Nadia T. van Pelt, « “Counterfeiting his maister”: Shared Folly in *The History of Jacob and Esau* », « Theta XII, Théâtre Tudor », 2016, pp. 131-148
mis en ligne en juin 2016, <https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta12>.

Theta XII

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Benoist Pierre,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 7323

Responsable scientifique

Richard Hillman

ISSN 1776-1026

Date de création

juin 2016

Theta XII – Théâtre Tudor
Nadia T. VAN PELT | pp. 131-148
CESR, Tours

"Counterfeiting his maister": Shared Folly in The History of Jacob and Esau

Nadia T. van Pelt
University of Leiden

The History of Jacob and Esau is a mid-Tudor interlude that has been relatively underexplored in studies in early English drama, not having aroused the same interest as other contemporary interludes that were performed in court or great hall settings, such as John Bale's, John Heywood's or William Wager's. Although it is assumed that the play was written by a schoolmaster and staged by choir boys,[1] a lack of evidence about the contexts and auspices of the play's performance has elicited a variety of conjectures concerning its authorship[2] and the identity of the reigning monarch at the time.[3] The work has been identified by Paul

1 Grantley, p. 157, presents the possibility that the play was performed by boys at court. See also White, "The Bible as Play in Reformation England", p. 102.

2 Nicholas Udall and William Hunnis have been suggested as possible authors for the play. See Blackburn, p. 148; Walker, *Politics*, p. 166; and White, "Predestinarian Theology", p. 292.

3 White considers the play's first performances to have been staged in the 1550s and that the play was possibly performed again during the reigns of Elizabeth I and Mary (Introd., pp. xxxiv-xxxix). The play has been interpreted as Edwardian by Bevington, p. 109; King, p. 301; and Westfall, pp. 285-86; Pasachoff, p. 18, has argued that the work is Marian. Campbell, p. 215, suggests that the play may have been performed or printed during Mary's reign and changed during Elizabeth's, but the evidence is not conclusive. Stopes suggests the possibility that the play was "written in Edward's reign, acted and printed in Mary's, and reprinted in Elizabeth's" (p. 269).

Whitfield White as "moderately Calvinist" in doctrinal thought, predominantly on the grounds of the play's attitude towards the doctrine of predestination.[4] The play enacts the Calvinist notion that God has preordained some to be given salvation through grace, while others are predestined as reprobates. Jacob and Esau—their Hebrew names already signposting the younger brother's supplanting the elder—both exemplify such doctrinal ideas and, as Old Testament figures, allow for a use of the dramatic medium that would have been acceptable to Protestant reformers, as theatrical representations of these figures would not have been seen as "idolatrous".[5] "Iconoclastic" theatre, Dalia Ben-Tsur argues (p. 53), facilitated the play's turn from earlier biblical morality drama, with its Catholic implications and associations, through the removal of saintly and holy images on stage, including Christ and God.[6] John E. Curran's thought-provoking study elaborates on this notion and argues that iconoclasm in the play thematises notions of watching and spectating to address the predestinarian theology at the core of the drama. Indeed, Curran argues that spectators are invited to contemplate their own spectatorship, turning watching into a self-reflexive act, and through that to arrive at a doctrinal understanding of how inconsequential their own perception really is. To this end the play uses a theatrical "trap", which encourages all present to judge Esau for his actions (hunting, mistreatment of servants), only to find out that doctrinally, Calvinism does not recognise human merit as relevant, as all has been predestined, correcting spectators' "sinful" or presumptuous judging (Curran, p. 286), whilst also urging audience members to place their faith in that which they cannot perceive. Furthermore, Curran follows Ben-Tsur in arguing (p. 286) that iconoclasm is employed to justify the appropriation of the dramatic medium for Protestant purposes, thus indicating an anxiety that spectators might have felt about the medium.

However, what is not pointed out in Curran's study is that the theatrical "trap" to which he refers is a typical morality play device, such as the spectators of *Mankind* (*c.* 1470) experienced, no doubt to their satisfaction but hardly to their souls' health. In that play, the infamous "Christmas song" initiated by the vices Nowadays and Nought tempts the audience to sing along with them

4 White, "Predestination Theology"; see also Thomas. This opinion is not shared by Bevington, who describes the playwright as "a zealous Calvinist" (p. 109), and Blackburn, whose study addresses the author's "rigid Calvinism" (p. 13).

5 See Ben-Tsur, p. 52.

6 See also O'Connell.

in "mery chere" (l. 334). Singing, "yt ys wretyn wyth a coll, yt ys wretyn wyth a cole" (l. 335), the Vices encouraged spectators to sing along in repetition of their line. Before they knew it, the audience members had fallen into the trap of participation, chanting, "He þat schytyth wyth hys hoyll, he þat schytyth wyth hys hoyll" (l. 337) along with New Gyse and Nowadays. Although this singing can hardly be considered "sinful", spectators were shown a mirror in which their behaviour was magnified for all to see. Indeed, they enjoyed being led into temptation by the Vices in the "here and now", along with the protagonist, whose name represented all humankind. Such playful temptation was necessary for the doctrinal purposes of the morality, showing spectators the road to heaven through strategies that temporarily allowed them to promote festive celebration over moral insight.[7] Such theatrical "traps" were supported by the narrative structure of the play, which caused spectators to be completely absorbed in interaction with the characters, allowing audience members to gradually "change sides" between the Vices and the protagonist. Robert Jones has asserted that this change of attitudes was caused by replacing "an engagement in the entertainment of the vices" with "judgment that places that sort of entertainment in perspective" (p. 53). In other words, the spectator was to directly experience how easy (and how much fun!) it was to lapse into sin but also learned, along with the protagonist, that this fun had a less playful and more cruel side to it.

By using such a theatrical mechanism, *Jacob and Esau* in fact remains closer to earlier Catholic biblical drama than has previously been argued. Furthermore, as *Jacob and Esau* was performed for and by children, who were familiar with Terence's comedy and associated theatre with wit and privileged learning, they would have associated the medium as much with Roman comedy as with Catholicism—if not more. Therefore, one may wonder whether the dramatic *medium* really caused anxiety to its audience, or whether—as this essay will argue—it was the play's less appealing doctrinal aspects that needed to be managed by the playwright. It may be imagined that a play for children that suggests that one may not go to heaven, even if one is a good boy, needs to have the pill sweetened through a great dose of folly.

The discussion below will demonstrate that the play invites a conflict between *sola fide* and *sola scriptura* that arises when performing a part of the Bible

7 Somerset has argued that "as the vices amuse us, we can be said to share the hero's seduction. We have believed in it, have felt the springs of sympathetic laughter, and have perhaps even been called upon to assist in seduction" (p. 65).

that spectators *doctrinally* do not believe in, but which one has to believe in simply *because* it is in the Bible. Indeed, although the biblical story has been freely elaborated upon, a clash between the biblical and the doctrinal can still be perceived in two important moments in the narrative: the "pottage scene", in which Esau devours the dish out of his own free will, thereby relinquishing his birthright, and the scene in which Jacob misleads his blind father, causing him to believe that he has blessed his eldest son. These scenes are problematic because if spectators believed that God had predestined Jacob to rule over his older brother, then Jacob's act of deception would not be necessary to the plot. Similarly, for a play adhering to the principle of predestination, it would appear to be doctrinally immaterial whether or not Esau eats the pottage, and "sells" his rights, if he is already singled out as a reprobate.

The play, I argue, embraces this problem through the application of overt theatricality, thematising playmaking and pretending, in the play referred to as "counterfeiting". This includes a trivialisation of Esau's eating the pottage and a move towards drawing Jacob's fraudulence into the realm of *ludus*. Folly thus, apart from offering the burlesquing of taboo subjects and fun for the spectators, takes attention away from doctrinally incompatible moments. Furthermore, folly addresses the issue of the reality of drama and the question of whether playing something makes it real. This approach invites, on the one hand, an abstraction of human action, suggesting that all is play in Calvinist thought because God is the only one who "acts" in the non-theatrical sense, but it contributes, on the other hand, to making the doctrinal idea of predestination accessible to children through the characters' child-like qualities and behaviour.

I

The *Jacob and Esau* playwright faced a challenge that is generally underestimated in readings of the play: explaining predestination to children, who were not only educated to conform to the norms set for them by the society in which they lived, and who were encouraged to live "good lives", but who had also been trained to enjoy debating and appreciate argumentation. Exemplifying the doctrine through the narrative of two brothers, neither of whom had done either good or bad before their futures had been divinely preordained, the playwright faced the risk that children would deem the story unfair or illogical. Furthermore, it invited the possibility that Jacob as protagonist would not invite spectator iden-

tification, hence that his example would not inspire the youthful audience to be and do "good" as did other mid-Tudor interludes, such as R. Wever's *Lusty Juventus* (*c*.1550) and the anonymous *Nice Wanton* (*c*.1550), in which the character representing a young and virtuous boy laughs last. For example, in the latter play, Barnabas reflects on the fact that his brother and sister have been caught up in sinful lives and congratulates himself on his ability to "avoid evil and do good" as inspired by God's "special grace":

> If God had not given me special grace
> To avoid evil and do good, this is true,
> I had lived and died in as wretched case
> As they did, for I had both suff'rance and space
> . . . . . .
> And as for my sister, I am able to report
> She lamented for her sins to her dying day.
> . . . . . .
> To believe this and do well, to God for grace call
> All worldly cares let pass and fall
> And thus comfort my father, I pray you heartily. (*Nice Wanton*, ll. 509-27)

No such claim about the protagonist's divinely inspired goodness is made in *Jacob and Esau*. Indeed, through the Prologue, audience members are made aware that the play does not wish to suggest that Jacob is necessarily more deserving of being elected than his elder brother, or that Esau has somehow incited God's hatred; instead it conveys the notion that this was simply decided upon. This disclaimer needs to be justified to the play's audiences, and the Prologue first sets out to do that by echoing Malachi 1:2-3 and Romans 9:13 in the line, "Iacob I loue … and Esau I hate", presenting Malachi and Paul as scriptural authorities, but more importantly as prophets as well as "witnesses" of God's act of predestining the brothers' futures:

> … before Iacob and Esau yet borne were,
> Or had eyther done good, or yll perpetrate:
> As the prophete Malachie and Paule witnesse beare,
> Iacob was chosen, and Esau reprobate:
> Iacob I loue (sayde God) and Esau I hate. (sig. A1^{v})[8]

8 Citations refer to *A newe and wittie comedie or enterlude, newely imprinted, treating vpon the historie of Iacob and Esau, etc.* (1568).

In a rather contradictory manner, spectators are further managed through the playmaker's overt claim that the work draws on but does not limit itself to scriptural evidence, as the Prologue here promises to "exhibite" the "story" (sig. A1^{v}) of Jacob and Esau, thus informing spectators that they are to watch a performance that may deviate in content from the biblical narrative to which they are accustomed. As such it causes spectators to be aware of the fictionality of the play as it moves away from Biblical reality at plot level, creating a distancing effect.

At the level of character, folly, as a key element of fictionality, also contributes to the overt theatricality of the play. Folly is made apparent through characters' actions, but also by the way in which they are addressed by other characters. For example, Esau calls his servant Ragau "foolishe knaue" (sig. A3^{r}) and speaks of him as "a fine knaue" (sig. C2^{r}). Similarly, when Rebecca asks her younger son why he will not give Esau "some good sad wyse counsaile", Jacob answers that whenever he does approach his brother with advice, Esau shows his displeasure at the younger brother's presumption: "He calleth me foolishe proude boy with him to mell / he will sometime demaunde by what authoritée / I presume to teache them which mine elders bee?" (sigs. A4^{v}-B1^{r}). The play here invites spectators to "side" with Jacob, whilst voicing the question of authority and justification that some audience members may have felt about Jacob's sense of entitlement. In a similar manner, the play both offers the interpretation that Jacob and Rebecca are the instruments of fulfilling the divine word and will, to which Isaac is stubbornly blind, whilst encouraging spectators to superficially judge Rebecca's—at first sight—foolish performance. The latter is made possible through the framing of Rebecca and Isaac's dialogue in a context of classical drama, so that they are temporarily removed from the scriptural narrative and are presented as self-consciously theatrical, reminding the children in the audience of the fictional characters in the classical literature that formed part of their educational backgrounds.

To this end the playwright employs stichomythia. The following example focuses the play's central conflict:

> *Isaac*. And the eldest sonne is called the fathers might
> *Rebecca*. If yours rest in Esau, God giue us good night
> *Isaac*. A prerogatiue he hath in euery thing
> *Rebecca*. More pitie he shoulde haue it without deseruing
> *Isaac*. Of all the goodes his porcion is greater

Rebecca. That the worthy should haue it, I thinke much better
Isaac. Emong his bretherne, he hath the pre-eminence
Rebecca. Where Esau is chiefe, there is a gay presence
Isaac. Ouer his bretherne he is soueraigne and lorde
Rebecca. Such dignitie in Esau doth yll accorde
Isaac. He is the head of the fathers succession
Rebecca. I wolde Esau had loste that possession. (sig. B3^{v})

Stichomythia as a tool to accentuate fictionality is further employed in interaction between Mido and Ragau; when Mido mimics Esau's eating, Ragau underscores Esau's animalistic qualities and lack of generosity: "*Ragau*. Is there any pottage left for me that thou wotte? / *Mido*. No, I left Esau about to licke the potte" (sig. C3^{v}). This draws the narrative about Esau's selling his birthright into the realm of *ludus*, building on earlier moments in the play when Ragau playfully represents his master, as is apparent from a stage direction: "Here he counterfaiteth how his maister calleth hym vp in the mornings and of his answeres" (sig. A2^{r} SD). In a later scene, Ragau "counterfeits" his master again, copying his tone and the manner of his address: "Then, helpe, runne apace, Ragau my good seruant" (sig. D1^{r}). Such in-play mimetic representation foreshadows later instances of playing and pretending employed as spectator management devices.

For the play's more problematic scenes, which risk doctrinal incompatibility and which need to be made more accessible to the youthful audience, the clownesque characters steal the show by parodying the play's most challenging subjects through childish play. For example, Mido the clown enters laughing, thereby allowing spectators to identify his character as contributing folly to the dramatic action. His opening words as he comes onstage are, "Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, / Nowe who sawe ere such an other as Esau" (sig. C2^{v})—an entry which is clarified by the stage direction: "Mido cometh in clapping his han[…]s,[9] and laughing" (sig. C2^{v} SD). Mido combines overt folly, the pleasure to be had from telling or hearing a juicy gossipy story, and the imitation of actions to offer a hyperbolic statement in which Esau's eating habits are likened to those of a dog, this dehumanisation allowing spectators to avoid identifying with or feeling compassion for the character, while at the same time evoking a clear and recognisable picture for the mind's eye:

9 Early English Books Online uses bracketed ellipsis in its transcript of the early edition where the text is illegible. The current article adheres to the same practice.

By my truthe, I will not lie to thee Ragau,
Since I was borne, I neuer see any man
So greedily eate rice out of a potte or pan
He woulde not haue a dishe, but take the pot and sup
Ye neuer sawe hungry dogge so slabbe potage up. (sigs. $C2^{v}$-$C3^{r}$)

It is notable that Mido in his account of the scene is not interested in the birthright that is renounced through the act of eating this pottage, but focuses on ridiculing Esau's hunger and greed through a vivid and humoristic description. He then illustrates his words by *showing* Ragau and the audience how Esau performed the act of eating, thus again "counterfeiting" his master:

Mary euen thus, as thou shalte see me doo now.
[Here he counterfaiteth supping out of the potte]
Gently done Iacob: a fredely parte Iacob
I can suppe so Iacob.
Yea that wyll I suppe too Iacob.
Here is good meate Iacob. (sig. $C3^{v}$)

The repetition of the name "Jacob" adds a comic effect to the moment, furthering the caricature that Mido presents of Esau, whilst beating the joke to death.

Invited to laugh at Mido's folly, the spectators are not encouraged to ponder on Esau's renouncing his birthright for a pot of rice, nor on the doctrinal implications of this moment. The licking of the pot is presented as a sensual act, both animalistic in nature, to accentuate Esau's dehumanisation at this moment, and comic because of the repetition of the word "licke":

When he had supte vp all, I sawe him licke the potte
Thus he licked, and thus he licked, and this way
I thought to haue lickt the potte my selfe once to day
But Esau beguilde me, I shrewe him for that
And left not so much as a licke for pusse our cat. (sig. $D2^{v}$)

It is important that the playwright relies on the humour of the scene to remove some of its sharp dogmatic edges, while at the same time creating a distancing effect, so that spectators do not actually *see* Esau eating from the pot; thus the actual moment of doctrinal incompatibility is not shown to the audience, who are left to enjoy its mimicking.

II

Although spectators do not see Esau consume the pottage on stage, as they are only given second-hand accounts of this moment, his character is to be enjoyed within a framework of playfulness; we learn early on that not sleeping for long and insisting on waking his servants in a rather rough manner is "our good Esau his common *play*" (sig. A2^{r}; emphasis mine). In keeping with the traditional role of the Vice-character, Esau's choice of words and style of speech remind spectators of comic characters in late medieval morality plays and Tudor interludes.[10] A tell-tale sign in Esau's characterisation is his use of lengthy enumeration connected through rhyming, alliteration or repetition, such as is found in John Heywood's *The Play of the Wether* (1532-33), in which Merry Report boastingly refers to all the places that he has visited during his travels: "At Louyn, at London and in Lombardy / At Baldock, at Barfolde, and in Barbury / At Canturbery, at Coventre, at Colchester" (ll. 198-200). John Bale's *King Johan* also includes such enumerations, uttered by the Vice-character Sedicyon, for example:

> In every estate / of the clargye I playe a part:
> Sumtyme I can be / a monke in a long syd cowle;
> Sumtyme I can be / a none and loke lyke an owle;
> Sumtyme a channon / in a syrples fayer and whyght;
> A chapterhowse moncke / sumtym I apere in sytht;
> I am ower Syre Johan, / sumtyme with a new shaven crowne;
> Sumtym the person / and swepe the stretes with a syd gowne
> Sumtyme the bysschoppe / with a myter and a cope;
> A graye fryer sumtyme / with cut shoes and a rope;
> Sumtyme I can playe / the whyght monke, symtyme the fryer
> The purgatory prist / and every mans wyffe desyer. (*Complete Plays*, ll. 194-204)

When Esau offers such an enumeration, employing internal rhyming, and including in his description a great amount of superfluous synonyms and contradictions, he does so to abuse his servant in a manner that makes him both theatrically appealing and morally unlikable:

> So idle, so loytring, so trifling, so toying?
> So pratling, so tra[…]ling, so chiding, so boying?
> So iesting, so wrestling, so mocking, so mowing?

10 For a study of the "Vice", see Steenbrugge.

So nipping, so tripping, so cocking, so crowying?
So knappishe, so snappishe, so eluishe, so frowarde?
So crabbed, so wrabbed, so stiffe, so vntowarde?
In play or in pastime, so iocunde, so mery?
In work or in labour so dead or so weary?
Oh that I head his eare betwene my teeth now,
I should shake him euen as a dog that lulleth a sow. (sig. C2[r])

Esau's theatricality is further underlined by his use of the word "geare" when describing his selling of his birthright, a word that is often employed by Vice-characters and offers the possibility of a double entendre:[11] "But the best pottage it was yet that euer was / It were sinne not to sell ones soule for such geare" (sig. D1[r]). Here we know that Esau refers to the "pottage", but the word is far from innocent when understood within the framework of self-referential theatre, great hall performances, and the traditional Vice. The light-hearted way in which Esau, the reprobate, recounts that he has now lost claim to all his earthly goods perhaps invited audience members to relish the irony of the fact that, doctrinally speaking, Esau is not at liberty to sell his soul, so that the moment is trivialised.

Jacob can be seen to also utilize the word "geare", but in a way that is different from his brother's understanding of the word:

I could with mine owne geare better contented be
And but for satisfying of your minde and will
I would not weare it, to haue it for mine owne still
I loue not to weare an other birdes feathers. (sig. F1[r])

11 Walker reminds the reader of the sexual connotations of the word "gere" (l. 178) in *The Play of the Wether*, l. 178 (Walker, ed., p. 460, n. 26). The word is used five more times in this play, four times by Merry Report, the play's "Vice". Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister* contains seven occurrences of the word, uttered by comic characters, such as *Talkapace*: "Faith, I would our dame Custance saw this gear!" (I.iii.96). Sodmismus in John Bale's *Three Laws* says, "The woman hath a wytt, / and by here gere can sytt, / though she be sumwhat olde" (ll. 474-76). See also Courtly Abusyon in John Skelton's *Magnyfycence*: "Ye[a], so I can devyse my gere after the cowrtly maner" (l. 765). In Lewis Wager's *Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* (*c.* 1550), the word "geare" carries different meanings depending on the character that employs it. In this play, the characters Infidelity, Carnal Concupiscence, Malicious Judge, Simon, and Mary Magdalen together use the word twenty-one times, the Vice-characters twisting Mary's words for comic effect at every turn, even though Mary uses the word innocently when referring to clothing and her general appearance.

Where one may expect a pun in Esau's language in tune with his Vice-like theatrical behaviour, Jacob's lines do not invite this. Nevertheless, the word "geare" for Jacob has a similar distancing effect, as, not unlike the trivialisation of the pottage scene, the reference to clothing draws a doctrinally awkward scene into *ludus*, presenting Jacob's fraudulence as a theatrical act, in which Jacob dons a costume ("Here she doth the sleues vpon Iacobs armes" [sig. E4^{v} SD]), as is devised by his mother, who thereby takes on the role of playwright or stage manager:

> *Rebecca*. It shall serue anon I warraunt you, take no thought
> Now throughly to rauishe thy father Isaac,
> Thou shalt here incontinent put vpon thy backe
> Esau his best apparell, whose fragraunt flauour
> Shall coniure Isaac to beare thee his fauour
> *Deborra*. Now I see apparell setteth out a man. (sig. E4^{v})

Jacob's trickery can be understood in a variety of different ways, depending on spectators' interpretations. The play may successfully have caused some spectators to infer from the scene a sense that Rebecca's and Jacob's staged actions are legitimate, and, indeed, necessary as acts justified by their presence in the biblical narrative. Others, however, might not have seen the performance in such a positive light, understanding Jacob's behaviour as immoral, due to his superficial lack of respect for his blind father, which might offer a wrong example to the children in the audience; others again perhaps felt uneasy about the scene's doctrinal superfluousness. Jacob's reluctance to accept his costume indicates his (and more importantly, the playwright's) awareness of both of these potential anxieties, which find themselves further managed through Jacob's expressed concern about the *audience* for whom he is to show himself dressed as Esau—or at the theatrical level, the Vice; for although his father Isaac is blind, the "folke" referred to can see his apparel, and thus see through his duplicity: "Goe before, & I folow: but my chekes will blushe red, / To be sene among our folke thus apparailed" (sig. F1^{r}). The audience-in-the-play and the external audience here merge into one, drawing spectators into the biblical narrative as they become part of "our folke".

III

Jacob and Esau ends in solemn song and prayer, forms of ritual that would have been approved of by Calvinist spectators and participants. The shift to ritual action marks a new phase in the play, which until that moment had presented its audiences with clownesque characters, including fools, knaves and a character resembling the traditional Vice, and which addressed all doctrinally awkward moments through self-conscious theatricality. In this new part of the play, the dramatic action ceases to be self-referential, as befits the introduction of a final character, who remains off-stage but is made part of the world of the play and the world of the spectator through pious address: God. The playmaker seems to suggest that God, however invisible, is the only character who *actually* performs: "*Rebecca*. As thou has ordeyned right so must all thing be / Performe thine own words lord which thou spakest to me" (sig. $E2^{r}$). "Performance" here does not have a theatrical undertone and is conceptually linked to God's biblical "promise", as can be seen in Rebecca's addressing Jacob to ask him to join her in prayer:

> Sonne Iacob, forasmuche as thou has so well sped,
> With an himne or psalme let the Lord be praised
> Sing we all together, and geue thankes to the Lord,
> Whose promise and performaunce do so well accord. (sig. $D2^{v}$)

The implication is that Rebecca and Jacob's performances have been the gracious instrument of the divine one, suggesting that human action *can* have an effect, when this is divinely inspired and guided. It follows that any human action that is not thus motivated is ineffectual and abstract, and this implies that all actors in this play, except Rebecca and Jacob, have actually been "counterfeiting", thus reducing these performances in *Jacob and Esau* to plays-within-the-play, with or without in-play audiences, but always in the presence of the external, "real" audience. For the latter, the playwright at times creates a distancing effect, whilst at other times drawing them into the dramatic action, changing spectators' relationships to the play as well as their modes of involvement and participation, according to the play's need to balance its doctrinal agenda with the biblical narrative and theatrical form. The playmaker's emphasising of the theatricality of these moments perhaps allowed the children in the audience to feel that if the world is a stage, on which (most) human action is "counterfeit-

ing" and only divine performance ultimately matters, human performance can be seen as harmless fun if it is not applied for the wrong reasons.

However, the playwright also offers a more cautious undertone, in which he suggests that there is a danger to playing those parts that could jeopardise the soul's health. For Rebecca warns that affecting to be blind and impersonating a blind man may elicit divine wrath: "Nay it is to tempt God before thou haue neede / Whereby thou mayst prouoke hym in very deede / With some great misfortune or plague to punish thee" (sig. B2^{v}). The question that arises is whether her claim, which evokes the biblical injunction against tempting God (Deut. 6:16, Luke 4:12), comments on mid-Tudor theatre practices as a vehicle for the play's Calvinist message, or is more broadly offered to echo Puritan strictures against acting. Making such scruples relevant to the youthful audience, the playwright offers a perspective on playing or play-making as something that is trivial and childish through the scene in which Mido imitates the blind Isaac. Rebecca's considering Mido's antics to be rude and unnecessary, whilst being the driving force behind her son's "counterfeiting", exemplifies a condemnation of theatrical forms that are not divinely inspired and that serve only to amuse:

> *Mido*. I trowe if I were blinde, I coulde goe well inowe
> I coulde grope the way thus, and goe as I do nowe
> I haue done so ere now both by day and by night,
> And I see you grope the way, and haue hitte it right.
> *Rebecca*. Yea syr boy, will ye play any suche childishe knack?
> As to counterfaite your blinde master Isaac?
> That is but to mocke him for his impediment. (sig. B2^{v})

Her comment may have served a double purpose: to remind the youthful spectators that *although* this play sought to entertain, and encouraged the enjoyment of playfulness, self-conscious theatricality, and the antics of clowns, fools and vices, its purpose was doctrinal. The play's doctrinal agenda as such justified the silliness of the performance to those suspicious of the use of the medium for doctrinal ends. However, it was also the play's folly that made possible the staging of *Jacob and Esau*'s less appealing dogmatic aspects. Crucially, Rebecca's remark could be interpreted as a moral footnote glossing the play's Calvinist message: even if its spectators believed in predestination, which would suggest that one's actions are essentially irrelevant, the playwright wanted to remind them that the doctrine also prescribes that good behaviour is a sign of, and enabled by, grace.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Bale, John. *King Johan. The Complete Plays of John Bale.* Ed. Peter Happé. 2 vols. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985. Vol. I.

_____. *The Three Laws. Medieval Drama: An Anthology*. Ed. Greg Walker. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.

Heywood, John. *The Play of the Wether. Medieval Drama: An Anthology*. Ed. Greg Walker. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.

Mankind. The Macro Plays: The Castle of Perseverance, Wisdom, Mankind. Ed. Mark Eccles. Early English Text Society, OS 262. London: Oxford University Press for the E.E.T.S., 1969.

A newe and wittie comedie or enterlude, newely imprinted, treating vpon the historie of Iacob and Esau, etc. London: Henrie Bynneman, 1568.

Nice Wanton. The Tudor Interludes: Nice Wanton; and, Impatient Poverty. Ed. Leonard Tennenhouse. New York: Garland Publishing, 1984.

Skelton, John. *Magnyfycence. Medieval Drama: An Anthology*. Ed. Greg Walker. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.

Udall, Nicholas. *Ralph Roister Doister. Medieval and Tudor Drama*. Ed. John Gassner. London: Bantam, 1963.

Wager, Lewis. *A new enterlude, neuer before this tyme imprinted, entreating of the life and repentaunce of Marie Magdalene not only godlie, learned and fruitefull, but also well furnished with pleasaunt myrth and pastime, very delectable for those which shall heare or reade the same.* London: John Charlewood, 1566.

Secondary Sources

Ben-Tsur, Dalia. "Early Ramifications of Theatrical Iconoclasm: the Conversion of Catholic Biblical Plays into Protestant Drama". *Partial Answers* 3.1 (2005): 43-56.

Bevington, David. *Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1968.

Blackburn, Ruth H. *Biblical Drama under the Tudors*. The Hague: Mouton, 1971.

Campbell, Lily B. *Divine Poetry and Drama in Sixteenth-Century England.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959.

Curran, John E., Jr. "*Jacob and Esau* and the Iconoclasm of Merit". *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 49.2 (2009): 285-309.

Fisher, Gerhard, and Bernhard Greiner, eds. *The Performance of Meta-Theatre and Self-Reflection*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007.

Grantley, Darryll. *English Dramatic Interludes, 1300-1580: A Reference Guide.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Jones, Robert C. "Dangerous Sport: The Audience's Engagement with Vice in the Moral Interludes". *Essays on Dramatic Antecedents.* Ed. Alan C. Dessen. *Renaissance Drama* ns 6 (1973). 45-64.

King, John N. *English Reformation Literature: The Tudor Origins of the Protestant Tradition.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982.

O'Connell, Michael. *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early Modern England*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Pasachoff, Naomi E. *Playwrights, Preachers and Politicians: A Study of Four Tudor Old Testament Dramas.* Salzburg Studies in English Literature, Elizabethan and Renaissance Studies, 45. Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1975.

Somerset, J. A. B. "'Fair is foul and foul is fair': Vice-Comedy's Development and Theatrical Effects". *The Elizabethan Theatre V: Papers Given at the Fifth International Conference on Elizabethan Theatre Held at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, in July 1973*. Ed. G. R. Hibbard. London: Macmillan, 1975. 54-75.

Stopes, Charlotte C. *William Hunnis and the Revels of the Chapel Royal: A Study of His Period and the Influences which Affected Shakespeare*. Louvain: Uystpruyst, 1910.

Thomas, Helen. "*Jacob and Esau*—'Rigidly Calvinistic'?" *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 9.2 (1969): 199-213.

Walker, Greg. *The Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Westfall, Suzanne. "The Boy Who Would Be King: Court Revels of King Edward VI, 1547-1553". *Comparative Drama* 35.3/4 (2001-2): 271-90.

White, Paul Whitfield. "The Bible as Play in Reformation England". *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*. Ed. Jane Milling and Peter Thomson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 87-115.

_____. Introduction. *Reformation Biblical Drama in England: The Life and Repentaunce of Mary Magdalene, The History of Iacob and Esau: An Old-Spelling Critical Edition*. Ed. Paul Whitfield White. The Renaissance Imagination. New York: Garland, 1992. xix-xlvi.

_____. "Predestinarian Theology in the Mid-Tudor Play *Jacob and Esau*". *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* ns 24.4 (1988): 291-302.