foxe does not deny that Acton and his associates were executed for treason, even if they had no seditious intents, perhaps because they 'did frequent among themselues, some conuenticles (which conuenticles was made treason by the statute aforesayd) either in those Thicketts or in some place els'.<sup>22</sup> The play similarly acknowledges that even Oldcastle's supposedly loyalist nonconformity stands in contradiction with not just the ambitions of the corrupt clergy but also the direct will of the King. When Henry eventually tells Oldcastle that 'for some good service you have done, / We for our part are pleased to pardon you' (6.4–5), there is indeed something to be pardoned. It seems highly questionable, therefore, whether Oldcastle really embodies the perfect loyalty of a supposedly moderate Puritan that is usually ascribed to him.

Moreover, Oldcastle's activities would also have been in breach of a recent and important sixteenth-century piece of legislation, namely, the 1593 Act against Seditious Sectaries mentioned earlier in this chapter. The act required nonconformists 'to yeald themselves to come to some Church Chappell or usuall Place of Commen Prayer, and heare Devyne Service, accordinge to her Majesties Lawes and Statutes'.<sup>23</sup> Admittedly, Oldcastle's refusal 'to come to mass' (2.109) does not necessarily mean that he categorically stays away from church services. Absenting oneself from the service during the communion was a widespread Elizabethan practice.<sup>24</sup> However,

<sup>21</sup> In his edition of the play, Rittenhouse suggests (108–9, 113) that the command may be based on a statute passed one year after the Ficket Field rebellion (2 Hen. V c. 7), which is fully quoted and discussed at length by Foxe (*Acts and Monuments Online* 570–4).

<sup>22</sup> Foxe, *Acts and Monuments Online* 587. <sup>23</sup> SR 4–2:841.

<sup>24</sup> Skipping merely the Lord's Supper was a common form of Catholic semi-conformity, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 7. According to Calvin, however, there seems to have been a Protestant equivalent in Catholic territories. In the anti-Nicodemite sermons published by Munday, Calvin describes a similarly selective church attendance on the part of French Protestants: 'Other some do watche a tyme, least they come in the Masse whyle, and yet they come to the Temple, that men should suppose they heare Masse' (*Two godly and learned Sermons* 61r).

the 1593 act incriminates not only Protestants who ‘abstayne from comynge to Churche to heare Devyne Service’ but also those who refuse ‘to receyve the Communion’.<sup>25</sup> Like Henry’s command in *Oldcastle*, the act further penalises ‘unlauffull Assemblies Conventicles or Meetinges uuder [*sic*] colour or pretence of any exercise of Religion’.<sup>26</sup> Oldcastle, who refuses to go to Mass and apparently promotes Lollard conventicles of some sort, clearly does not comply with secular authority in the fullest sense – neither in the legal framework of the play’s historical context nor according to the standard of Elizabethan legislation of religious dissent. Oldcastle’s nonconformity thus complicates the play’s discourses of conscience and political loyalty to an extent that has not yet been fully recognised in previous criticism.

The controversial status of Oldcastle’s loyalty is most glaring in the question of royal supremacy. Of course, Puritans rejected Papal authority, but they did not really warm to royal supremacy either. *The Book of Discipline*, the Puritan blueprint for an ecclesiastical constitution, provided no role at all for the monarch, as Richard Bancroft observed in his scorching review of the document: ‘there is not once mention made of any authoritie, or office, in or ouer the Church; belonging to the Christian ciuile magistrate. He hath not so much, as eyther voyce or place, in any of their Synodes, as a member thereof’.<sup>27</sup> The 1593 Act against Seditious Sectaries accordingly penalised any claims ‘to denye withstande and ympugne her Majestie Power and Authoritie in Causes Ecclesiasticall’.<sup>28</sup> When Oldcastle declares his loyalty to Henry, he complies at least with one aspect entailed by royal supremacy, namely, a vociferous denunciation of Papal authority. In his pious zeal, however, Oldcastle silently passes over the issue of the monarch’s authority over the Church and begs the King that his ‘conscience may not be encroached upon’.

But for obedience to the Pope of Rome,  
I owe him none, nor shall his shaveling priests  
That are in England alter my belief.  
If out of Holy Scripture they can prove  
That I am in an error, I will yield,  
And gladly take instruction at their hands.  
But otherwise, I do beseech your Grace,  
My conscience may not be encroached upon. (6.11–18)

<sup>25</sup> SR 4–2:841. <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Bancroft, *Dangerous positions* 98. On *The Book of Discipline*, see also Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement* 291–302.

<sup>28</sup> SR 4–2:841.

The simple repudiation of Papal authority does not mean, as David Bevington has suggested, that 'Henry and Oldcastle are thus as one in their belief that the church must be subject to royal authority and reformed under the king's direction'.<sup>29</sup> Oldcastle's insistence that he will only yield '[i]f out of Holy Scripture they can prove / That I am in an error' is a fitting insistence on *sola scriptura* for a first-generation Reformation hero. In the context of the 1590s, however, when apologists of the Church of England made a case for the authority of the monarch to regulate so-called things indifferent, such as 'the ceremonies / That are of ancient custom in the Church' (2.8–9) which Oldcastle apparently spurns, he would rather have sounded like a radical nonconformist.

Oldcastle's conception of loyalty is thus hardly coterminous with the acknowledgement of royal supremacy but to be defined more narrowly as obedience to the monarch in all secular matters. Remarkably, Henry is quite open to such a conception of loyalty. When he counsels Oldcastle to abandon his nonconformity instead of commanding him to do so, Oldcastle replies in terms vague enough that if 'my life in any of these points / Deserves th'attainder of ignoble thoughts' (6.28–9), he would that 'even the utmost rigour may be shown' (6.31). The King, however, does not insist on a more explicit declaration of obedience or a confirmation of royal supremacy on Oldcastle's part. On the contrary, he seems to scale back his expectations to a conception of loyalty that does not require complete conformity: 'Let it suffice we know your loyalty' (6.32). To be clear, Henry *did* explicitly prohibit conventicles and other manifestations of nonconformity earlier in the play, and this prohibition had been justified with a reference to 'the King's prerogative' (1.99). In his interview with Oldcastle, however, Henry does not insist on his prerogative in matters of religion and thus allows, at least temporarily, for a reconciliation of nonconformity with political loyalty. It is indeed only in such an ad hoc form of religious toleration, driven by pragmatism and the monarch's individual disposition rather than by constitutional principle, that Elizabethan Puritans could realistically place their hopes.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics* 257.

<sup>30</sup> Throughout Elizabeth's reign, uniformity was enforced to different degrees in different places at different times. Lancashire, for instance, was simply passed over in Whitgift's subscription campaign in 1584. Similarly, Puritan exegetical exercises, so-called prophesyings, were mostly prohibited in the south by 1576, but actively encouraged in the diocese of Chester in order to counter the strong local Catholic presence with a well-trained, thoroughly reformed clergy (Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement* 406).

Finally, the play advances an interpretation of what exactly would constitute a violation of royal supremacy in words that, once again, are attuned to Puritan concerns in the 1590s. When Beverley defends himself after the failed rebellion by claiming that '[w]e meant no hurt unto your Majesty, / But reformation of religion' (12.15–16), Henry replies:

Reform religion? Was it that ye sought?  
 I pray who gave you that authority?  
 Belike then, we do hold the sceptre up  
 And sit within the throne but for a cipher.  
 Time was, good subjects would make known their grief,  
 And pray amendment, not enforce the same,  
 Unless their king were tyrant, which I hope  
 You cannot justly say that Harry is. (12.17–24)

This passage is arguably Henry's most determined bid for royal supremacy. The Elizabethan Act of Supremacy<sup>31</sup> authorised the monarch 'to visite reformation redres order correcte and amende all such Erroures Heresies Scismes Abuses Offences Contemptes and Enormitees whatsoever . . . to the Pleasure of Almightye God thencrease of Vertue and the Conservac[i]on of the Peace and Unitie of this Realme'<sup>32</sup> – a clause that was also cited by opponents of Puritan reform initiatives in Parliament.<sup>33</sup> At first glance, Henry seems to stake out a similarly exclusive claim to reforming religion, just as his earlier suppression of conventicles appealed to his 'prerogative', a term that likely reminded the play's audiences of Elizabeth's governorship over the Church.<sup>34</sup>

However, Henry also makes an important distinction between mere petitions and active efforts to reform religion. In this regard, the scene can also be read as a retrospective vindication of Presbyterian agitation, which had led to the high-profile Star Chamber trial of nine Puritan ministers in 1591.<sup>35</sup> The ministers were accused of intending to set *The Book of Discipline* into practice without royal or episcopal authorisation, which would have constituted a violation of royal supremacy. However, they disavowed any intention of doing so and argued that the book was merely a proposal for

<sup>31</sup> 1 Eliz. c. 1. <sup>32</sup> SR 4–1:352. <sup>33</sup> *Proceedings* 2:354.

<sup>34</sup> Compare with the language of article 37, 'Of the ciuill Magistrates', of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, which speaks of the 'prerogatiue whiche we see to haue ben geuen always to all godly Princes in holy Scriptures by God him selfe, that is, that they should rule all estates and degrees committed to their charge by God, whether they be Ecclesiasticall or Temporall, and restraine with the ciuill sworde the stubberne and euyll doers' ('Articles of Religion' 408–9).

<sup>35</sup> For a detailed account of the trial, see Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement* 403–31.

reform. The Act for the Submission of the Clergy<sup>36</sup> had stipulated the repeal of all ecclesiastical laws that were 'much prejudiciall to the Kyng's prerogatyve royall and repugn[a]nt to the lawes and statutes of this Realme'.<sup>37</sup> According to Robert Beale, whose argumentation was also adopted by other Presbyterians who had subscribed to *The Book of Discipline*, the failure of subsequent attempts to establish a new corpus of ecclesiastical law had placed the responsibility for its reformation on the whole commonwealth.<sup>38</sup> By submitting *The Book of Discipline* for consideration, the Presbyterians were therefore merely doing their duty as loyal subjects. Beale, however, conceded that any attempts to set the book into practice would indeed have been illegal.<sup>39</sup>

In *Oldcastle*, Henry seems to vindicate this argumentation when he insists that 'good subjects would make known their grief, / And pray amendment, not enforce the same'. This is by no means a commonplace assertion of royal authority. After all, the right to voice one's opinion on matters of religion was highly contested during Elizabeth's reign. As Patrick Collinson points out, 'Beale was claiming for an entirely unprivileged group of private individuals powers which Elizabeth would not even concede to her own Parliament'.<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth was perfectly clear on this point when a parliamentary committee was established on 8 March 1587 in order to compose a petition for better training for the clergy and against Whitgift's harsh anti-Puritan proceedings. In her response, the Queen rejected even mere petitions as an infringement of her royal prerogative:

Hir Majestie taketh your petition herein to be againste the prerogative of hir Croune. For by your full consentes it hath bene confirmed and enacted (as the truth therein requireth) that the full power, authoritie, iurisdiction and supremacie in Church causes which heretofore the Popes usurped, and tooke to them selves, shoulde be united and annexed to the imperiall Croune of this realme.<sup>41</sup>

As Elizabeth told Parliament through Lord Chancellor Hatton once more two years later, it had no right to 'meddle with anie such matters or causes of religion, excepte it be to bridle all those, whether papists or puritanes, which are therewithall discontented'.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, some of the more

<sup>36</sup> 25 Hen. VIII c. 19.    <sup>37</sup> SR 3:460.

<sup>38</sup> Since Parliament failed to authorise the *Reformatio legum ecclesiasticarum* in 1553 and 1571, Roman canon law mostly remained in force, despite partial reform in 1571, 1575, 1585, 1597, and, most importantly, the canons from 1604. See *Synodalia* 1:111–329.

<sup>39</sup> See Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement* 420–2; Levy, *Origins of the Fifth Amendment* 175–6.

<sup>40</sup> Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement* 422.    <sup>41</sup> *Proceedings* 2:364.    <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 2:419–20.

determined Puritan MPs, such as Peter Wentworth, Anthony Cope, James Morice, and others, were repeatedly arrested for their parliamentary speeches and initiatives.<sup>43</sup>

The bill that eventually resulted in the Act against Seditious Sectaries<sup>44</sup> likewise caused considerable unease in the Commons on 4 April 1593, especially because it stipulated a restriction of free speech that went far beyond the question of parliamentary privileges. The bill would have incriminated all who ‘shall deface our devine service’, even if only by ‘open speaking’.<sup>45</sup> Since Beale and Morice had been placed under house arrest,<sup>46</sup> it fell to Nicholas Fuller and Henry Finch to lead the opposition. Fuller, who had already supported the nine Puritan ministers in the Star Chamber,<sup>47</sup> was alarmed by the prospect of being completely muzzled in matters of religion: ‘Whosoever writeth or speaketh in these matters of controversy is within the danger of this law, for if he write or speake against any thinge that / is auctorised by law though he write not with a malitious intent against the Quene . . . it shall be intended malitiously’.<sup>48</sup> Henry Finch, another common lawyer with Puritan sympathies, objected that ‘[t]o a man’[s] neerest frend it is not safe to speake; ffor though a men [*sic*] speake but against nonresidency, excommunication as it is used, or any other abuse in the Church, he incurrs the danger of this lawe’.<sup>49</sup> In none too subtle a gesture of intimidation, the separatists Henry Barrow and John Greenwood were hanged two days later, on 6 April. As one contemporary observed, ‘it is playnley sayd . . . that theyr execution proced[ed] of malice of the Bishoppes to spite the nether house which hath provoked ther moch hatred among the common people affected that way’.<sup>50</sup> In the end, the bill was heavily amended by a committee of the Commons before it passed, but free speech in matters of religion was evidently a precarious good in late Elizabethan England.

In *Oldcastle*, Henry’s liberal concession that good subjects may make known their grief thus tallies with a highly contested, Puritan interpretation of the right of subjects to partake in ecclesiastical deliberations.

<sup>43</sup> For Wentworth’s pleas for free speech and repeated arrests, see, for example, *Proceedings* 2:320–31; 3:42–4, 3:68. For the debates on Anthony Cope’s notorious bill to replace *The Book of Common Prayer*, see *Proceedings* 2:333–54. For the bills against abuses of ecclesiastical jurisdiction proposed by Morice and his subsequent arrest on 28 February 1593, see *Proceedings* 3:30–49, 3:76–80. For the suppression of Puritan parliamentary initiatives in general, see also Dean 98–132. However, for free speech as a specific feature of early modern parliamentary discourse and its often controversial restrictions, especially in matters of religion, see also Colclough 131–8; Mack 252–4.

<sup>44</sup> 35 Eliz. c. 1. <sup>45</sup> Quoted in Dean 68. <sup>46</sup> Levy, *Origins of the Fifth Amendment* 200–1.

<sup>47</sup> Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement* 419. <sup>48</sup> *Proceedings* 3:162. <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* 3:163.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Dean 70.

However, it also rings rather hollow in the light of a long history of Puritan parliamentary initiatives that had come to nothing owing to the Queen's heavy-handed suppression of any challenge to her religious settlement. Henry ends on a politically highly charged note when he proclaims that subjects should 'not enforce [their grief] / Unless their king were tyrant which I hope / You cannot justly say that Harry is' (12.22–4). Henry's casual concession that resistance to a tyrant may actually be lawful is remarkable and flies in the face of Tudor orthodoxy. The contrast between Henry's own liberality and Elizabeth's usual parliamentary obstructionism could hardly have been missed by spectators with any interest in contemporary church politics. Even more, this contrast may have suggested that Elizabeth's suppression of free speech is actually an instance of the kind of tyranny that Henry disavows. If Henry is, at least in his treatment of religious dissent, an idealised monarch who validates the political views of a supposedly moderate and loyalist Puritan party, then the idea of moderate and loyalist Puritanism is really stretched to breaking point. Rather than celebrating the 'elect nation' or expressing allegiance to the Elizabethan settlement, *Oldcastle* ominously intimates that the patience of the silenced brethren is not without limits.

### Theatre, Hypocrisy, and Espionage

The nonconformist ethos of *Oldcastle* is also mirrored in its ambivalent attitude towards theatricality. As Marsha Robinson observes, the play 'disengages Falstaff, the consummate player of parts, from Oldcastle, the martyr, reincarnating an Oldcastle whose identity is fixed, rooted in inner "truth"'.<sup>51</sup> This ethical reorientation towards an inner truth to which the martyr testifies with his own blood leaves little leeway for a positive appraisal of dissimulation. However, Falstaff's hypocrisy resurfaces in the priest Sir John of Wrotham. Like Falstaff, who calls himself 'kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff' (1H4 2.4.463), this priest calls himself 'kind Sir John of Wrotham, honest Jack' (2.149). However, whereas Shakespeare celebrates Falstaff's theatricality and makes a genuine case for dissimulation as a life-giving principle, the hypocritical Sir John is a good deal less charming than Falstaff – and also a good deal more reprehensible.

Sir John's theatricality has nothing to do with legitimate dissimulation as a means of self-preservation. His is the alleged hypocrisy of the Catholic clergy, which was habitually exposed in earlier polemical and didactic

<sup>51</sup> Robinson, *Writing the Reformation* 69.



Protestant drama.<sup>52</sup> Sir John is thus arguably an embodiment of what Ritchie D. Kendall has called ‘the stratagem of self-exorcism’ of nonconformist drama,<sup>53</sup> the attempt to come to terms with the paradoxical formulation of a nonconformist ethos in a medium that relies on dissimulation. Thus, Oldcastle is stripped of Falstaff’s habits of dissimulation, which in turn are transferred to and condemned in meta-theatrical fashion in the hypocritical priest, the martyr’s theatrical double. In the play’s first soliloquy, Sir John declares:

I am not as the world does take me for.  
 If ever wolf were clothed in sheep’s coat,  
 Then I am he. Old huddle and twang, i’faith;  
 A priest in show, but in plain terms a thief.  
 Yet let me tell you, too, an honest thief;  
 One that will take it where it may be spared,  
 And spend it freely in good fellowship.  
 I have as many shapes as Proteus had  
 That still, when any villainy is done,  
 There may be none suspect it was Sir John. (2.154–63)

Sir John is a consummate shape-shifter, as is evident in this heterogeneous and contradictory patchwork of different theatrical traditions, which includes the morality Vice, the hypocritical stock priest of anti-Catholic drama, the ideal of good fellowship, and the Machiavellian dissembler. In brief, Sir John ‘represents the self as a constructed artifice’.<sup>54</sup> Sir John’s first costume, the sheep’s clothing, recalls Christ’s warning against false prophets, who ‘come to you in shepes clothing, but inwardely they are rauening wolues’ (Matt. 7:15). He adopts this role in his minor but nasty part in the machinations against Oldcastle when he maintains the façade of ‘[a]n honest country prelate who laments / To see such foul disorder in the Church’ (2.30–1). This ‘honest country prelate’ is, as the play gradually reveals, a thief and nothing but ‘a priest in show’. However, the play does not fail to point out that the priest shares his profession with ‘that foul villainous guts, that led him to all that roguery . . . that Falstaff’ (10.82–3). When Sir John robs the disguised King, the latter is indeed given to nostalgic reminiscing about his good old days, or rather nights, as a minion of the moon: ‘Where the devil are all my old thieves that were wont to keep this walk? Falstaff, the villain, is so fat he cannot get on’s horse; but methinks Poins and Peto should be

<sup>52</sup> See White, *Theatre and Reformation* 34–41; Kendall 101–22. <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 118.

<sup>54</sup> Robinson, *Writing the Reformation* 69.

stirring hereabouts' (10.52–5). Sir John's rapacious tendencies are thus associated with one of the period's most popular stage characters, which might seem to palliate to some extent the anti-Catholicism that he embodies.

Additionally, Sir John insists that he is 'an honest thief; / One that will take it where it may be spared, / And spend it freely in good fellowship'. Sir John thus invokes Robin Hood, who had only recently been on stage in Munday's *Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntingdon* and *Death of Robert Earl of Huntingdon* (1598) and whose merry men are likewise repeatedly characterised as 'good fellows'.<sup>55</sup> In *Shakespeare's Tribe*, Jeffrey Knapp has argued that the ideal of good fellowship implies an inclusive, Erasmian stance towards religious difference.<sup>56</sup> Musa Gurnis-Farrell has accordingly suggested that by invoking good fellowship, *Oldcastle* 'generates an inclusive stage representation of English Catholicism', even though this may never have been the authors' intention.<sup>57</sup> As Gurnis-Farrell points out, '[t]he production of plays in the early modern commercial theater was a process of cultural bricolage. Playwrights used what tropes they had to hand to meet the market's demand for new plays that cashed in on current dramatic trends'.<sup>58</sup> Undoubtedly, Sir John is the result of such bricolage, which may well generate semantic effects beyond any individual author's intention or control. A case in point is the reconciliation between Sir John and Oldcastle's servant Harpool: 'Give me thy hand; thou art as good a fellow. I am a singer, a drinker, a bencher, a wencher. I can say a mass and kiss a lass' (4.182–3), to which Harpool replies: 'Well said, mad priest. We'll in and be friends' (4.186). However, such rogue ecumenicism is hardly commendable in the overall context of the play. For a start, Harpool's Protestant credentials are dubious.<sup>59</sup> And while Gurnis-Farrell claims that Sir John's good fellowship is a redeeming trait in an otherwise polemical satire of a Catholic priest, one might wonder if it is not rather the ideal of good fellowship that is tarnished by its association with Sir John and other unsavoury characters. In *Oldcastle*, the epithet 'good

<sup>55</sup> For example, *Downfall*, ll. 899–900, 923, 1113. However, Sir John's insistence that he is 'an honest thief' who spends his spoils 'freely in good fellowship' is a rather euphemistic description of the management of his finances. To the dismay of his concubine, he simply gambles his money away (16.5–6).

<sup>56</sup> See especially Knapp, ch. 1, 'Good Fellows' 23–57. <sup>57</sup> Gurnis-Farrell 190. <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 193.

<sup>59</sup> When Rochester accuses Harpool of 'contempt of our church discipline' (13.124) because of his rough handling of the sumner, Harpool replies: 'Sblood, my Lord Bishop, ye do me wrong. I am neither heretic nor puritan, but of the old church. I'll swear, drink ale, kiss a wench, go to mass, eat fish all Lent, and fast Fridays with cakes and wine, fruit and spicery, shrive me of my old sins afore Easter, and begin new afore Whitsuntide' (13.129–33). These words are, of course, rife with anti-Catholic stereotypes, but the play itself, rather than Harpool, seems to be doing the mocking, given that the latter does indeed behave accordingly for most of the play.

fellow' is used in an inflationary and almost indiscriminate manner that severely questions its desirability. Although the term never entirely loses its positive evaluation of sociability, it also describes highly problematic behaviour, as when Sir John declares that 'a good fellow parson may have a chapel of ease [i.e. sexual gratification] where his parish church is far off' (4.16–17). When Sir John robs the disguised King, he calls himself again 'good fellow' and tells the King: 'if thou be a good fellow, play the good fellow's part; deliver thy purse without more ado' (10.42–3). Even more problematically, Acton calls one of his fellow-rebels 'good fellow' (8.51). In such moments, the play veers closely towards the scepticism that Puritans often displayed towards an indiscriminating ideal of good fellowship.<sup>60</sup> Any higher spiritual purpose in good fellowship, as well as any conception of the theatre in line with this ideal, is severely compromised in *Oldcastle*.

Finally, there is an almost Machiavellian element to Sir John's dissimulation. His revelation of a radical disparity between inward and outward self in an early soliloquy is typical for the stage Machiavel,<sup>61</sup> as is his boastful rhetoric and vocabulary when he proclaims that he has 'as many shapes as Proteus had / That still, when any villainy is done, / There may be none suspect it was Sir John' (2.161–3). In moments like this, Sir John sounds almost like Richard, Duke of Gloucester, who 'can add colours to the chameleon, / Change shapes with Proteus for advantages, / And set the murderous Machiavel to school' (3H6 3.2.191–3). Proteus and the chameleon are prominent early modern symbols of changeability, inconstancy, and deceit, which only rarely possess positive connotations outside Neoplatonic and Erasmian traditions. They also feature prominently in early modern anti-theatrical literature,<sup>62</sup> as for instance in *A second and third blast of retrait from plaies and Theaters*, commonly ascribed to Munday: 'Plaiers can not better be compared than to the Camelion'.<sup>63</sup> An anti-theatrical flavour is indeed unmistakable in the characterisation of Sir John, given that he seems to own a well-stocked wardrobe of disguises that enable his illicit ventures. He is once described as 'a fellow with one eye that has robbed two clothiers' (4.94), a fitting target for his needs, and when he relieves the King of his gold, he is 'all in green' (11.99). The garb of a priest, it seems, is just one of Sir John's many costumes. Theatricality in *Oldcastle* thus is not associated with the accommodation of good fellowship but is rather a cloak for clerical

<sup>60</sup> Compare with Collinson, 'Cohabitation' 67.

<sup>61</sup> On the role of soliloquies by early modern stage Machiavels in connection to confessional polemics, see also Chapter 6.

<sup>62</sup> Barish 101–31. <sup>63</sup> Munday, *A second and third blast* 112; compare with Barish 101–31.

abuses, especially the hypocrisy, exploitation, and persecutory practices ascribed to the Catholic clergy in Protestant polemics. Sir John thus embodies the 'strident histrionics' of the Foxean Catholic clergy, 'mere actors who play a false part', whose 'private thoughts are contained in Machiavellian moments of calculating shrewdness'.<sup>64</sup> It comes as no surprise then that the King has little tolerance for Sir John's dubious activities:

... Why, you should be as salt  
 To season others with good document;  
 Your lives as lamps to give the people light;  
 As shepherds, not as wolves to spoil the flock.  
 Go hang him, Butler. (12.141-4)

Sir John talks his way out of even these dire straits with the bold move of pointing out that the King too once was one of Diana's foresters. Nonetheless, Henry's condemnation loses none of its moral urgency. In line with the anti-Catholic drama of earlier Protestant polemicists such as John Bale, the hypocritical theatricality of the clergy is to be exposed; the sheep's clothing must be torn off the ravening wolves.

However, such self-reflexive theatricality, which draws attention to the artificiality of its own representations, can also claim epistemological value for the institution of the theatre. With its meta-theatricality, the play constantly reminds its audiences not to trust outward appearances. As a form of dissimulation, the theatre is therefore paradoxically able to discover and expose its targets, in this case the alleged hypocrisy of the Catholic clergy (and, presumably, their spiritual heirs in the Church of England), whose behaviour is coded in such explicitly theatrical terms in the play. Such an approach to the theatre's epistemic status, which uncovers truth by means of theatrical falsehood, is embodied on the level of the plot by the protagonist's role as a spy in the Southampton Plot. Notably, the scene is unhistorical and has no known sources. It is a deliberate addition by the playwrights, quite possibly by Munday, and is therefore particularly revealing for the play's approach to dissimulation.<sup>65</sup> When the conspirators try to recruit Oldcastle, the latter initially plays along: 'Notorious treason! Yet I will conceal / My secret thoughts to sound the depth of it' (7.139). Surprisingly, Oldcastle immediately succeeds in persuading the remarkably daft conspirators to sign the

<sup>64</sup> Robinson, *Writing the Reformation* 60.

<sup>65</sup> In his edition of the play, Rittenhouse makes an informed guess that Munday is indeed responsible for scene 7, which dramatises Oldcastle's unhistorical infiltration of the Southampton Plot (63).

document containing the plan and justification of the revolt (7.126–7, 167–76), which he carries immediately to the King. Oldcastle thus dissembles, paradoxically, in the service of the truth:

How can they look his Highness in the face,  
Whom they so closely study to betray?  
But I'll not sleep until I make it known;  
This head shall not be burdened with such thoughts,  
Nor in this heart will I conceal a deed  
Of such impiety against my King. (7.190–5)

Oldcastle does not dissemble in order to conceal but in order to reveal treason. Just as the tradition of anti-Catholic drama invoked in the portrayal of Sir John claims to uncover hypocrisy, Oldcastle's dissimulation is committed to an ethos of exposure.

Kristin Bezio detects such a 'combination of spycraft and stagecraft' already in Munday's early career as a dramatist, especially in *Fedele and Fortunio* (1584). In this adaptation of Luigi Pasqualigo's *Il Fedele*, the combination of role-playing and espionage 'strongly parallels the situation occupied by Munday himself' when he claimed to have infiltrated Catholic communities abroad in order to spy on them.<sup>66</sup> In *Oldcastle*, the target of such histrionic spycraft is a form of radical proto-Protestantism that is presented as equally treasonous as the Jesuits. In fact, there is a remarkable parallel between Oldcastle's dissimulation in the play and the espionage which Munday practised not only against Catholics but also as a pursuivant in Archbishop Whitgift's campaign against the Puritan movement.<sup>67</sup> Munday's most notable victim was the Puritan preacher Giles Wigginton, who was suspected to be involved in the Marprelate tracts. On 6 December 1588, Munday visited Wigginton in his London lodgings with a commission to bring him to the Archbishop. On their journey to Lambeth, however, he feigned sympathy with Wigginton's claim that the prelates 'should not long endure, nor prosper at all'.<sup>68</sup> Munday managed to win the confidence of Wigginton, apparently as daft as the Southampton conspirators in *Oldcastle*, and got Wigginton to admit that he knew Martin's work well.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Bezio 477.

<sup>67</sup> Munday appears to have acted, at least occasionally, as a pursuivant from the 1580s up to the first decade of the seventeenth century. See Hamilton, *Munday and the Catholics* xxi–xxii.

<sup>68</sup> *Seconde Parte of a Register* 2:253.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* The assumption of Wigginton's involvement in the Marprelate tracts, at least as a source, was certainly plausible. Martin had reported how Wigginton was deprived of his living in Sedbergh and recounted Wigginton's repeated conflicts with Whitgift, particularly his insolent omission of the Archbishop's academic and ecclesiastical titles (Marprelate, *Marprelate Tracts* 25–6). As Wigginton reveals elsewhere, Whitgift did not take this lack of reverence well at all: 'You called me of late Mr

Munday's dissimulation against a supposed radical like Wigginton, who eventually fell in with 'Frantick Hacket'<sup>70</sup> and was accused of espousing populist resistance theory,<sup>71</sup> is echoed in the religious politics of *Oldcastle*. Despite its Puritan sympathies, the play likewise throws the Southampton conspirators and the radicals of the Ficket Field Rebellion, who share Wigginton's creed that they may take reform into their own hands, under the bus without the least scruples. Like Munday, the protagonist of *Oldcastle* acts as an agent provocateur in order to undermine the conspirators, whose endeavour may not be motivated by religion, but who are clearly willing to exploit religious discontent for their seditious purposes (7.135–8). This is not to say that Munday's work for Whitgift and *Oldcastle* are both expressions of a specific and stable, 'moderately Puritan' disposition on Munday's part. Munday's personal convictions throughout the 1580s and 1590s, if he had any, will likely remain a mystery. However, the parallels between *Oldcastle*'s espionage and Munday's own work for Whitgift put a spotlight on the continuities between religious dissimulation and the theatre in the early modern period. As these parallels further accentuate, the play's ethos of exposure, which is exemplified by *Oldcastle*'s espionage, did not only serve to expose Catholic hypocrisy but could also be put to the service of the suppression of Protestant dissenters. This ambiguity is equally evident in the play, which occupies an ideological position that could be construed as violating royal supremacy, but which nonetheless – or precisely for this reason – rests on the vociferous condemnation of a militant fringe. This, notably, was a common strategy employed by Puritans in order to assert their own supposed political probity.<sup>72</sup>

As I have argued in this chapter, *Oldcastle* can be read as a refutation of Shakespeare's take on the Lollard martyr in Falstaff in a number of ways. First of all, the authors of *Oldcastle* emphasise the nonconformist credentials of the Lollard to an extent that has been underestimated by previous critics. Even though the play goes to great lengths to

Whitgift. I wis I was Mr Doctor yet when you were but a skervye boye. If I be but Mr Whitgift what are you then I praye you, you must then be noebodie, or some suche like terme he used' (Wigginton, 'Examinations' 381).

<sup>70</sup> Walsham, "Frantick Hacket" 35–7. <sup>71</sup> Bancroft, *Daungerous positions* 168.

<sup>72</sup> Many Puritan divines of dubious political credentials themselves, including Cartwright, distanced themselves in unequivocal terms from the 'Martinists' (Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement* 393) and William Hacket (Walsham, "Frantick Hacket" 32–4, 54–5). As Lake has shown, however, the strategy 'to oppose something called 'puritanism' (in reality a mere caricature of certain extreme elements in precisian opinion)' was indeed employed by patrons of the godly cause such as Bishop Matthew Hutton for the purpose of 'favouring, indeed protecting, the mass of puritan ministers' (Lake, 'Matthew Hutton' 197).

emphasise the political loyalty of its protagonist, especially in the contrast with the Ficket Field Rebels and the Southampton conspirators, its political stance is more complicated. The play's condemnation of rebellion is not simply an unconditional declaration of obedience on the government's own terms. Just as the self-identification of a segment of the godly as moderate Puritans was often a strategic form of self-fashioning that cannot be taken at face value, *Oldcastle's* ostensible condemnation of treason is primarily a rhetorical manoeuvre that serves to shift the coordinates of loyalty in favour of a more nuanced challenge to royal supremacy. Instead of cherishing *politique* tolerance for private dissent as Shakespeare arguably does with Falstaff, the play is critical of the silencing of religious dissent in the 1590s and suggests that an overbearing crackdown on religious dissent amounts to tyranny. Second, this nonconformist ethos also manifests itself in the play's highly ambivalent theatricality, embodied most prominently in its anti-Falstaff figure, Sir John of Wrotham. However, in a self-reflexive epistemology of discovery, the play also recalls earlier anti-Catholic drama that was dedicated to exposing hypocrisy by means of a meta-theatrical emphasis on the artificiality of its own representations. Finally, as *Oldcastle's* role as a spy suggests, this ethos of exposure could paradoxically be turned against dissenters themselves. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 6, when the state renounced its reticence in making windows into men's hearts, it was often not the hypocrisy of the tyrannical clergy but that of seditious Puritans that was to be exposed as empty theatricality. The next two chapters, however, are dedicated to Catholic perspectives on religious dissent and the manner in which the aggressive inquiry into the secrets of English Catholics was reflected in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama.