

The Religious and Secular Clergy in the Sixteenth-Century English Vernacular Jest Book (1510 – 1609)

Of the frere that had his chylde make a luten	fo. x.
Of the gentylman that asked the frere for his	fo. xi.
Of the .iii. men that chafe the woman	fo. xii.
Of the gentylman that taught his	fo. xiii.
Of the gentylman that taught his	fo. xiiii.
Of the yemant of garde that wolde bete the curi	fo. xv.
Of the yemant of garde that wolde bete the curi	fo. xvi.
Of the maydes answere that was with chylde	fo. xvii.
Of the seruaunt that rymyd with hys mayster	fo. xviii.
Of the welchman that delyuered the letter to the ape	fo. xix.
Of hym that solde ryght nought	fo. xx.
Of the frere that tolde the thre chylde's fortunes	fo. xxi.
Of the boy that bare the frere his masters money	fo. xxii.
Of Phylp Spencer the bochers man	fo. xxiii.
Of the courtear and the cartter	fo. xxiiii.
Of the yongman that prayd his feiow to teche hym his pater noster	fo. xxv.
Of the frere that prechyd in ryme expownyng the aue maria	fo. xxvi.
Of the curat that prechyd the arttycles of the Crede	fo. xxvii.
Of the frere that preched the .x. comaundementis	fo. xxviii.
Of the wyse that had her husbände ete the candell fyrste	fo. xxix.
Of the man of lawes sonnes answer	fo. xxx.
Of the frere in the pulpet that had the woinan leue her babelynge	fo. xxxi.
Of the welch that cast the scotte into the see	fo. xxxii.
Of the man that had dome wyse	fo. xxxiii.
Of the proctour of that had the lytell wyse	fo. xxxiiii.
Of .ii. nonnes that were yuen of one preste	fo. xxxv.
Of the esquier that shold haue ben made knyght	fo. xxxvi.
Of the penytent that sayd the shepe of god haue pon me	fo. xxxvii.
Of the husbände that sayde he was Johñ dalm	fo. xxxviii.
Of the scoles of oxfoꝛde that prouyd by souestry .ii. chylde	fo. xxxix.
Of the frere that stals the nobynce	fo. xl.

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“Nothing is more fun than treating jokes seriously.”

- Desiderius Erasmus

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¹ The picture on the title page depicts the index of a fragmentary copy of *Mery Talys* (1526) held at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust <https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/blogs/hundred-merry-tales-visiting-groups-enjoy-very-rare-book/>

Introduction

Humour and laughter were a central part of early modern English society and culture: from the comic characters of Shakespeare's plays and the enormous popularity of jesters as Richard Tarlton to coney-catching pamphlets and comic ballads. It should therefore not come as a surprise that one of the most flourishing genres of the sixteenth century was the jest book.² However, the early modern jest book has not proved a popular source for literary and cultural historians. Even one of the most prominent scholars of the early modern jest book Paul Zall states that the jest books are "not 'literary,'" and describes them merely as "subsoil for the lush growth of Elizabethan prose fiction."³ Over the last couple of decades, the jest book has gained more scholarly interest, as Anne Lake Prescott and Chris Holcomb unearthed the humanist origins and tendencies of the jesting tradition and Pamela Allen Brown and Anu Korhonen addressed the jest books from perspectives of gender.⁴

Another prevalent perspective in the jest books, which remains overlooked, is religion. The neglect of religion in the jest book is especially prevalent in scholars' dismissal of the secular and religious clergy. It is striking that the clergy is not at the heart of discussion in modern scholarship of the jest book. Not only were the clergy at the heart of (religious) medieval and early modern society but they also initiated the Reformation in which they also became the object of criticism. Most importantly, however, they are an abundant presence in the jest books, where they make up one of the largest groups of characters. Nevertheless, Derek Brewer minimises the clergy's relevance in jest books as "satiriz[ing] false religion in priests or laity," and dismisses them as stock figures.⁵ Martha Bayless, on the other hand, recognises the role of religion in medieval humour but argues that religion was a motive just like any other, and was therefore at

² Ian Munro, "Shakespeare's Jestbook: Wit, Print and Performance," *ELH* 71, no. 1 (Spring, 2004), 98.

³ P.M Zall, *A Hundred Merry Tales and Other English Jestbooks of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century* (Lincoln, NE & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), 1.

⁴ For Humanism see: Chris Holcomb, *Mirth-Making: The Rhetorical Discourse on Jest in Early Modern England* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001) and Anne Lake Prescott, "Humanism in the Tudor Jestbook," *Moreana* XXIV 95 - 96 (November 1987): 5 - 16. For gender see: Pamela Allen Brown, *Better a Shrew than Sheep: Women, Drama and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2003) and Anu Korhonen, "Laughter, Sex, and Violence: Constructing Gender in Early Modern English Jestbook," in *Laughter, Humor and the (Un)making of Gender*, ed. Anna Foka and Jonas Liliequist (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).

⁵ Derek Brewer, "Prose Jest Books in England," in *A Cultural History of Humour*, ed. Jan Bremer and Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 107.

times applied by humourists simply because of its availability.⁶ Historian Keith Thomas, on the other hand, devotes more attention to the subject of the clergy in his seminal work on the study of the early modern jest book. Thomas remarks the “marked anti-clericalism” of the Tudor and Stuart jest book, as well as its “course, derisive humour ... usually hostile in intent.”⁷ Contrarily, Sophie Murray, in her research on anti-monastic and anti-clerical jokes during the time of the dissolution of the monasteries, claims that these clerical and monastic jests only became hostile and “expose[d] the failings of religious life” when they were exploited in the 1530s by the Henrician government to remove monasticism.⁸ According to Murray, before the 1530s, jocular genres which took the religious and secular clergy as its object were part of the rhetoric of late medieval society, “helping to shape ideals of religion.”⁹

In this thesis, the clergy will be at the heart of the analysis of the sixteenth-century vernacular jest book. In order to understand the functions and effects of the various representations of clerical members throughout the sixteenth-century jest book, this thesis will analyse representations of the secular and religious clergy to argue that the jest books were not merely anti-clerical or used to shape religious ideals. Instead, this thesis sets out to argue that jest books both voiced and dismissed criticism of the clergy to argue for reform of both clergy and laity and that representations of the clergy were largely employed for nostalgic values. To do so, this thesis will analyse representations of the secular and religious clergy from the sixteenth-century jest books and touch upon the jest books’ medieval and humanist influences and tendencies.

Jesting and the Jest Book in Early Modern England

For this thesis, it is crucial to shed light on the genre of the jest book. This is easier said than done, as the genre is wide-ranging and no clear distinctions have been made within the Renaissance period. The jest book was first introduced in England, and Europe more broadly, by the Italian humanist Poggio Bracciolini with his *Facetiae* (1470), a collection of comic tales.¹⁰ The

⁶ Martha Bayless, *Parody in the Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 211.

⁷ Keith Thomas, “The Place of Laughter in Tudor and Stuart England,” *Times Literary Supplement* 21 (January 21 1977): 78.

⁸ Sophie Murray, “Dissolving into Laughter: Anti-Monastic Satire in the Reign of Henry VIII,” in *The Power of Laughter in Early Modern Britain: Political and Religious Culture, 1500 – 1820*, ed. Mark Knights and Adam Morton (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017), 27 – 29.

⁹ *Ibidem* 27.

¹⁰ Ian Munro and Anne Lake Prescott, “Jest Books,” in *The Oxford Handbook of English Prose 1500 - 1640*, ed. Andrew Hadfield (Oxford: Oxford Handbooks Online, 2013), 5.

Facetiae can be grouped under the heading *Losse Sammlungen*, a term devised by the German scholar Ernst Schulz, by which he refers to “collections of detached jests.”¹¹ In the English jest book tradition, these books present a usually high number of relatively short jests which include a didactic or moral tag at the end to explain its meaning or elaborate on the jest. Schulz has also created two other distinctions, namely *Schwankbiographien* or “jest-biographies,” which describe the usually tumultuous life of a fictive or existing comic character and, *Novellistische Schwanksammlungen* under which Schulz groups collected comic short stories or the “comic novella.”¹² Ian Munro and Anne Lake Prescott criticise Schulz for his attempt to group the jest books *post hoc* and argue that the genre should not be regarded as “specific and manageable” but instead as “a manifestation of a broader culture of jesting, laughter and wit ... that extends considerably beyond collections of jokes.”¹³ Munro and Prescott’s criticism is valid, as Schulz’s distinctions do not cover every type of jest book and his meanings often overlap, for instance in *Merie Tales Made by Master Skelton* or *Scoggins Iests*, which are both jest-biographies as well as collections of detached jests. Nevertheless, especially Schulz’s distinctions of collections of detached jests and comic novellas are helpful for this thesis because, as shall be argued in later chapters, these two headings created by Schulz, despite not always inclusive or complete, illustrate some profound changes in the direction the jest book takes.

Early modern definitions of jests are rare, but Thomas Dekker and George Wilkins include one at the beginning of their popular jest book *Iests to make you merie* (1607):

A Jest is a bubbling up of wit. It is a bavin, which being well kindled, maintains for a short time the heate of laughter. It is a weapon wherewith a fool does oftentimes fight, and a wise man defends himself by. It is the fool of good company if it be seasoned with judgement; but if with too much tartnesse, it is hardly digested but it turne to quarrel. A jest is tried as powder is, the most sudden is the best. It is a merrie gentleman, and hath a brother so like him that many take them for twins: for the one is a jest spoken, and the other is a jest done. Stay but the reading of this booke some halfe an houre, and you shall bee brought acquainted with both.¹⁴

¹¹ F.P. Wilson, “The English Jestbooks of the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (1939): 122.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Munro and Prescott, 2.

¹⁴ T[homas] D[ekker] and George Wilkins, *Iests to make you Merie: With the Coniuring vp of Cock VVat, (the walking spirit of Nengate) To tell Tales. Vnto which is Added, the miserie of a Prison, and a Prisoner. And a Paradox in praise of Serieants* (London: Nathaniell Butter, 1607): A3r, page nr. 1.

This definition by Dekker and Wilkins is quite in line with the jesting culture argued for by Munro and Prescott. Not only do the two authors proclaim the versatility of the jest book's purposes and functions, but they also touch upon its uses within early modern culture, where jests read or appropriated from a jest book could be performed or spoken out loud, make someone laugh but also cause an argument. Another critical aspect of the jest book which Dekker and Wilkins express is the variety of people who read or came into contact with the jest book in the early modern period, by naming both the fool and the wise man as readers and even users of the jest books.

One of the reasons scholars have probably long disregarded the Tudor jest book, is because of its association with low and popular culture, as most jest books were cheap, scarcely illustrated and written in the vernacular. Prescott, however, illustrates that the "plain style" applied in the jest books, was actually a humanist custom.¹⁵ Humanism had a profound influence on the early modern English jest book. One of the first popular Tudor jest books, *Tales and Quick Answers*, draws heavily on works by More, Poggio and Erasmus whereas *A, C, Mery Talys* was printed by John Rastell, and arguably collected by his brother in law Thomas More and his humanist circle.¹⁶ This exemplifies the popularity of the jest books in early modern culture, as they were perused, appropriated and read, either aloud or in silence, by people from different social classes, ages and gender.

Therefore, this thesis applies a rather broad view of early modern popular culture, acknowledging Peter Burke's stance that the "little tradition" in which the jest books circulated is not only open to the lower classes or popular culture but similarly to the elite.¹⁷ Barry Sanders argues that the increase of literature in the early modern period created a "society of secret readers" and that aristocrats would read "semi-underground" works such as jest books in secret to hide their "bad taste."¹⁸ Sanders' ideas seem to be shaped by those mentioned before of Zall and Hazlitt, whose primary interest in jest books is their influence on the great literary tradition of the Elizabethan period. An often cited example in the scholarly literature, however, is that of Queen Elizabeth I, who asked her staff to bring her a copy of *A Hundred Merry Tales*, an action she did not seem to hide from the public.¹⁹ Therefore, this thesis does not regard jest books as a

¹⁵ Munro and Prescott, "Jest Books," 102 & Prescott, "Humanism in the Tudor Jest Book," 6.

¹⁶ Prescott, "Humanism in the Tudor Jest Book," 6.

¹⁷ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* [1978] (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), 28.

¹⁸ Barry Sanders, *Sudden Glory: Laughter as Subversive History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995), 214, 212.

¹⁹ Linda Woodbridge, "Jest books, The Literature of Roguery and the Vagrant Poor in Renaissance England," *English Literary Renaissance* 33, no. 2 (2003): 206.

marginalised popular category of literature. Instead, this thesis applies the idea that jest books circulated as part of a “unified culture.”²⁰ Bob Scribner introduces this concept, and whereas he recognises that certain polarities and distinctions are clearly at play between various participants of culture, overall, popular texts like jest books were available to a large variety of people who enjoy reading them.²¹

Humour and Religion

At first sight, jest books might not seem a fit historical source to research religion, as religion and humour seem to be highly incompatible. Nevertheless, the two were inextricably connected in the medieval and early modern period, where both humour and religion were inherently part of everyday life, and as a result, the two often mixed. According to Martha Bayless, clergymen were the authors of the majority of jests and parodies in the late Middle Ages. Bayless argues that, since the jokes appeared in Latin and required knowledge of Scripture and theology to be understood and appreciated, that they were not primarily intended for lay consumption.²²

In the sixteenth century, however, jesting became a part of religion for the laity as well, through preachers who started jesting from the pulpit. Chris Holcomb illustrates that preachers appropriated sermons for various reasons, most commonly either to regain the attention of the listeners in church or to provide them with a moral lesson.²³ Protestant preachers and reformers such as Hugh Latimer (1487 - 1555), John Hooper (1495 - 1555) and Thomas Wilson (1524 - 1581) vigorously adopt the practice and even gain fame and popularity for their mocking sermons.²⁴ Whereas incorporating jests in sermons appears to have been a widespread custom, attitudes from religious and humanist thinkers towards the usage of jests in sermons and jesting, in general, are somewhat contrasting and erratic. One would, for instance, expect the Catholic humanist friends Thomas More and Desiderius Erasmus, who are continuously praised for their wit and accredited with the authorship of two early jest books, to approve of the practice of including jests in preaching wholeheartedly. However, the two Catholics eventually reluctantly condone the practice after long consideration in their texts on the subject, and they only allow the inclusion of jests in sermons in particular instances. Erasmus, for instance, hopes for a union of the “pleasant and the wholesome” and argues that if preachers insist on jesting, they should do so sparingly and use ancient source material instead of bawdy folk humour. Moreover, preachers

²⁰ Bob Scribner, “Is a History of Popular Culture Possible?” *History of European Ideas* 10, no. 2 (1989): 184.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² Bayless, *Parody in the Middle Ages*, 177.

²³ Holcomb, *Mirth-Making*, 53 – 55.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 47.

should not use jesting merely to make their listeners laugh but instead to “render [the audience] most pleasant.”²⁵

Despite reservations by Erasmus and others, jesting from the pulpit was popular, and exemplifies how jesting and jest books were interwoven with English popular and religious early modern culture. Hugh Latimer, for instance, appropriates a jest from the popular collection *A, C, Mery Tayls* (1526) in one of his sermons. Latimer shares a jest with his audience in which a woman who has trouble sleeping at night attends a sermon that very morning as she “never failed a good nap there.”²⁶ Latimer then states that “I had rather ye should go napping to the sermons, than not go at all ... yet peradventure ye may chance to be caught or ye go, the preacher may chance to catch you on the hook.”²⁷ According to Holcomb, Latimer appropriates the popular jest in such a way that he does not mock himself nor the people listening to the sermon, but he does teach the churchgoers a lesson.²⁸ Latimer’s appropriation is a perfect example of the type of jest that was generally condoned by the English Protestants. Latimer eschews the theatrical performance connotated with the Catholic past and does not tell the jest solely to incite laughter but uses it appropriately to teach his parishioners a lesson without distracting them from Scripture.

Outline and Aims

As stated at the beginning of this introduction, this thesis aims to analyse representations and functions of the secular and religious clergy in the sixteenth-century English jest book. The jest book provides some interesting new takes on conceptions of the clergy during the English Reformation and is an apt source to use for this study as humour and religion were deeply rooted in early modern culture. Additionally, jest books were read and enjoyed by a wide variety of people and usually eschewed polemical representations. Therefore, the jest book as a source has the ability to provide a more nuanced and complex image of the clergy, which is not inspired by polemical or subversive types of humour, but instead by a more subtle incongruous type.

The first chapter will outline the theoretical framework used in this thesis, which consists of theories on humour and laughter ranging from classical to medieval, Renaissance and modern conceptions. This chapter will consider the three main strands of humour theory, superiority,

²⁵ Ibidem, 55.

²⁶ P.M. Zall, “A Hundred Merry Tales,” In *A Hundred Merry Tales and Other English Jestbooks of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), 91.

²⁷ Latimer quoted in Holcomb, *Mirth-Making*, 59.

²⁸ Holcomb, *Mirth-Making*, 59.

relief and incongruity, throughout history together with its functions to illustrate how different forms of humour work in the jest book as well as their effects on the reader. Additionally, this chapter regards the jest book's innocent nature by linking the characteristics of the jest book and jest culture to Huizinga's elements of play.

From then on, this thesis presents three chapters which each discuss the jest books published in the three distinct chronological phases of jest book publishing identified by Linda Woodbridge.²⁹ The first chapter spans from 1510 – 1534 and argues for the influence of humanism in the English jest book, which instigated a change in the jest book's approach to religion. The chapter sets out to argue that anti-clerical subversive humour makes way for a more refined pleasant humour which is applied to argue for reform of the clergy. The second chapter takes a jump in time to the period 1555 – ca. 1585 in which most jest books were published. Where the first jest books argued for reform and stepped away from caricatures and stereotypes, this second phase, among others, witnesses the creation of the comical cleric, who is juxtaposed with the regular clerical member. The third and final phase of jest book publishing spans from 1585 – 1609, in which a new type of jest book, the comic novella is introduced. In this phase of scurrilous writing, jest books treat the clergy more severely before moving from a religious setting to a more secular world which harbours nostalgic feelings of a Catholic past. Each of these chapters will start with an outline of the historiography of the period which pays special attention to the history of the clergy and religion as well as the politics involved and the literature published to place the jests appropriately in the period in which they circulated. Where possible, the sources used are original or at least close to the first known publication of the work. When the original sources were not available, critical editions have been used.

By presenting an analysis of the religious and secular clergy in the sixteenth-century jest books, this thesis will demonstrate that the comical representation of the clergy is more complex than often believed, and that it serves a wide variety of functions. Furthermore, it will be demonstrated that jest books are not anti-clerical or subversive, but instead employ a friendly tone and that the clergy function in such a way that the jest books argue for reform of the clergy as well as the laity.

²⁹ Linda Woodbridge, *Vagrancy, Homelessness and English Renaissance Literature* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 285 – 294.

Chapter 1:

The Place of Humour and Laughter in Renaissance England

In 1579, Laurent Joubert wrote in his *Traité du Ris* that “the subject of laughter is so vast and deep that few philosophers have attempted it, and none has won the prize of treating it properly.”³⁰ Today, 440 years later, the scholarship surrounding laughter is as vast and deep as Joubert deemed the subject itself to be. Laughter and humour received a revived interest during the Renaissance, which still inspires researchers of the topic today. In this thesis, the focus will mainly lie on humour, which is here understood as tendencies or notions which are regarded as funny with the possibility of invoking laughter. As C. Stephen Evans states, while there is a particular connection between humour and laughter, people may regard something as funny or humorous, but this does not always cause laughter. On the other hand, someone may also laugh without encountering something humorous.³¹ Laughter is therefore only alluded to in this thesis when it helps clarify which parts of a jest induce laughter and to whom the laughter is directed. Additionally, this chapter regards the physiology of laughter because of the emphasis placed on it during the early modern period to describe what was regarded as humorous, whereas the term “humour” then mainly referred to bodily fluids.

As many historical topics which are prone to a certain level of subjectivity, explaining the role of humour and laughter in the early modern period is easier said than done. Mary Floyd-Wilson, Gail Kern Paster and Katherine Rowe argue that it would be inaccurate to regard early modern emotions as coherent entities as our modern day understandings of passions and emotions differ immensely from early modern understandings, and even today there is no consensus between the various disciplines as to how and where emotions operate.³² Therefore, this chapter does not pretend to provide a coherent theoretical framework which encapsulates a true Renaissance or modern conception of humour and laughter. Instead, this chapter aims to offer an overview of early modern humour and laughter from an interdisciplinary perspective to understand the humorous and comical aspects of early modern popular culture and how the early modern vernacular jest book fits in this culture.

³⁰ Laurent Joubert, *Treatise on Laughter* [1579], trans. ed. Gregory David de Rocher (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1980), 11.

³¹ C. Stephen Evans, “Kierkegaard’s View of Humor,” 177.

³² Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe and Mary Floyd-Wilson, ed. *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 1-6.

Theories of Humour

Mikhail Bakhtin, one of the most influential scholars on late-medieval and Renaissance humour, established the idea that the lower classes mainly applied humour as a tool to express themselves against the official culture of the elite which kept them subjugated. For Bakhtin, medieval humour is a manifestation of carnival, in which the lower classes create a topsy-turvy or upside down world to both question and challenge existing elite authority.³³ In this conception, Bakhtin assumes a dichotomy between the official and unofficial, as well as between the lower class and the elite.³⁴ Katell Lavéant, on the other hand, argues for a more inclusive “joyful or festive culture,” which also involves the elite in its manifestations of the comic, as they also often took part in these celebrations.³⁵ Lavéant’s joyful culture expresses similar sentiments as the understanding of popular culture included in the introduction of this thesis, which places the jest book in an inclusive and broad popular culture, which was enjoyed by the elite and lower classes alike. Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque and its subsequent subversive role of humour and laughter are not apt to apply to the English vernacular jest books as the early modern jest book does not oppose official culture in a subversive way. Chris Holcomb, for instance, argues that the jest book mirrors the increase of mobility witnessed during the Renaissance. As a result of this increased mobility, the encounters described in the jest books were happening more and more in real life, and should not be regarded a fantasy.³⁶ Therefore, early modern jest books do not create a topsy-turvy world as in Bakhtin’s carnival which opposes official culture and attacks the elite, as these different social and cultural groups presumably also met in real life. As a result, the jest books applied a more subtle way of humour instead, which often relied on incongruity.

John Morreal describes incongruity as a shift from the emotional side of laughter present in the superiority theory, to a more cognitive side, coining the laughter invoked by this type of humour as an “intellectual reaction to something unexpected, illogical or inappropriate.”³⁷ What Morreal in his definition of incongruity terms “inappropriate” comes close to the “ugliness” described by Plato, Aristotle and Cicero. The three classical philosophers theorise that laughter is

³³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* [1965], trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 59 – 75.

³⁴ Bayless, *Humour and Parody*, 179.

³⁵ Katell Lavéant, “Medieval Joy,” in *Gender: Laughter*, ed. Bettina Papenburg (Farmington Hills, MI: MacMillan Reference USA, 2017), 132.

³⁶ Chris Holcomb, “‘A Man in Painted Garment’: The Social Functions of Jest in Elizabethan Rhetoric and Courtesy Manuals,” *Humor* 13, no. 4 (2000): 434.

³⁷ John Morreal, *Taking Laughter Seriously* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983), 15.

usually invoked by sayings which acknowledge something “ugly in a manner that is not ugly.”³⁸ In the sixteenth century, Italian rhetorician Vincentius Madius added the factor of surprise and unexpectedness as a prerequisite of humour to the existing ideas of the classical theorists.³⁹ In a similar vein, Thomas Hobbes, in his work on the idea of laughter arising from “sudden glory,” argues that one can laugh at jests: “the wit whereof always consists in the elegant discovery and conveying to our own minds some absurdity.”⁴⁰ Whereas Hobbes remains faithful to the theory of superiority, claiming that these “absurdities” are always related to people, Hobbes also emphasises the importance of the unexpected in this instance.⁴¹

The first person to relate the incongruous to humour and the laughable in a coherent theory was Immanuel Kant, who identifies laughter as “arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing.”⁴² It is unclear what Kant means with “nothing” in his definition of the incongruous. John Lippitt interprets Kant’s theory as leading to nowhere.⁴³ Arthur Schopenhauer, on the other hand, provides a more detailed answer by explaining that the path of expectation that is set up for the receiver suddenly changes and goes on into the unexpected.⁴⁴ Whereas incongruity does not suffice as a theory for all kinds of laughter, the ideas professed for this theory do function in explaining humorous laughter. Morreal even regards incongruity as a vital component for every type of humour.⁴⁵ Especially Schopenhauer’s explanation of the incongruity theory works well with the early modern jest book, as this thesis will demonstrate how jest books often portray characters with unfitting or unexpected characteristics who utter incongruous remarks.

Whereas both jokes which rely on superiority and jokes which rely on incongruity share the function of differentiation between groups, superiority does so more cruelly and harshly by imposing one group as superior over the other. Incongruous jokes, on the other hand, differentiate by the impact they have on people, as some group members appreciate the jest

³⁸ Marvin J. Herrick, *Comic Theory in the Sixteenth Century* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1964), 37 – 38.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 44 - 46.

⁴⁰ Hobbes quoted in John Lippitt, “Humour and Superiority,” *Cogito* 9, no. 1 (1995): 46.

⁴¹ Morreal, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 12 - 13.

⁴² *Ibidem*, 16.

⁴³ Lippitt, “Humour and Incongruity,” *Cogito* 8, no. 2 (1994): 1

⁴⁴ Morreal, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 17.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 18.

whereas others do not.⁴⁶ Additionally, incongruous humour encompasses a clarifying function, as jests often defy from behaviour which is socially accepted or expected in order to reinstate social or cultural expectations.⁴⁷ Holcomb illustrates that this quality of humour was already acknowledged and appreciated in early modern rhetoric and courtesy manuals, which regarded jesting as a powerful tool “for defending the status quo and preserving social relations already in place” or instead “to redefine or even challenge them.”⁴⁸ Holcomb argues that the manuals consider these possible functions of humour to be mutually exclusive: either a jest is “socially conservative or socially disruptive.”⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the jest book also keeps social and cultural expectations in place by challenging them, as jests can portray new situations as unwanted, or be perceived as such.

A final leading theory of humour is the release or relief theory, which focuses on the physical quality of laughter and the idea that the act of laughing can emit nervous energy out of the body.⁵⁰ Sigmund Freud provides the main body of work on this theory in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), in which he argues that society creates a certain tension around subjects of taboo, such as sexuality, by continually suppressing them.⁵¹ Whereas this relatively modern theory might not seem the most appropriate for a study of early modern jesting, it is of importance to acknowledge Schopenhauer’s ideas on the subject as he emphasises the function of laughter as a liberation from the harsh reality of everyday life.⁵² A variety of early modern jest books and jest book authors touch upon this point. Poggio Bracciolini, for instance, warns for the dangers of jesting and “advises reading his funny stories only because they provide some relief from the struggles and tedium of hard labour.”⁵³

Whereas Poggio focuses on the potential dangers of jesting, the anonymous author of *Scoggins Iests* (1565 - 66) comments upon the positive aspects of humour as “there is nothing beside the goodnesse of God, that preserue health so much, as honest mirth.”⁵⁴ The physiological

⁴⁶ John C. Meyer, “Humor as a Double-Edged Sword: Four Functions of Humor in Communication,” *Theory* 10, no. 3 (August 2000): 321 – 323.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 319 – 320.

⁴⁸ Chris Holcomb, “A Man in Painted Garment,” 432 – 433.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ Morreal, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 20-21.

⁵¹ John Lippitt, “Humour and Release,” *Cogito* 9, no. 2 (1995): 169.

⁵² Morreal, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 21.

⁵³ Barry Sanders, *Sudden Glory*, 214.

⁵⁴ Anonymous, *The first and best part of Scoggins iests ... Gathered by Andrew Boord, Doctor of Physicke*. [1565 - 66] (London: Francis Williams, 1626).

aspects of laughter and its subsequent beneficial qualities gained the attention of scholars in the Renaissance period. Whereas the physiology of laughter will not be central to the ideas argued for and illustrated throughout this thesis, it is useful and vital to touch upon Renaissance conceptions of the physiology of laughter, as the ideas are central to the early modern understanding of humour. One of the main works published on the subject is the aforementioned *Traité du Ris* (1579) written by Laurent Joubert. In this work, Joubert builds on and refers to the work of numerous other European and classical theorists, resulting in a very influential treatise which captures sentiments that were shared by the majority of thinkers throughout Renaissance Europe.⁵⁵ In his psychological view of humour, Joubert agrees for the most part with Plato and Aristotle as he focuses on the ugly without compassion as an incentive for laughter but also stresses the importance of elements of surprise argued by Madius.

Joubert's ideas differ from the classical authors on the physiology of laughter, as he believes that contrary emotions, such as the combination of joy and sorrow, cause laughter instead of solely joy or sorrow.⁵⁶ Furthermore, Joubert's treatment of the sensation of laughter is surprisingly favourable compared to his predecessors as well as some of his contemporaries. In the prologue to his work, he writes:

We find the act [of laughing] most enjoyable and desire it most deeply on account of the pleasure it brings. For we are so naturally drawn to delight that all our designs have it as object, as sovereign goods.⁵⁷

Joubert attributes these positive effects to laughter because he situates laughter in the heart, as laughter causes the heart to move, and these contractions, in turn, spark joy.⁵⁸ Alongside creating a joyous feeling, Joubert also considers laughter as a way of cleansing the body of excess humours.⁵⁹ For Joubert, this explains why it is possible to faint when laughing “with too much violence” wherefore Joubert advises specific more healthy types of laughter.⁶⁰

How people laughed concerned many early modern writers as they distinguished between proper and improper laughter. The discussion on which types of laughter should be condoned in relation to religion started during the Middle Ages. Bayless presents the example of Burchardus, a

⁵⁵ Gregory David de Rocher, “Introduction,” *Treatise on Laughter*, xi.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, xii.

⁵⁷ Joubert, *Treatise on Laughter*, 16.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 36 & 63.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, 64.

twelfth-century abbot, who distinguishes between the laughter of wisdom as proper as it “delights in the works of the Lord” and laughter of foolishness, which mocks creation, as improper.⁶¹ In the early modern period, Sir Philip Sidney, on the other hand, recommends a courteous type of laughter which for him is caused by delight: “delight hath a joy in it, either permanent or present. Laughter hath only scornful tickling.”⁶² These medieval and early modern ideas on the physiology on laughter, help understand how contemporary readers possibly responded to comical literature and why there was a renewed interest and appreciation of humour and laughter throughout the period. This positive and subtle type of laughter is similar to the laughter which the early modern jests presumably aspired to invoke: not loud or subversive, but instead, delightful and mild, an intellectual and pleasant form of laughter which does not aim to offend or subvert.

Johan Huizinga’s Elements of Play

The inoffensive type of laughter which is argued for in the Renaissance is also apparent in the form of the jest books. In her work on laughter and humour on the Shakespearean stage, Indira Ghose appropriates Johan Huizinga’s play-elements in culture to analyse the function of laughter in the early modern theatre, as she proposes an analogy between laughter and the world of play. According to Ghose, laughter and play are most alike in their creation of separate temporary realities. These new realities, or in fact, these new forms of play, operate according to their own rules and the agent’s awareness of this reality as a game, vital elements for both laughter and play.⁶³ Huizinga’s theory on the elements of play can likewise be applied to early modern jest books. Acknowledging the elements of play in the early modern jest book establishes and explains its more kind and playful nature as well as its functions, by which it becomes clear how the jest book operates as well as its place and functions in early modern culture.

Huizinga distinguishes five main characteristics of play, most of which share a common ground with the functions and workings of the early modern jest books. Firstly, play is a voluntary activity; it is not commanded to anyone.⁶⁴ Similarly, jest books are often published anonymously without any plain meaning or expression of thought attached to it. Especially the early jest books usually lack a preface which could attempt to control the reader, and the books

⁶¹ Bayless, *Parody in the Middle Ages*, 204.

⁶² Sir Philip Sidney, “An Apology for Poetry,” [1595] in *An Apology for Poetry (or The Defence of Poesy)*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd & R.W. Maslen (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002), 112.

⁶³ Indira Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter: A Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2008), 7.

⁶⁴ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* [1944] (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1998), 7.

do not address a particular type of reader or group of people. Jest books which were published later in the sixteenth century or at the beginning of the seventeenth century do at times contain a preface or markers of intent. Nevertheless, these are usually related to laughter, or as in *Scoggins Jestes*, claim that laughter invoked by the jest book is beneficial for one's health. Additionally, the reader or listener who comes across a jest book can appropriate and interpret its jests as he or she wishes. Whereas the moral tags added to the jests can steer the reader, they are not a finite conclusion.⁶⁵

Secondly, play is not “ordinary” or “real” life.⁶⁶ Instead, it offers an escape “into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own.”⁶⁷ Similarly, early modern jest books portray a temporary version of reality, which is akin to real life but is yet an escape from it due to the releasing qualities of humour. As Huizinga argues, play, or in this case, the jest book, presents itself “as an intermezzo, an interlude, in our daily lives” which becomes an integral part of this life as it is used as a recurrent form of relaxation.⁶⁸ This argument continues in Huizinga's third argument that play is distinct from this ordinary life both in time and duration.⁶⁹ Whereas a jest book and the jests in it can be read multiple times and re-appropriated for various means and in various instances, the jest is played out in its own time and place. It is this ability of repetition that is an essential quality of play.⁷⁰

Fourthly, play demands and creates order: “into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection.”⁷¹ This characteristic of play does not seem to rhyme with jokes, as Mary Douglas states, “the rite imposes order and harmony, while the joke disorganises.”⁷² Nevertheless, the jest can create a “temporary suspension of the social structure,” by which the jest implies a disturbance which attacks the actual structure of society and thereby creates its own.⁷³ This is similarly how jests can offend, by opposing the social and

⁶⁵ Holcomb, “Man in a Painted Garment,” 430.

⁶⁶ Huizinga, 8.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, 8.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, 9

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 10.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

⁷² Mary Douglas, “The Social Control of Cognition: Some Factors in Joke Perception,” *Man* 3, no. 3 (September 1968): 369.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, 372.

cultural structure, through which they create order inside of the jest book and demand a different one outside of it.⁷⁴

Finally, Huizinga argues that play as an activity is free from any material interest, and therefore, it does not gain the agent any profit.⁷⁵ This is a crucial characteristic applicable to both play and early modern jest books as it helps to distinguish the vernacular jest book from more polemical forms of writings which circulated in early modern England. Whereas other works were written to attack, subvert or openly criticise certain religious conceptions, the jest books were published anonymously and served no specific or personal goals.

Because of the jest books' similarities with play-elements, the jests as they are presented via Tudor jest books do not serve a derisive or subversive goal as that argued by Bakhtin. Instead, jests can be regarded as innocent. Jest books present a mirror of everyday life through which readers can reflect on their own culture and society. Nevertheless, the jest books were written and compiled mainly for entertainment reasons and not for polemical or political ends. As Ghose states in her work: "as in play, it demonstrated its power to take control of reality in the realm of the imagination" by refashioning the world through art.⁷⁶

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates how humour and laughter have always been an essential focus for philosophers and scholars and how the two are inherent to medieval and early modern society and culture. This chapter contests the Bakhtinian idea that humour is subversive or overtly anti-clerical. Instead, as humour and laughter gain more positive connotations throughout the medieval and early modern period, this thesis will focus on inoffensive, subtle and friendly types of laughter which the incongruous type of humour in the jest book invokes. Whereas it must be noted that some form of superiority is inevitably a part of many jokes made both today and in the early modern period, this thesis will not regard superiority in the jest book as subversive or politically challenging. Instead, this thesis discerns the more subtle ways of humour concerning the clerical representations and what these representations demonstrate about changing religious attitudes and practices. By focussing on the innocent nature and friendly tone of the early modern jest books, this thesis aims to understand early modern jest books and their clerical representations within the culture of sixteenth-century England.

⁷⁴ Ibidem.

⁷⁵ Huizinga, 13.

⁷⁶ Ghose, 7.

Chapter 2:

From Merry Jest to Merry Tales: The Influence of Christian Humanism (1510 – 1534)

The vernacular jest book first entered the English literary scene in 1484 with William Caxton's translation of the French *Livre de Subtilles Histoires et Fables de Esope* (1477), to which he added three tales by Poggio Bracciolini, under the name *The Fables of Alfonse and Poge*. The next piece of jest literature in print only appeared in 1510, which marks the onset of publications of singular jests, four of which are analysed in this chapter: *How a Ploughman leaned his paternoster* (1510), *The Friar and the Boy* (1510 – 1513), *The Sergeant who became a Friar* (1516) and *Dane Hew* (1520). These singular jests were soon followed by what Schulz has coined collections of detached jests: *A, C Mery Talys* (1526), *Homleglas* (1528) and *Tales and Quick Answers* (1535). This chapter sets out to show a change between the portrayal of clerics in the singular jests and the collections of detached jests. Whereas the singular jests employ a harsh and often violent anti-clerical stance, the collections present jests of a friendly tone which focus on interactions between the clergy and laity. This chapter argues that this is mainly due to the influence of Christian humanism, which became a significant influence and inspiration for the collections of detached jests *A, C Mery Talys* and *Tales and Quick Answers*. As a result of this influence, jest books lose their anti-clerical voice, and instead they propose reform of the English clergy.

Historiography

The period with which this chapter is concerned spans from 1510 when the earliest English jests are published to 1534 when the Act of Supremacy is passed and Henry VIII breaks from the Church of Rome. Whereas some scholars refer to this period as the “Eve of the Reformation” during which people became critical of religion, revisionist scholars as Christopher Haigh and Eamon Duffy illustrate the continuous popularity of English Catholicism before and during the Henrician break with Roman-Catholicism.⁷⁷ Christopher Haigh convincingly argues that early modern England was still exceedingly engaged with Catholicism, as he points out the enormous popularity of religious works and the vast amounts of money people gifted to the Church both

⁷⁷ A.G Dickens referred to this period as the “eve of the Reformation” in *The English Reformation* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 40. The term has been influential ever since and picked up by other scholars of the English Reformation of the latter half of the twentieth century. Seminal works of Christopher Haigh include *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) and *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), for Eamon Duffy see in particular: *The Stripping of the Altars: traditional religion in England, c.1400-c.1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1992).

during and after their lifetime, which resulted in substantially staffed churches.⁷⁸ G.W. Bernard adds that clerical complaints were limited, and if there were complaints, they mostly concerned “alleged sexual misdemeanours of priests, disputes over tithes, mismanagement of parochial property and negligence in performing the liturgy.”⁷⁹ Haigh’s view is similar to that of Bernard as he argues that most churches seem to have been well run throughout the early sixteenth century and the clergy was usually held in high esteem and deemed trustworthy by their parishioners, with only a few exceptions.⁸⁰

Nevertheless, the revisionist approach also receives criticism. It is a convincing argument that people were generally satisfied with the clergy, but at the same time, the clergy stood at the forefront of the Protestant Reformation and thus did not merely promote Catholic values.⁸¹ Moreover, while many people gifted money to the Church, people often criticised the payments of tithes and mortuary dues as churches grew wealthier.⁸² Finally, alongside the demand for religious bestsellers such as devotional manuals, the period also saw an influx of heretical books from Antwerp, where several English reformers lived in exile between 1525 and 1535.⁸³ Both Lollards and early readers of Martin Luther enjoyed these heretical books. Where the authors in Antwerp did not necessarily add to the arguments by the Lollards against clericalism, they too believed in the previous existence of a “golden age” in the Church, which had now been corrupted by the clergy.⁸⁴ Besides, while Henry VIII is believed to have been successful in keeping Tyndale’s vernacular Bible from the English market, Archbishop Warham already complained of the vast amount of Tyndale Bibles circulating in Canterbury in 1526, and the book had already gone through at least seventeen editions by 1536.⁸⁵

Protestant and reformist ideas were not only disseminated via books. These ideas also became a popular subject for reformist preachers such as John Colet and John Taylor, who in their Convocation addresses in respectively 1510 and 1514 argued that “worldliness among the

⁷⁸ Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 26, 29 – 35, 39.

⁷⁹ G.W. Bernard, *The Late Medieval English Church: Vitality and Vulnerability Before the Break with Rome* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 69.

⁸⁰ Haigh, *English Reformations*, 40, 44. Haigh shares the example of John Stokesly, who as the newly appointed archbishop of Canterbury personally examined the clergymen in the diocese of London and only thought about less than one third of them “accurate.”

⁸¹ Nicholas Tyacke, *England’s Long Reformation: 1500 – 1800*, (London: UCL Press, 1997), 10.

⁸² A.G. Dickens, *The Age of Humanism and Reformation* (London: Prentice-Hall International, 1972), 172.

⁸³ Rosemary O’Day, *The Debate on the English Reformation* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), 8.

⁸⁴ Haigh, *English Reformations*, 8.

⁸⁵ Nicholas Tyacke, *England’s Long Reformation*, 8.

clergy was a greater danger than heresy among the laity.”⁸⁶ About a decade later, Hugh Latimer and Robert Barnes also preached against the worldliness of the Church in 1525.⁸⁷ Interestingly enough, Haigh argues that these forms of criticism towards the clergy should not be seen as anti-clerical, as the preachers do not condemn the clergy but instead elevate them as a separate group in order to regain respect for the clergy.⁸⁸ Despite Haigh’s claims, the influence of Lollards, early Lutherans, and Christian humanists is not to be neglected or minimised. Nicholas Tyacke describes Haigh’s approach as “a stark choice between conceiving of the English Reformation as either “from above” or “from below,” a choice he deems illusionary.⁸⁹ According to Tyacke, the English Reformation, similarly to the Reformation on the continent, is brought about by interactions between political actions from above and criticism voiced from below.⁹⁰

Whereas the English Church was quick to condemn ideas by Luther and other reformers, they were not able to stop the influx of books, which soon gained popularity in circles of Lollards and educated men in university towns as Oxford and Cambridge.⁹¹ The authorities of the English Church were alarmed by the high influx of books. The Church recruited authors such as Thomas More to write polemical responses against reformist texts, and Luther’s books were formally burned at St. Paul’s Cross in 1521.⁹² Whereas More himself was critical of the clergy, he mostly defended Catholicism. Desiderius Erasmus, on the other hand, repeatedly addressed issues of clerical misconduct in the English Church throughout his polemical writings.

Various jests which include the clergy in the early Tudor jest books originate from these works written by Erasmus, More and other humanists.⁹³ Therefore, it is of interest to consider the idea of Christian humanism. Whereas scholars cannot seem to reach a consensus with regard to the relations between the Reformation and humanism, Jonathan Woolfson captures the relation between the two when he writes: “scarcely a single early Henrician description of humanist studies does not justify them in religious turns.”⁹⁴ Woolfson speaks of liberal and

⁸⁶ Haigh, *English Reformations*, 58 – 59, 66.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, 77.

⁸⁸ Haigh, *English Reformations*, 77.

⁸⁹ Tyacke, *England’s Long Reformation*, 4.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 4, 6.

⁹¹ Haigh, *English Reformation*, 57.

⁹² Tyacke, *England’s Long Reformation*, 4.

⁹³ Henry de Vocht, *De Invloed van Erasmus op de Engelsche Toneelliteratuur der XVIe en XVIIe Eeuwen. Eerste Deel* (Gent: A. Stiffer Drukker der Koninklijke Vlaamsche Academie, 1908), 31 – 33, 45, 77.

⁹⁴ Jonathan Woolfson, ed. *Reassessing Tudor Humanism* (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 8.

reformist habits in the intellectual and religious cultures of the early sixteenth century whereas Margo Todd expands its influence when she regards Erasmian humanism as inspiring “Protestant social thought and activism in the Elizabethan period.”⁹⁵ Whereas humanism left a considerable influence on the English Reformation, it is essential to note that Erasmus was still defended by Catholics who endorsed his orthodoxy and criticism of the Church.⁹⁶ As a result, Erasmus was not only appropriated by Protestants but similarly by Catholics. This is important to note, as Christian humanists argued for reform of the Church but did not necessarily promote Protestantism, nor endorse the Henrician Reformation. Christian humanism, among others, mainly focused on the rediscovery of Scripture, cleansing the Church and society from corruption, defeating superstition and ignorance, papal power and the role of education.⁹⁷ In the latter part of this chapter, it will become evident that these points of criticism also featured in the collections of detached jests in this first phase of jest book publishing with similar aims of reform.

Merry Jests in Prose and Verse

Before the popular books of collected jests were published for the English market, jest books mostly consisted of longer single prose or verse jests, many of which included one or multiple friars as their protagonist. Even more so than the jests included in collections of detached jests, the single verse jests resemble the medieval fabliau and other early forms of tale-telling. This resemblance not only pertains to form, language or subject matter but also for the jests’ treatment of religion and in particular, members of the clergy. These early merry jests, represent various forms of the stereotypical lascivious, greedy and rebellious friar. The friars in these jests resemble the representation of the friar in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, in which Chaucer describes the friar as “a wanton and a merry ... [who] had y-made full many a marriage of younge women, at his owne coste,” is well acquainted with taverns in every town and who asks not for “weeping and prayers [but] men must give silver to the poore freres.”⁹⁸ Lesley A. Goote explains that this image comes from anti-fraternal satire, which was often written by the regular clergy to tone down the popularity of friars as preachers and confessors.⁹⁹ The early modern singular jests portray similar

⁹⁵ Ibidem, 7.

⁹⁶ Lucy E. Wooding, *Rethinking Catholicism in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 29.

⁹⁷ Wooding, 16, 29 & Woolfson, 9.

⁹⁸ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. D. Laing Purves (The Floating Press, 2012), 36 - 37.

⁹⁹ Lesley A. Goote, “Introduction,” in *The Canterbury Tales* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2002), 3.

types of lecherous and deceiving friars, but also present the priest in a more pleasant manner and with a friendly tone.

The portrayal of the priest is found in the oldest of the four singular jests in this chapter. *Here begynneth a lytell geste how the plowman lerned his pater-noster* was printed approximately around 1510 and introduces a ploughman who is a very skilled craftsman. His only defect is that he cannot say his Paternoster. A priest promises to teach the ploughman the paternoster if the ploughman in return provides forty poor people with wheat and remembers all their names in the order of visiting. The names of the forty people turn out to be the forty words to the Paternoster, by which the ploughman has learned the prayer. However, the priest then refuses to pay the ploughman for his wheat, as the priest claims that feeding the poor serves as the ploughman's act of charity. The ploughman takes the case to court where he is laughed at by the people, after which he angrily tells his wife: "Preests shall I neuer trust agayne."¹⁰⁰ The end of the tale, however, implies that the ploughman has lived a long and content life after which he ascended into heaven. With this ending, the jest gains a friendly and pleasant tone of voice, as the jest does not hold the priest accountable, nor does it criticise the priest for stealing the ploughman's wheat.

Another popular singular jest was *Here begynneth a mery geste of the frere and the boye* (*The Friar and the Boy*) which was arguably first printed around 1510 and seems to enjoy the most popular afterlife of the four singular jests.¹⁰¹ In this jest, a boy called Jack has a spiteful stepmother who sends him away to herd animals. While he is out, an old man offers Jack three rewards: a pipe which incites everyone to dance without control, a bow that will last him his entire life and never miss a bird and thirdly a reward chosen by Jack himself, that his stepmother will fart loudly every time she reprimands him. Naturally, the stepmother is furious with Jack after she starts farting uncontrollably on his return to the house, and she instructs a friar who came to the house "to lye there all nyght" and whom the stepmother "loued ... as a saynt" to follow the boy into the woods and bete hym well and make the boye lame."¹⁰² These phrases already introduce the friar as the lecherous stereotype as he lays with a married woman who ironically admires him as a saint.

¹⁰⁰ Anonymous, *Here begynneth a lytell geste how the plowman lerned his pater-noster* (London: W. de Worde, 1510), A4v.

¹⁰¹ In addition to three editions published in the sixteenth century, the English Short Title Catalogue lists 39 publications of *The Friar and the Boy*, sometimes under the name *The Merry Piper*, between 1668 and 1800.

¹⁰² Anonymous, *Here begynneth a mery geste of the frere and the boye* (London: Wynkyn de Worde, 1510 – 13), A4 ll. 183 – 84, ll. 194 - 95.

Additionally, in agreeing to the quest, the jest parodies the medieval chivalric romance, as the friar goes on a quest to serve his lady, but instead of fighting a superior and challenging evil, he sets out to battle an innocent young child and even loses the fight. When the friar meets Jack, the boy exposes the friar's greedy nature as the friar runs into the bushes to catch the bird that Jack has just shot out of the air. Once he is in the bushes, Jack plays his pipe, and the friar hurts himself against the prickly branches of the bushes as he starts to dance. The title of the piece is of interest here as it presents the friar as the main antagonist, while the dispute is mainly between Jack and his evil stepmother, but neither she nor other characters such as the old man or Jack's father are mentioned here. The title affirms the popularity of the stereotypical friar as a comical character by portraying him as the main antagonist, and presumably, the book lives up to the audience's expectations by portraying the friar as foolish and lascivious.

A Merry Jest, How a Serjeant would learn to play a friar was first published in 1516 but was presumably already written in 1503 when the author Thomas More performed it during a feast in London celebrating his grandfather's appointment as sheriff of the city of London.¹⁰³ The jest proclaims that men should take as their profession what they do best instead of choosing professions for which they have no predisposition:

Wise men alway, affirm and say, that best 'tis for a man, diligently, for to apply the business that he can; and in no wise to enterprise another faculty, for he that will and can no skill s never like to theeh [= thrive].¹⁰⁴

Despite this warning, the serjeant in the jest poses as a friar and enters an Augustinian monastery where a thief is in hiding. Whereas both the thief and the serjeant pose as friars in this jest, the thief, who has broken the law and left many debts, is not held accountable for his fakery, whereas the serjeant, who More presents as an honest man of law, is exposed as the "feigned frere" and punished by the monks.¹⁰⁵ With this, More provides an interesting take on the early modern friar as he implies in this jest that the thief resembles the actual friar more closely than an honest man.

A final clerical representation in the early sixteenth-century singular jest is that of the monk in *Dane Hew, the munk of Leicestre* (the 1520s). The jest introduces Dane Hew as "yung and

¹⁰³ Richard Marius, *Thomas More: A Biography* (Harvard UP, 1999), 49.

¹⁰⁴ Sir Thomas More, "A merry Jest, how a Serjeant would learn to play the Friar" [1516] *Luminarium Editions Online* <http://www.luminarium.org/editions/morejest.htm> (accessed 10 June 2019). The text on this website is taken from: *Memoirs of Sir Thomas More* vol 1., ed. Arthur Cayley, Jr. (London: Cadell and Davis, 1808), 34 – 48.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*.

lusty” as he often leaves the monastery to visit the women he fancies, mainly the tailor’s wife.¹⁰⁶ The tailor and his wife devise a plan to take money from the monk and in their plan, accidentally kill Dane Hew. The tailor and his wife hide Dane Hew at the monastery, where he is “slain” a second time by his fellow monks who are angry at him for leaving the grounds. The monks’ anger towards Dane Hew for leaving the abbey grounds seems to imply that it was an anomaly for monks to leave the abbey. The jest, therefore, suggests that people mostly knew about these misbehaving monks, as they were the ones who left the abbey while the monks “of great renown” would stay inside and live and work piously.¹⁰⁷ Nonetheless, this conception of the pious monk alters quickly when one of the monks blames the abbot for killing Dane Hew, and he asks him for a reward, or else he will blame Dane Hew’s death on the abbot. The abbot in return promises him money: “forty shillings thou shalt have and if thou can mine honor save.”¹⁰⁸ Therefore, the jest presents not only a lecherous monk in Dane Hew, but also a greedy, corrupt monk and abbot.

Even though these singular jests are very different from the other jest books published during the sixteenth century, they remain popular, and their influence remains notable throughout the entire period. *Dane Hew* and *The Frair and the Boy* both present the stereotypical lecherous, greedy, ignorant, corrupt friar inspired by medieval literature.¹⁰⁹ Whereas More’s *How the Serjeant would learn to play the friar*, does not represent actual friars, More does comment on the office of friars, as the thief is better at playing a friar than the sergeant is. Finally, it is of interest that of all four jests, *How the Plowman learned his Paternoster* is the only jest to focus on a non-monastical cleric, but instead, on a priest. In this jest, the tone is more friendly, and the cleric is portrayed as helping the poor people in town by providing them with food, but also the ploughman, whom he teaches the Paternoster which grants him entrance to heaven. This jest signifies a difference in representation between the religious clergy as opposed to the secular clergy, as the representation of the latter is not merely negative but instead portrays the priest positively, which both fosters clerical reputation and advocates of clericalism, instead of anti-

¹⁰⁶ Anonymous, “*Dane Hew, the Munk of Leicestre*,” in *Ten Bourdes*, ed. Melissa Furrow (Kalamazoo MI: Medievale Institute Publications, 2013), ll. 2.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, ll. 2.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, ll. 169 - 170.

¹⁰⁹ It should be noted that Melissa M. Furrow in her critical edition of *Dane Hew* considers the fact that Dane Hew was most likely a canon, as the jests calls him “a false priest,” swears by his priesthood and lives in a town rather than the countryside where monasteries used to be. Whereas the image of Dane Hew as a monk prevails because of the title and the way he is addressed, it is interesting to see how clerical identities are changeable in the jest, and presumably can be altered to share a certain sentiment.

clericalism. As the following section of this thesis will demonstrate, it is this final approach, which is most often taken in the early modern collections of detached jests.

Christian Humanism in the Early Collections of Jest

The vernacular collections of detached jests were a new popular genre of the jest book. This chapter discusses three of these printed jest collections, namely *Howleglas* (ca. 1519), *A, C, Mery Tahys* (1526) and *Tales and Quicke Answeres* (1532). These three collections are presumably not the only collections of jests published in the period, but they are the only three collections which have survived and are still accessible. Linda Woodbridge argues that versions of *Scoggin's Jestes*, *The Mad Men of Gotham* and *The Jestes of Skelton* were also first published in this period. However, the possible earlier editions of these jest books to which Woodbridge refers do not survive, and she bases her argument on fragmentary evidence and scattered allusions to these texts in other forms of literature.¹¹⁰ This thesis will regard these collections in the next chapter because of possible changes implemented in later editions and the lack of clear evidence with regards to the possible publication dates.

A, C, Mery Tahys and *Tales and Quicke Answeres* were presumably both collected and later published in English humanist circles. The first was printed by Thomas More's brother in law John Rastell, and the jests were probably for the most part collected by More and others in his circle of humanist scholars. The jests in *A, C, Mery Tahys* largely stem from English folk humour but also include a clear humanist perspective. *Tales and Quicke Answeres*, on the other hand, draws mainly on works of continental humanists, such as Poggio and Erasmus.¹¹¹ The third collection, *Howleglas*, is an exception to the other two jest books as it is not an original English work but instead presents an English adaptation of the German *Til Eulenspiegel*. *Eulenspiegel* was a mythical jester from the court of King Solomon who first gained popularity in the twelfth century.¹¹² The jester has been appropriated ever since within as well as outside of the jest book.

Members of both the secular and religious clergy feature prominently in all three of these jest books: at least thirteen out of forty-seven jests in *Howleglas*, seventeen out of 113 jests in *Tales and Quicke Answeres* and even as many as forty-seven out of a hundred jests in *A, C, Mery Tahys* include members of the clergy. Various clergymen are either presented as main characters, supporting characters or merely mentioned in passing. The singular jests printed in this period

¹¹⁰ Woodbridge, *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature*, 285 – 86.

¹¹¹ Prescott, "Humanism in the Tudor Jestbook," 5 – 6.

¹¹² Anonymous, "Howleglas," [1519] in *A Hundred Merry Tales and Other English Jestbooks of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. P.M. Zall (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), 152.

already signify a distinction between the treatment of the religious clergy and the secular clergy. Similarly to *How the Plowman learned his Paternoster*, and contrary to the predominantly stereotypical representation of the clergy as lascivious, greedy and ignorant, these three jest books offer more comprehensive representations of the clergy. This distinction similarly signifies a change in clerical jests in general, as they are no longer solely anti-monastic or anti-fraternal. The remainder of this chapter argues that Christian humanism influenced the clerical representations in the jest books *A, C Mery Talys* and *Tales and Quick Answers*. These jest books do not include anti-clerical images to expose the clergy as corrupt. Instead, they employ representations of the religious and secular clergy to argue for reform of both the clergy and laity.

Humanism is not only of interest for the early sixteenth-century jest book concerning its contents but also to the form of the jest book. Alan Stewart illustrates how Thomas More in 1526, amidst the controversies surrounding the Tyndale Bible, expressed his concern of hypothetical English translations of humanist works by both him and Erasmus entering the English marketplace:

I wolde not onely my derlynges [Erasmus] bokes but myne owne also, helpe to burne them both wyth myne owne handes, rather then folke sholde (though thorow theyr own faute) take any harme of them, seyng that I se them lykely in these dayes so to do.¹¹³

According to Stewart, what concerns More the most is the possibility of “texts previously confined to an educated Latinate class to become available to the rest of England.”¹¹⁴ Stewart argues that More feared that uneducated people would read his works in translation, and thereby misinterpret it, as More had no control over the translation, nor over its readers. Whereas More in this instance clearly comments on the possible misinterpretations of the vernacular Bible, it does not seem a coincidence that the jest books, which are convincingly linked to both More and Erasmus, appear on the English literary market at precisely this point. The humanist jests employs many examples of clerical members to comment upon those practices of the Church humanists regard incompatible with faith. The jests comment on clergymen and religion in a more friendly way than the polemical texts of the two humanists published at the same time, both in the innocent nature of the jest book as illustrated by the analogy with Huizinga’s play-elements but, as this chapter will demonstrate, also in the jests itself. In this light, the collections of

¹¹³ Thomas More quoted in Alan Stewart, “The Trouble with English Humanism: Tyndale, More and Darling Erasmus,” in *Reassessing Tudor Humanism*, ed. Jonathan Woolfson (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), 87

¹¹⁴ Stewart, “The Trouble with English Humanism,” 88.

detached jests, and especially the jests on the clergy and religion, can be regarded as voicing humanist criticism on religion in a manner that was thought appropriate for a broad English audience.

Anne Lake Prescott convincingly makes a case for humanist and Christian humanist interpretations of the early modern English jest books. Prescott discusses one of the jests in *Tales and Quicke Answers* in which a professor goes along with a bird catcher, the latter asking the professor to remain silent as they await the birds. When the birds arrive, the professor remarks in Latin: ‘Aves permultae adsunt [=there are many birds here]’ and the birds fly away because of the noise. The bird catcher is furious with the professor, who foolishly replies: “why, thinkest thou, fool . . . that the birds do understand Latin?”¹¹⁵ At first glance, this jest might seem to portray a stupid, ignorant professor. However, as Prescott argues, one should take into account the context of the 1520s and 1530s when humanists debated “the legitimacy of vernacular Scripture and the adequacy of the Vulgate translation.”¹¹⁶ This added layer raises multiple questions about publishing theological texts in Latin, and the scholar serves in this jest to touch upon this criticism.

The use of Latin is also the subject of some clerical jests in *A, C Mery Talys*, which, as Prescott illustrates, test the validity of Latin as a religious language. In one of the jests, the Archdeacon of Essex accuses three newly appointed priests of not saying their divine services well, and he asks them “whether they said corpus meus or corpum meum,” whereas the correct Latin form is *corpus meum*, meaning my body.¹¹⁷ This jest voices criticism on multiple levels as the three young priests are unable to provide a satisfactory answer, but the jests also rebukes the archdeacon, as “divers that were present thought more default in [the archdeacon] because he himself before time had admitted them to be priests.”¹¹⁸ Another jest also touches upon the cleric’s failure as a teacher of Latin when a friar asks the child he has taught Latin to translate the phrase “friars walk in the cloister,” which the child translates to “in circuitu ipu ambulant [= the imps walk around in circles.”¹¹⁹ Whereas the child’s answer mocks friars, it does so in a friendly tongue-in-cheek way. Finally, another priest kills his horse Modicum because the Bishop who has come to visit him asked the priest to prepare little meat: “Preparaas mihimodicum.”¹²⁰ All three

¹¹⁵ Prescott, “Humanism in the Tudor Jest Book,” 8.

¹¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹¹⁷ Anonymous, *A, C, Mery Talys* (London: John Rastell, 1526), B2v.

¹¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹¹⁹ Ibidem, C2v.

¹²⁰ Ibidem, E3r.

jests touch upon the inability of the lower clergy to learn or teach Latin, which leads to humorous consequences. These consequences are rather harmless in the jest book but at the same time, they present the readers with the difficulty of the Latin language, and its shortcomings as a language of religion, as even clerics misunderstood the language.

Besides criticism towards the use of Latin in Church and the Bible, Christian humanism also focuses on the misuses of Scripture. Various of these jests paint the picture that clerical members were aware of their misuses of Scripture and that they even abused Scripture to benefit themselves. In *Tales and Quicke Answeres*, a curate tells his parishioners that Jesus fed five hundred people with just five loaves of bread. The curate is corrected by his clerk who tells him that Jesus fed five thousand people with those five loaves, but the curate answers: “Hold thy peace, fool ... they will scanty believe that they were five hundred.”¹²¹ In this instance, the clergy attempts to improve its credibility towards its parishioners, which is, in turn, overthrown in the jest book as the book unveils the true of the clergy to its readers. Another interesting example is found in *A, C, Mery Talys* when a parish friar rebukes people who go riding on Sundays. A man who is dressed to go riding that Sunday protests and tells him: “Christ himself did ride on Palm Sunday,” to which the friar replies: “But I pray thee what came thereof? Was he not hanged on the Friday after?”¹²² According to the jest, everyone in the church laughed as a result of the friar response, but the jest does not state who the object of laughter is. Presumably, the audience laughs *at* the man who went riding and *with* the friar who appropriates Scripture in a witty and clever manner to teach someone a lesson. It must be noted that the jest states explicitly that the audience already noted the man’s riding clothes and seemingly already condemned him for riding on Sunday before he made his comment to the preacher. In this case, these two jests illustrate how the clergy was allowed to appropriate Scripture; the appropriation had to be faithful to Scripture and not abused for personal reasons. As with the jest appropriated by Hugh Latimer, the witty remark teaches the laity a lesson without offending them.

From the corruption of Scripture, it is only a small step to regarding other corrupt practices of the clergy, as superstition in religion, which is criticised in the jest book by reprimanding the laity rather than the clergy. In *A, C, Mery Talys*, a friar visits a house, and the woman living there feigns that she is not at home and lets her children open the door instead. The friar then reads the children’s hands to see their destinies, which prompts their mother to come out and offer the friar good meat and drink so that she may hear the friar’s prophesies

¹²¹ Anonymous, *Tales and Quicke Answeres*, A1v.

¹²² Anonymous, *A, C, Mery Talys*, E4v.

concerning her children. The friar tells her that her children will become a beggar, a thief and a homicide “which she hearing, fell down in a swoon and took it grievously.”¹²³ The friar comforts the lady and tells her: “ye must make the eldest that shalbe a begge a frere, and the second that shalbe a thefe a man of law [&] the third that shalbe an homycyde, a physycyon.”¹²⁴ This jest is ambivalent in that it both celebrates the friar and criticises him. On the one hand, the jest exposes the friar’s trickery and illustrates how he abuses superstition in the laity for personal gain. On the other hand, the jest praises the friar for his trickery by rewarding him with food, which he would not have received otherwise.

It is somewhat surprising, however, that a jest like this in which a friar tricks his people does not directly criticise the clergy. On the one hand, this can be inspired by the logic of the jest book, in which the audience usually laugh *at* the innocents and *with* the jester or trickster. This is true in another jest in *Tales and Quicke Answeres* where the laughter stems from the surprise that the laity believes a corrupt friar, and is not directed towards the tricking friar. In this jest, a friar sells scrolls against the plague, which the people are told to hang around their neck unopened for the next fifteen days to protect them from the illness. When the “foolish people” open the scrolls after fifteen days, the scrolls read in Italian: “Woman, if thou spynne, and thy spyndell falle away, when thou stoupest to reache for him, holde thyne arse close.”¹²⁵ The moral of the jest focuses mainly on the foolishness of the people who bought the scrolls, calling on their good judgement to not trust any person they meet as “all is not gospel that such wanderers-about say.”¹²⁶ Similarly to the jest mentioned above, this jest does not judge the friar nor hold him accountable for his actions as he has already left town before the people open their scrolls. Instead, the laughter is directed at the people who were tricked. By directing the laughter to the people who fell for the trickery, the jest book warns readers of corrupt clergymen. The jest, in this case, creates a distinction between the foolish people who are tricked by the friar, and the readers who laugh at this jest and are therefore distanced from the group who becomes the object of the joke.

Furthermore, *A, C Mery Talys* includes three clerical jests with a supposed didactic intention, which distracts the reader from the criticism made towards the clergy. For instance, there is a jest in which a friar preaches Ave Maria on Our Lady day, and he is laughed at by his

¹²³ Anonymous, *A, C, Mery Talys*, C4v.

¹²⁴ Ibidem.

¹²⁵ Anonymous, *Tales and Quicke Answeres*, D2r.

¹²⁶ Ibidem, D2r.

parishioners for delivering the sermon “in such fond rhyme.”¹²⁷ The friar delivers Ave Maria in the vernacular, and the moral of the jest does not only focus on the priest’s rhetoric but emphasises at the end that “they that be unlearned in the Latin tongue may know the sentence of the Ave Maria.”¹²⁸ Something similar happens in the two jests immediately following “of the curate that preached the Articles of the Creed,” and “of the friar that preached the Ten Commandments,” which respectively teach the laity presented in the jest and the readers of the book the twelve articles of faith and the ten commandments as well as the seven deadly sins.¹²⁹ Holcomb wonders whether the makers of the jest books added didactic tags to make the educational content of the jest explicit or, instead, to counterbalance the jest’s subversion.¹³⁰ Holcomb’s second argument sounds plausible. While this thesis assumes that the jests are not subversive, jests are ambivalent and therefore remain open to interpretation. In these specific examples, the didactic quality distracts the readers from the inability of the clergy to preach convincingly and directs the attention to vernacular Scripture. In this case, the didactic moral tag adds an exciting dimension to the jest book as a medium of reform. By adding the didactic tag, the jests do not only argue for reform by the subjects they touch upon but at the same time, they become a vehicle which explains Scripture in the vernacular, focussing on the unavailability of Scripture for people who do not know Latin. Additionally, these jests do not represent a false or unlearned cleric, but instead, represent the inability of the laity to learn. Therefore, in again criticising the laity rather than the clergy, the jest books additionally divert the attention from criticism which might have been uttered against the clergy throughout popular as well as scholarly culture to such an extent that it praises the clergy.

In a similar fashion, the collections of detached jests still include jests of a lecherous nature. However, the sexual nature is taken away from the clergy and instead portrayed on the women they encounter. In her research on early modern chapbooks, Margaret Spufford argues that these books portray women as positive towards love-making: “women enjoyed their sexuality and were expected to enjoy it.”¹³¹ Whereas this observation can in no way comment on actual early modern women, the jest books portray women in a similar way in those particular jests which also include clergymen. In *A, C, Mery Talys*, a friar warns a maid washing her clothes in the

¹²⁷ Anonymous, *A, C Mery Talys*, D1r.

¹²⁸ Ibidem, D2v.

¹²⁹ Ibidem, D2v – D2r.

¹³⁰ Holcomb, “A Man in a Painted Garment,” 430.

¹³¹ Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and Its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1982), 63 – 64.

river that her smock is in between her buttocks: “take hede for Bayard bytys on the brydyll!” to which the maid responds: “he doth but wipe hys mouth and weenyth ye wyll come [&] kiss hym.”¹³² The jest compares the woman to an animal and emphasises her sexual nature in contrast to the friar, whose only role in this jest is to warn the woman, as he does not act upon the maiden’s initiation. The moral tag expresses the idea that sexual or lecherous behaviour is unwanted by this woman, and women in general, as it states the often recurring phrase: “a womans answer is neuer to seke.”¹³³ Ian Munro explains this moral as either providing the woman with the agency of the jester in the meaning “a woman never needs to seek for an answer” or as the opposite and taking the agency away from the female when the moral is read as “a man should never seek a woman’s answer.”¹³⁴ Either way, the woman is the winner of the jest, but at the same time, she serves as the sexual character to take that connotation away from the friar.

In other jests of a sexual nature which include lascivious or lecherous clerical male members, the clergy does not become the object of the joke, and the jests do not severely mock nor attack the clergy. Instead, their actions only receive subtle laughter from the audience presented in the jests and therefore presumably the readers of the jest book. In one of the most spectacular jets in *Tales and Quicke Answers*, “of the fryer that confessed the woman,” a woman feigns sickness in order for a friar to come into her room under the guise of confession to lay with her. The woman’s suspicious and jealous husband enters the room and sees that he friar left behind his breeches when he hurried outside. The man goes to complain at the convent that the friar is “an advouterer,” but the warden explains that the breeches belongs to Saint Francis, “an holy relyke, that his brother caryed thither for the womans helth” and therefore the friars come to fetch the breeches in a holy procession.¹³⁵ The people in the streets admire and kiss the breeches while the friar does not return to the jest after his escapes from the woman’s bed and consequently, he is neither blamed nor punished. As the friar does not return to the jest, the focus is no longer on him as blasphemous adulterer and sinner but instead the focus shifts to the cuckold who is ridiculed together with the supposed superstition and corruption of the Catholic Church. The friar is portrayed as an inherent part of this corruption, but the jest does not mean to criticise the Church directly. The moral tag of this jest adds a fascinating layer as it states that

¹³² Anonymous, *A, C, Mery Tahs*, B3v.

¹³³ Ibidem.

¹³⁴ Ian Munro, *Essential Works for the Study of Early Modern Women: Series III, Part Two, Vol. 8: ‘A womans answer is neuer to seke’: Early Modern jestbooks, 1526 – 1635* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), xvi.

¹³⁵ Anonymous, *Tales and Quicke Answers*, I4v.

ambassadors of the city later complained of this procession to the Holy See. Therefore, whereas the jest first ridicules Catholic saints, relics and procession, the jest also includes that the Church disapproves of this act and that this was certainly not the custom.

Finally, to illustrate both the influence and function of humanism on the sixteenth-century jest book, it is helpful to take a look at *Howleglas*, which was compiled on the continent and adapted from earlier sources and does not address reform of the clergy in any way. *Howleglas* mainly depicts the clergy as an amiable friend of the jester, who throughout the jest book befriends various priests, a bishop and even the Pope on his adventures. Howleglas befriends the bishop of Bremen with whom he goes to a market where Howleglas tricks the bishop by making a woman destroy all the earthen pots she sells. The bishop is pleased with Howleglas's trick and afterwards pulls the same jest in the company of some lords, whom he tricks into giving him their oxen. Whereas the jest depicts the bishop as a jester and trickster, the lords do not hold the bishop accountable, because he is their "Lord and master," adding an inviolable quality to the bishop as a jester.¹³⁶ In another jest, Howleglas attempts to trick a man into giving him a piece of green cloth without having to pay for it. Howleglas argues that the cloth is blue and they agree that if the cloth is indeed blue, then Howleglas wins the wager and thus the piece of cloth. A priest walks by and is asked to be the judge. Surprisingly, the priest answers that the cloth is indeed blue. The man naturally disagrees with the answer, but he will have to be at peace with the answer: "for ye be three false men. But sithen you be a priest, I must believe you."¹³⁷ Even though the priest lies, the man believes him. Therefore, the jest book contrasts his behaviour with his jesting presentation and reputation as honest and neutral, which creates the priest's inviolable qualities.

It is striking that whereas the difference in treatment between the secular and religious clergy disappears in *A, C Mery Talys* and *Tales and Quicke Answers*, which treat the secular and religious clergy rather similar, the distinction remains visible in *Howleglas*. Towards the end of the jest book, Howleglas aspires to become a monk. The abbot instructs Howleglas to count every monk that comes down to matins every morning. To make his job easier and quicker, Howleglas removes part of the stairs, as a result of which, the monks all follow each other falling down the stairs. As in the singular jests, the jest which is concerned with the religious clergy does not focus on any religious issues. Whereas the punishment of the monks was still somewhat justified in the singular jests because of the clerics' blasphemous behaviour, Howleglas does not provide a

¹³⁶ Anonymous, "Howleglas," 226.

¹³⁷ *Ibidem*, 213.

reason for his harsh treatment of the monks. Therefore, the jest is most likely adapted from earlier, possibly medieval, jests about monks which remain popular throughout the sixteenth century and probably incited laughter for early moderns as they were familiar with other anti-monastic jests.

Conclusion

In sum, the merry jests and jest books published in the period between 1510 and 1534 manifest various alterations in the representation and function of the clergy in jocular literature. Whereas the early singular jests portray the religious clergy as lecherous, greedy and worldly stereotypes inspired by medieval anti-fraternal and anti-monastic satires, the only singular jest about the religious clergy approaches the cleric in a more friendly tone. This friendly tone is also found in the collections of detached jests of this period, which present the religious and secular clergy where early modern readers would expect to see them, preaching in the church or taking confession. A new sentiment of the collections of detached jests is that they echo proto-Protestant sentiments which seem to be influenced by the Christian humanism of its collectors. As a result, the use of Latin, veneration of saints, the selling of indulgences and preaching and education become essential subjects of the clerical jests. These jests are not subversive, derisive or anti-clerical, as the jest books do not express any harm against the clerical members and their religious practices. Instead, the jests offer criticism from a reformist perspective, not denouncing Catholicism but focussing on the misconducts in the Church and how they can be altered. In doing so, the jest book not only criticises the clergy, but often reprimands the laity, by which they illustrate the superstition of laypeople to the readers of the jest book. In this regard, the jest book differs from the polemical humanist writings of the time, and consequently, becomes a vehicle for Christian humanism which is available and appropriate for the broad audience of English popular culture.

Chapter 3:

“Accordinge to the maner that then was”: Comical Clerics and Jestings about Clerics in a Catholic Setting (1555 – 1585)

Twenty-five years have passed between the first publication of *Tales and Quicke Answers* in 1532 and the first publication of *The Sackfull of Newes* in 1557. The years in between saw many changes with regard to politics and religion in England, but surprisingly, no jest books appeared apart from reprints of *The Friar and the Boy* in 1545, *A, C Mery Talys* in 1548 and *Howleglas* in 1555. It is unclear whether evidence of jest books published between 1532 and 1557 did not survive or that, in fact, no jest books were published in this period. In an attempt to explain the break in jest book publishing, Linda Woodbridge touches upon the fact that both John Rastell and Wynkyn de Worde, popular printers of jest books, died in 1533 and 1535, right at the end of the first phase of jest book publishing.¹³⁸ With regards to clerical jests, in particular, there might be another explanation. The previous chapter has argued that the early modern jest book issued reform of Catholicism in England. This reform was innocent, as it did not deride clerical members or apply subversive types of humour which were present in the polemical works by contemporary humanists and others. Additionally, the authors did not seek to replace Catholicism with Protestantism and distinguished themselves from the polemical religious debate. Therefore, the medium was perhaps not suitable to comment on clerical reform during the years of Edward's Protestant reign and Mary's Catholic restoration because readers might interpret the jests as politically charged.

The second phase of jest book publishing is quite similar to the first phase as it starts off with some familiar titles: *Howleglas* (1555 and 1560), *How the Plowman learned his Paternoster* (1560), *Dane Hew* (1560) and the *Friar and the Boy* (1568 - 69). Additionally, new jest book titles published during this period are mainly collections of detached jests, namely: *Sackfull of Newes* (1557), *Merie Tales of the Mad Men of Gotham* (1565), *The first and best part of Scoggin's jests* (1565 - 66), *Mery Tales newly imprinted and made by master Skelton* (1567), the second edition of *Tales and Quicke Answers* under the new name *Mery Tales*, *Wittie Questions and Quicke Answers* (1567), *The Schoolemaster or Table of Philosophie, the fourth book* (1567 and 1583) and *The Mirrour of Mirth* (1583). Whereas this second phase of jest book publishing spans thirty years, the majority of jest books, and especially the jest books analysed in this thesis, were published during the middle years of the 1560s.

¹³⁸ Woodbridge, *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature*, 285.

This chapter discerns three main themes in the second phase of jest book publishing. Firstly, this chapter will illustrate how jests use clerical representations to comment on Catholic hierarchy but also keep this same hierarchy in check. Secondly, where the influence of Christian humanism remains evidently visible, jests start to rely upon historical anecdotes of the clergy to strengthen the criticism made in the first period. Thirdly, this chapter argues that jest books created the comical cleric by which they commented on the Catholic clergy. The comical cleric could be laughed *with*, but also *at*, which undermines its agency and thereby diminishes the criticism of the jest books.

Historiography

The period between the publication of the final jest book of the first phase in 1532 and the first jest book published in the second phase in 1557 was a tumultuous one. Henry's break with the Church of Rome was followed by one of the most impactful events for the clergy: the dissolution of the monasteries between 1536 and 1541. According to G.W. Bernard, there were close to 900 religious houses in England, and about one adult male in fifty belonged to religious orders.¹³⁹ Bernard argues that Henry's visitors were biased when it came to sexual misconduct. Whereas about 70 per cent of monks did not confess to breaking the vows of chastity and almost 90 per cent denied sexual relations, the reports presented sexual misconduct as the main evidence against the monastic clergy.¹⁴⁰ There was a rebellion in the autumn of 1536 by clerics who believed "the divine service of Almighty God" suffered under the dissolution of the monasteries, but still, monasteries were completely abolished in England as of 1540.¹⁴¹ Satire became a leading tool during the dissolution of the monasteries, both for humanist scholars and the government. Erasmus "satirized monasteries as lax, as comfortably worldly, as wasteful of scarce resources, and as superstitious" and Sophie Murray illustrates how Henry VIII's government applied satire to mock misbehaviour by friars and monks.¹⁴² Erasmian views on monastic life heavily influenced the satire applied by the latter.¹⁴³

As suggested in the previous chapter, various scholars regard religion under Henry VIII as a form of Catholicism, which denied the authority of the Pope. However, when Edward VI

¹³⁹ G.W. Bernard, "The Dissolution of the Monasteries," *History* 96, no. 324 (2011): 390.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 397 - 98.

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 402, 404. Bernard does note a few exceptions: "the seven monasteries associated with cathedrals, and six Benedictine houses, notably Westminster Abbey, which were transformed into secular cathedrals, and some fifty monastic churches which were turned into parish churches," 404.

¹⁴² *Ibidem*, 393, 397.

¹⁴³ *Ibidem*. See also: Sophie Murray, "Anti-Monastic Satire."

ascended the throne in 1547, the English Church became more reformed and perhaps even Protestant under Edward's advisers, his Protestant uncle Edward Seymour and the Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer.¹⁴⁴ The first year of Edward's reign already saw the promotion of iconoclasm and the abolishment of both old heresy laws and chantries, but one of the most important alterations to the English Church during Edward's reign is arguably the Prayer Book in English in 1549 and its second "far more radical" edition in 1552.¹⁴⁵ A major uprising in West-England organised by the evangelical clergy criticised the Prayer Book and disapproved of the rapid religious innovations. At the same time, however, the clergy in South and East England lauded the new religion with popular praise.¹⁴⁶

The Prayer Book of 1552 included prayers and psalms in the vernacular and, among others, forbade the use of symbols, and abolished those practices which had "turned to vanitie and superstition."¹⁴⁷ However, the Prayer Book did not enjoy a long success. In 1555, Edward fell ill and Mary I ascended the throne.¹⁴⁸ Mary re-established Roman Catholicism in England and reverted the changes put forward by the Prayer Book. Whereas Mary is often remembered as Bloody Mary because of her violent persecutions of Protestants and other assumed "heretics," scholars as Christopher Haigh regard her Catholic restoration to be a success, as many English people welcomed the return of Latin liturgy and traditional worship.¹⁴⁹ During Mary's reign, the focus redirected towards the clergy under Archbishop Reginald Pole, who regarded the clergy as the main evil in the religious turmoil of the time, as he believed it was their ignorance which had inspired heresy.¹⁵⁰ Pole planned to reform the clergy through schooling, and he enforced high standards to see to it that properly educated men were schooled to become clerical members who were to be "pious, ascetic, and concerned for the poor."¹⁵¹ While Pole focused on reforming the clergy, Mary attempted to re-endow them, but neither succeeded. The two were successful,

¹⁴⁴ Brett Usher, "New Wine into Old Bottles: The Doctrine and Structure of the Elizabethan Church," in *The Elizabethan World*, ed. Susan Doran and Norman Jones (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 204.

¹⁴⁵ Diarmaid MacCulloch, "The Change of Religion," in *The Sixteenth Century*, ed. Patrick Collinson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 93.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 93.

¹⁴⁷ Church of England, *The Booke of common prayer and administracion of the Sacramentes, and other rites and Ceremonies in the Church of Englande* (London, 1552), A3v.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 94.

¹⁴⁹ Christopher Haigh, *England's Reformations*, 236 & Diarmaid MacCulloch, "The Change of Religion," 95.

¹⁵⁰ Christopher Haigh, *England's Reformations*, 225.

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

however, in their movement against married clerics, mostly because of support from the laity who were critical of the married clergy, as also comes forward throughout the jest books.¹⁵²

Religion changes again under Elizabeth I and the Elizabethan Religious Settlement. Diarmaid MacCulloch's refers to religion under Elizabeth as a "third way," a form of religion and government which neither adheres to Lutheran ideas nor abides by the rule of the Pope, but contains elements of both and was practically a restoration of the Edwardian Church of the autumn of 1552.¹⁵³ The Prayer Book of 1552 was restored, but with a slight alteration that the chasuble was again left out, as in the 1549 edition.¹⁵⁴ According to MacCulloch, whereas its constant change was a distinct characteristic of the Edwardian Reformation, the Elizabethan Church was rather static, as it returned to the Church of 1552 and made no further alterations.¹⁵⁵

It should not come as a surprise that the first generation of Elizabethan clerics was rather divided and diverse. In an attempt to control the clergy, Elizabeth I urged clerical members to swear an Oath of Alliance to her as part of the 1559 Act of Supremacy, by which Elizabeth became the Supreme Governor of the Church of England.¹⁵⁶ The scholarly evaluation of the position of the clergy in this period might be just as diverse. John Craig argues that the Elizabethan clergy played an enormous role in the establishment of the new religion as well as in the life's of parishioners, the relevance of which, according to Craig, "is hard to overstate."¹⁵⁷ Craig argues that the Reformation improved literacy amongst the clergy as well as clerical standards, whereas Haigh states that many clerical members denied subscription to the Supremacy, Prayer Book and Injunctions because of their Catholic preferences.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, Haigh argues that many priests were "demoralized and confused by change" which resulted in neglect in the parish churches, where prayer became rare and prayer books were absent.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵² Ibidem, 226 - 227.

¹⁵³ Diarmaid MacCulloch, "The Latitude of the Church of England," *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England* ed, Peter Lake and Kenneth Fincham (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2006), 41, 45 – 46.

¹⁵⁴ Ibidem, 46.

¹⁵⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁶ Usher, "New Wine into Old Bottles," 206 & Robert Bucholz and Newton Key, *Early Modern England: 1458 – 1714* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2004), 118.

¹⁵⁷ John Craig, "Parish Religion," in *The Elizabethan World*, ed. Susan Doran and Norman Jones (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 229.

¹⁵⁸ Haigh, *England's Reformations*, 243.

¹⁵⁹ Ibidem, 250.

Catholic Differences and Continuation in Jest Books

Despite these many religious changes in early modern religion, the jest books published in this second phase of jest book publishing are all set in a Catholic past. In this Catholic past, the clergy still plays an enormous role, and every jest book includes multiple priests, parsons, bishops or friars and sometimes even higher clerics as deacons, archdeacons, archbishops and Popes. The latter group is especially visible in the fourth book of Thomas Twyne's *The schoolemaster, or teacher of table philosophie ...* (1567) which consists of "honest Iestes, delectable deuises and pleasaunt purposes to be vsed among companie, for delight and recreation at all times" and distinguishes forty-two different chapters, each of which centres around a specific type of character, fifteen of which are about clerics.¹⁶⁰ Even though *The Schoolemaster* has circulated for a long time in various languages, markers are added to the jest book, which imply its place in time. For instance, in one of the jests, a preacher pronounces absolution in a sermon: "accordinge to the maner that then was."¹⁶¹ Markers of time and, more specifically, the past, stress that the jests were not merely repeated and remained popular in a similar fashion. Instead, the jests gained new nostalgic meanings as they reminisced about the Catholic past.¹⁶² Lieke Stelling argues that from the 1540s onwards, after the dissolution of the monasteries, anti-monastic jests were enjoyed for their sentimental value as they lost their political significance.¹⁶³ A similar sentiment is found in the following jests, where not only anti-monastic jests were enjoyed for their sentimental value, but jests about the secular Catholic clergy as well.

Whereas, as will be argued in the following chapter, the aspect of nostalgia in the jest book could result in the appropriation of anti-clerical jests, the opposite happens in *The Schoolemaster*, where the jests are not anti-clerical, but instead, gentle, friendly and pleasant, as the jokes mainly focus on clerical hierarchy instead of clerical misconduct. For example, the chapter "of Popes and their mery Iestes" does not include jests in which the clergy tricks, deceives or receives criticism, but rather, the chapter presents witticisms and factual matters which might as well be found in the third book of *The Schoolemaster* which presents appropriate sayings to share during dinner. Additionally, chapter 32 of the book is concerned with abbots, and only includes

¹⁶⁰ T[homas] T[wyne], *The Schoolemaster, or teacher of table philosophie ...* (London: Thomas Turswell, 1567), A2v.

¹⁶¹ *Ibidem*, O2r – O2v.

¹⁶² Lieke Stelling touches upon the effect of nostalgia in the jest books *Tarltons Newest out of Purgatorie* and *The Cobler of Caunterburie* in "Leaving their Humours to the Word Mongers of Mallice!: Mocking Polemic in *Tarltons Newes Out of Purgatorie* (1590) and Two Contemporary Responses," *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, 154 (2018): 140 – 154.

¹⁶³ *Ibidem*, 150.

kind jests of abbots in which monks become the object. As monks are lower in the clerical hierarchy, the jesting is justified, and the abbot is subsequently respected as a jester.

Furthermore, there is a specific type of jest which is repeated throughout the fourth book in which clerics are promoted to a higher position after which they forget their origins and what they promised others when they were in a less fortunate position. An example of this is a jest in which a cardinal becomes Pope and neglects his former chaplain Michael, of whom he before said that “if euer God called him to greater dignitie, - hee would prefer him to his contentacion.”¹⁶⁴ When Michael comments on the Pope’s changing behaviour, the Pope remembers his promise and rewards Michael with a higher clerical position. In a similar tale, an archdeacon visits his former parish church where a man tells him that he has “married a poore wife, and now I know where I may haue a ritche one, is it lawful for mee to forsake the poor one, and to take the ritche?”¹⁶⁵ The archdeacon tells him that this is no option, to which the man responds that the archdeacon has done a similar thing by switching in the poor parish church for the function of archdeacon. In response, the man renounces his archdeaconry and returns to preach in his former parish church. These jests challenge the hierarchy of the Catholic Church but also keep the hierarchy in check. Whereas earlier jests and other collections challenged the hierarchy and consequently mocked clerics in a higher position, they are now provided with a voice but also with a choice, and they often express their regret and better their ways.

In the previous chapter, it was argued that women figured in clerical jests to revert the sexual nature of clerical members, as these jests present women as sexual beings, for which the women consequently become the object of the jest. In this phase of jest book publishing, however, nuns are put forward as the foremost sexual beings. Frances E. Dolan illustrates that jokes about nuns cut two ways: “they are always about Catholics *and* about women.”¹⁶⁶ Whereas Dolan’s article focuses on the seventeenth century, her analyses apply for a certain extent to the late sixteenth century. Dolan argues that the nun figures as a character through which people could explore their distrust of Catholicism, taking the fascination of what happens inside the cloisters to what happens inside Catholic minds. As Dolan illustrates: “like nuns, all Catholics are feared to be unable to think for themselves, witlessly obedient to those who do not deserve their

¹⁶⁴ Twyne, *The Schoolemaster*, Q1r.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, Q2r.

¹⁶⁶ Frances E. Dolan, “Why are Nuns Funny?” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (December 2007): 512.

subservience.”¹⁶⁷ In the early modern jest books, this is mainly illustrated through the nun’s sexual nature and the inability for nuns to keep their vows of celibacy.

Whereas many jests about nuns are cruel and harsh, the jest books also comment on the nun’s inability to keep her vows of chastity in a friendly way. In its chapter on nuns, *The Schoolemaster* includes a friendly jest about a nun, in which a friar dines in a nunnery and asks for vinegar, an apparent wordplay on virgin, which the nuns do not have: “That is maruell, quod the Friar, beyng so many broken vessels in the house.”¹⁶⁸ This friendly tone is also applied in *Mery Tales, Wittie Questions and Quicke Answers* (1567) in which a nun is pregnant after she is raped by a friar.¹⁶⁹ The Abbess tells the nun that she would have been excused if she had screamed, to which the nun answers: “so woulde I haue doone, had it not beene in our Dortour where to crye is contrary to our Religion.”¹⁷⁰ Whereas the jest from *The Schoolemaster* merely mocks the nun’s, and therefore women’s, sexual nature in a friendly tone, the jest in *Mery Tales*, both criticises the nun’s sexual nature as well as the absurdity of Catholic rules about celibacy. With Dolan’s analysis in mind, this jest therefore clearly touches upon the supposed inability of Catholics to think for themselves by opposing the Catholic sin of lechery with one simpler rule of the abbey.

Another jest in *The Schoolemaster*, on the other hand, is less friendly towards nuns when it introduces a custom the nuns have “when any of them were delliuered of childe,” implying that it was not abnormal for a nun to become pregnant in the monastery.¹⁷¹ The pregnant nuns are treated well by the other nuns in this particular monastery, as they receive presents and are bathed but, there is also a punishment at the end of the month when the nun “must come naked into the Chapterhouse before them all, and receyue three strypes at euery one of hir sisters hadnes with a Fore tayle.”¹⁷² Where other jest books have shown multiple variations of harsh corporal punishment of clerical members, the clerical jests in *The Schoolemaster* are all of a friendly and pleasant tone, as they mainly correct clerics who do not know their place. In this case, the jest is clearly gendered, as nuns supposedly deserve a harsher punishment than their male counterparts. Whereas it would seem that the jest is also heavily influenced by anti-monasticism, the jests about monks in *The Schoolemaster* are strikingly friendly, as the jesters treat monks as

¹⁶⁷ Ibidem, 525.

¹⁶⁸ Twyne, *The Schoolemaster*, R1v.

¹⁶⁹ I would like to stress that the friendly tone of the jest is illustrated in the nun’s response, I wish to emphasise that jokes about rape in any way, shape or form, should never be regarded as friendly or funny.

¹⁷⁰ Anonymous, *Mery Tales, Wittie Questions and Quicke Answers* (London: H. Wykes, 1567), H3v.

¹⁷¹ Twyne, *The Schoolemaster*, R1v.

¹⁷² Ibidem, R1v.

equals, and do not deride them. It is very telling that this jest about nuns is included in *The Schoolemaster*, as the work presents itself as a conduct book, and the jests it includes are considered as suitable to share among friends during dinner or other gatherings. It is striking that in this context, the nun is put forward as a figure by which to ridicule Catholicism, whereas the higher clergy are not held accountable for causing the elements that are mocked in the jests.

The previous jest illustrates that the jests could also apply nostalgia to voice negative criticism of clerics and Catholicism. *The Sackfull of News* (1557), however, applies nostalgia as a way to voice criticism of the clergy without being too direct about it. The first jest in the collection, a miller who knows the priest to have a concubine disturbs the priest's sermon and proclaims: "What foolish Priest, ... thou makest much babling in the Pulpit and all thy wit is not worth a straw: for I have an asse that is far wiser than thou art..."¹⁷³ The priest is offended and complains to the bishop, where the miller elaborates that his donkey will never stumble into the same hole twice, "but this Priest hath had a maid this seven years and more, which he lyeth withall, and fleth oft in her hole, and yet he cannot beware of it."¹⁷⁴ Whereas in earlier collections, priests were only suspected of having a sexual or romantic relationship and were therefore never punished, the bishop in this jest excuses the miller but takes away the priest's priesthood. It is possible that the jest comments on the fact that priests were allowed to marry under Edward VI, a privilege that Mary I later reverted and was not reinstated by Elizabeth I.¹⁷⁵ Whereas the jest is set in a Catholic past, the jest was still relevant to readers in the 1560s, as a large part of the laity disapproved of clerical marriage.¹⁷⁶ By setting the jests in the past, criticism of married clergy was not too direct, but the jest book is able to make a critical point which is still relevant in the 1550s and 1560s.

The reciprocal relationship between laity and clergy seems to become of grave importance in the jests in *The Sackfull of News*. Whereas the miller derides the priest in the previous jest, another jest in this collection presents a priest who is invited to come and drink with a family after he has christened their baby. The priest "was quite foxed" after his drinking and merriments and leaves early, but because he is drunk, he falls asleep outside in a ditch with his feet in the water and with the moon shining in his face.¹⁷⁷ When the remainder of the party leave the

¹⁷³ Ibidem, 11.

¹⁷⁴ Ibidem, 14.

¹⁷⁵ Eric Josef Carlson, "Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation," *Journal of British Studies* 31, no 1 (January 1992): 1.

¹⁷⁶ Haigh, *England's Reformations*, 226 – 227.

¹⁷⁷ Anonymous, *The Sackfull of News*, 22.

alehouse, they pass by the priest and attempt to help him up to bring him home, when the priest says: “Do not meddle with me, for I lie very well, and will not stir hence before morning, but I pray lay some more cloathes on my feet and blow out the candle, and let me lie and take my rest.”¹⁷⁸ Similarly to the first jest, the priest does not act in a way he is supposed to. Whereas in the first jest, the miller was the winner of the jests for commenting on the priest’s blasphemous behaviour, the laughter is in this jest directed to the priest who also does not act in a way he is supposed to, but takes the upper hand with his incongruous remark. The parishioners forgive the priest and laugh with him, they do not scorn him for being drunk but laugh with him instead, presumably because of their friendly relationship.

Continuation of Christian Humanism

Christian humanist criticism as portrayed in *Tales and Quicke Answeres* also remained popular as this phase of jest book publishing saw a publication of its second version under the name *Merie Tales, Wittie Questions and Quicke Answers* in 1567. This edition expands on the criticism expressed in the first edition and adds jests which are relevant for the Elizabethan period. *Merie Tales* includes twenty-six new jests apart from the original 113 jests, presenting 139 jests in total. A substantial number of these added jests are in some way or another religious or comment upon religion, and twelve of the twenty-six jests include members of the clergy. Christian humanism, which, as argued in the previous chapter, is apparent in the earlier edition, regained popularity in the vernacular under Elizabeth I. In 1559, every parish church was ordered to have Erasmus’ *Paraphrases* on the Gospel, which was considered “necessarie and requisite for common prayer and administration of the Sacraments.”¹⁷⁹ Erasmus’ popularity is also vividly portrayed in the jest book, where at least six of the twelve clerical jests are directly taken from works by Erasmus. Therefore, this particular jest book is not merely a book for a pleasant pastime, but similarly to the earlier edition, an educative tool which disseminates humanist ideas in an accessible manner.

Mery Tales comments on the political side of religion in sixteenth-century England by referring to Henry VIII in two jests which feature “an uplandishe priest” who is “not the wysest nor the best learned.”¹⁸⁰ In the first jest, the priest preaches on charity and tells his parishioners that no man can rise to heaven without charity “except onely the kynges grace, God saue him.”¹⁸¹ In the following jest, the majesty’s commissioners are sent on visitation, and the priest tells them

¹⁷⁸ Ibidem, 22 - 23.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Craigh, “Parish Religion,” 227.

¹⁸⁰ Anonymous, *Mery Tales*, H4r.

¹⁸¹ Ibidem, H4r – H4v.

he spends his time reading the New Testament. The commissioner compliments him and asks him who made the New Testament, to which the priest answers: “That dyd ... kynge Henry the eyghte, God haue mercye vpon hys soule!”¹⁸² These jests stand out from the jesting collections as they do not comment on religious corruption or hypocrisy, but instead on corruption imposed by the government. Whereas the Reformist tendencies of the first edition might be connected to the Henrician Reformation by its readers, the jest book here takes a clear stance against it. Whereas the first edition criticised superstition and veneration of saints in both the laity and clergy, the jest book here mocks the clergy and Henry VIII. As a result of the Henrician Reformation, the priest in the jest book now venerates Henry in a similar way as saints were venerated before, because of the King’s powerful position as head of the English Church. Therefore, this jest in a way voices the discontent of early humanists with the Henrician Reformation, as it articulates the idea that the Reformation was not about Protestantism or fighting superstition, but instead about monarchical power. Additionally, the jests argue that this was not the way to combat religious superstition, as another form of superstition and abuse of power has filled the gap left by the Reformation.

Other striking additions to the second edition are four jests which are inspired by letters written by Erasmus in which he reprimands certain friars who have preached against him or made remarks about his writing.¹⁸³ Erasmus’ reputation as a great Catholic thinker understandably lifts a huge red flag here and one expects the jokes to be uttered against Erasmus, especially seeing the titles of the four jests: “Of the doctour that sayd, in Erasmus workes were heresies,” “Of the frier that preached at Paules crosse agaynst Erasmus,” “Of an other frier that taxed Erasmus for writyng Germana theologia,” “Of an other that inueighed agaynst the same Erasmus.”¹⁸⁴ The friars and doctors in these four jests, however, misinterpret or misunderstand the Erasmian works due to their little to no knowledge in Latin. As a result, they immediately dismiss the books as its style is “so high ... [the doctour] feared to fal into some heresy” or because “the holy Scripture ought not to be mingled with the eloquence of Tully, nor yet of Cicero,” by which the clerics and doctors are mocked and do not comment on the content intelligently.¹⁸⁵ The four jests share one moral tag which consequently turns the Erasmian mocking of the titles around as it refers to the “peuysshe preachers [that] haue been in this world ... lacking lerninge to iudge suche matters, thinke them selues well taught, when they be cleane

¹⁸² Ibidem, H4v.

¹⁸³ Vocht, *De Invloed van Erasmus op de Engelsche Toneelliteratuur*, 31 – 33, 45, 77.

¹⁸⁴ Anonymous, *Mery Tales*, H7r – H8r.

¹⁸⁵ Ibidem, H7v.

misledde.”¹⁸⁶ These four jests are more critical of faith and harsher in their treatment of the clergy than those in *Tales and Quick Answers*. Additionally, the jests do not return to a Catholic past for sentimental or nostalgic feelings but instead to criticise Catholics and their weak arguments against Erasmus.

This same sentiment of criticising the clergy for their behaviour in the church comes forward in the jests relating to Robert Caracciolo de Lecce, which are taken from Erasmus’ work on preaching, *Ecclesiastes*. Caracciolo was one of the most famous and celebrated fifteenth-century preachers who preached in rather extravagant, theatrical manners.¹⁸⁷ As the first chapter illustrated, Erasmus did not keep it a secret that he disapproved of theatrical or jesting ways of preaching, and his anecdotes of Caracciolo are included in “of the Italian friar that shoulde preach before the B. of Rome and his cardinals” and the final jest of the collection “What an Italian fryer dyd in his preachyng.”¹⁸⁸ In the first jest, Caracciolo enters the church crying out:

Phy on S. Peter! Phy on S. Paule! And with rauyng he spit now on the ryght side, and now on the left syde: and so, without more ado, shouyng through the preace, gat hym awaie, leauyng them all astonied: some thynkyng hym to bee fallen into a furie: other supposyng him to bee fallen into some heresy.¹⁸⁹

Afterwards, Caracciolo is allowed to explain himself and he states that he only did so because he saw the cardinals live such a luxurious life, whereas they should follow in the footsteps of the apostles in a poor and sober life. In Caracciolo’s logic, as he cannot criticise the cardinals, the apostles must have been mad, “turment[ing] them selves with watchynges, fastynges and other peynfull labours.”¹⁹⁰ In the other jest on Caracciolo, he takes off his friar’s coat in the pulpit and shows off a soldier’s uniform, presumably in order to take a stance against the Turks. Caracciolo is brought in front of the Cardinals to explain, and whereas he made a powerful sermon on defeating the Turks, he confesses that he had done it to impress a woman who would like to see him in a soldier’s garment. An interesting remark on how to interpret the effect of this jest comes

¹⁸⁶ Ibidem, H8r.

¹⁸⁷ Peter G. Bietenholz and Thomas B. Deutscher, ed., *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation* vol. 1 (A – E) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 265

¹⁸⁸ See: Desiderius Erasmus, *Spiritualia and Pastoralia: Exomologesis and Ecclesiastes*, ed. Alexander Dalzell, Frederick McGinness, Michael Heath and James L.P. Butrica, vol 67 – 68 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 812 – 813.

¹⁸⁹ Anonymous, *Mery Tales*, H6v.

¹⁹⁰ Ibidem, H7v.

from Erasmus himself, who in defence of his *In Praise of Folly* argues that he had not caused any offence in his work, as he had not named anyone personally.¹⁹¹ Even though this is a different work, Erasmus' comment provides an insight into what was regarded as harmful in early modern jesting. Perhaps the nostalgia softens the effect of the jest, as Caracciolo is no longer alive at the time the jest book was published, and presumably was not widely known in the popular culture of sixteenth-century England.

Whereas almost all the jests in this collection include a moral tag at the end, these two jests on Caracciolo do not. The lack of a moral tag raises the question of why these anecdotes are added to the collection as jests. In *Ecclesiastes*, the function of the anecdotes is to criticise a theatrical and over the top way of preaching, which is clear from its context in the book. In the context of the jest book, however, the anecdotes present funny stories of incongruous situations in a church, and it is not clear whether the audience laughs *with* Caracciolo as he makes a stance against the cardinals, or *at* Caracciolo for his extraordinary and worldly ways of preaching. In this case, the character of Caracciolo also represents a hypocrite paradox, as he comments on the worldliness of the clergy in the first jest, but exposes his own worldly and blasphemous pleasures in the second. As a result, the jest works in two ways, as people will laugh at Caracciolo's theatrical behaviour as well as his hypocritical standpoint.

The Paradox of Clerical Jestings

The paradox which the character of Caracciolo presents in *Mery Tales* manifests itself more clearly in *Merie Tales ... Made by Master Skelton* (1567) and *Scoggins Iests* (1565 - 66), through their representation of the comical cleric.¹⁹² This paradox is similar to that applied by Erasmus in his *Praise of Folly*, in which he elevates the narrator, Folly, to the position of a goddess, from which she speaks to an assembly of learned men to produce a "complex, puzzling and often-polemical discourse on contemporary society and religion."¹⁹³ In a similar vein, jests published in the second phase of jest book publishing elevate the corrupt, jesting, clerical member to a similar level as Folly, by which the cleric becomes a comical cleric. As the comical cleric comments on misconducts of the clergy, the jest book juxtaposes him with the other clergymen included in the

¹⁹¹ Anthony Grafton, "A Prelude to The Praise of Folly," *The Praise of Folly, Updated Edition* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012), xii.

¹⁹² The only existing editions of *Scoggin's Iests* stem from 1613 and 1626. However, the text of the 1626 edition matches with fragments surviving from an edition published in 1565 - 66 which is part of the Bagford Collection (Wilson, "The English Jest Books, 154). Therefore this thesis will regard *Scoggin's Iests* as published in this period around 1565.

¹⁹³ *Ibidem*, viii – ix.

jest book. *Merie Tales ... made by Master Skelton* and *Scoggins Iests* present the most prominent examples of the comical cleric in their representations of John Skelton as the Rector of Diss and the foolish scholar who is made priest with Scoggin's help. Both comical clerics in these jest books do not represent the perfect clerical member, but still, they comment on misconducts of other clerics whom they mock and punish, creating a paradoxical way of jesting. As with the earlier jest books included in both this and the previous chapter, the jests are set in a Catholic setting. Both the Catholic setting as well as the paradox of the clerical jester, make that the jests are again of a friendly tone which evokes memories of Catholicism rather than an attempt to mock or criticise the past faith.

The jests presented in *Scoggins Iests* and *Merie Tales* present the two comical clerics as unreligious, Scoggin's foolish priest more clearly than Skelton. In *Scoggins Iests*, the first jest already presents the scholar as a fool, as Scoggin remarks: "his scholler would neuer bee but a foole, and did apply him as well as he could to learning: but he that hath no wit, can neuer haue learning nor wisdom." ¹⁹⁴ Other authorities consequently affirm the scholar's foolishness in the next couple of jests. Firstly, the scholar fails to answer the deacon in Latin and secondly, the scholar does not know the answer to the simple riddle: "*Isaac* had two sons, *Esau* & *Iacob*, who was *Iacobs* Father?" ¹⁹⁵ Scoggin also states that the scholar "has no utterance," a striking feature for a priest in a time where preaching and the word of God were considered among the essential pillars of religion. ¹⁹⁶ The foolish scholar is nevertheless admitted as Priest in the diocese because he gives the ordinary money, which is why the moral tag reads: "Heere a man may see, that money is better then learning." ¹⁹⁷

The priest undermines his authority in these first jests, which acknowledge that he is not suitable for the position, and this trend continues when the scholar acts as a priest. Skelton's parishioners complain that the scholar never preaches. On Scoggin's advice, the scholar goes into the pulpit at Christmas day and asks both the clerk and the eldest parishioner the English translation of *Puer natus et nobis, filius datus est nobise, cuius imperium*, and they fail to translate the final two words. The scholar then proclaims:

This man hath dwelt in this Parish this many yeeres, and he cannot tell what *Cuius imperium* is. I haue not beene halfe a yeere among you, and you would haue me preach, I

¹⁹⁴ Anonymous, *Scoggins Iests*, 11.

¹⁹⁵ Ibidem, 15.

¹⁹⁶ Ibidem, 16 – 17.

¹⁹⁷ Ibidem, 14.

tell you all, by that time I haue beene in this Towne as long as this old man hath béene. I will preach, and tell you what *Cuius imperium* is.”¹⁹⁸

In this instance, it is not likely that the scholar engages in self-mockery, as the jest book portrays him as too foolish to achieve this kind of wit and sarcasm. Instead, the scholar makes a fool of himself in front of his parishioners, who are not afraid to confront him about it. A layman corrects the priest when the latter delivers the sermon *Requiem aeternam* on Easter day instead of the usual *Resurrexxi*: “you must neuer pray for God: but you must pray to God to send you some wit, or else you will die a foole.”¹⁹⁹ This jest is appropriated from jest no. 83 in *A, C Mery Talys* and a striking difference here is that in *A, C, Mery Talys*, the servant who misinforms the priest on what to preach is mocked as a fool, whereas now the priest becomes the object of mockery. The priest loses the inviolable nature which he gained in the first phase of jest book publishing, not because lay conceptions of the clergy have changed, but instead because the priest is a fool and fails to serve his parishioners.

Skelton’s reputation is similar to that of the foolish scholar, yet heavily influenced by Skelton’s reputation based on myths and histories which circulated about him and the poems he wrote during his lifetime. Skelton presents himself as the perfect choice to represent the paradox of the clerical jester to the collectors of *Merie Tales*. Thomas Betteridge speaks of a “tension ... between Skelton the poet – someone who seems to welcome a quarrel, and whose poetry is often bawdy, critical and self-regarding – and Skelton as the parish priest.”²⁰⁰ The jest book also presents Skelton as “bawdy,” but this time not in his role as a poet, which the jest book does not touch upon, but as a jester, which is in juxtaposition with his position as a priest. Betteridge describes Skelton’s religion as “compromised,” as the poet mostly operated in secular spheres and had little regard for Scripture, but at the same time, he criticised corruption and religious failure in his poems, where he deployed his clerical status to strengthen his critique.²⁰¹ Whereas Skelton uttered various forms of criticism of the clergy in his poems, especially against Cardinal Wolsey, he was not one to argue for reform, as he did not present an ideal of a reformed or functioning Christian community.²⁰² Moreover, Skelton was rather anti-Protestant, a characteristic which the jest book includes when Skelton tells a man that in the forty days between his death

¹⁹⁸ Ibidem, 18 - 19.

¹⁹⁹ Ibidem, 21.

²⁰⁰ Thomas Betteridge, “Religion,” in *A Critical Companion to John Skelton*, ed. Sebastian Sobocki and John Scattergood (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2018), 35 – 36.

²⁰¹ Ibidem, 26.

²⁰² Ibidem, 35.

and ascension, Christ “was very busy in the woods among his laborres that did make faggots to burn heretics.”²⁰³ Helen Cooper illustrates that this jest portrays similar sentiments as Skelton’s anti-Reformist poetry.²⁰⁴ Nevertheless, as the jest book was published after the reign of Mary I, this particular jest could also remind early modern readers of Mary’s persecution of Protestants, by which it comments on Catholicism rather than Protestantism.

Like in his poetry, Skelton uses his clerical position to voice criticism of religion, which is in this case directed at the laity. Skelton delivers a sermon after he receives complaints from his parishioners for keeping a mistress. Skelton consequently attacks his parishioners from the pulpit: “‘You be, you be.’ And what be you? ... I saye, that you bee a sorte of knave, yea, and a man might saye worse then knaues.”²⁰⁵ Skelton admits to the parish that he keeps a concubine and introduces both her and their child to the parish. Skelton states that both the woman and their child are “as fayre as is the beste of all yours” and that there is, therefore, no reason to complain about him, as he did not beget a “monstrous beast.”²⁰⁶ Skelton actually kept a concubine, but he supposedly was not as open about it as he is in the jest book. John Bale writes in his biography of Skelton from 1557 that “he kept the woman (who he had secretly married for fear of Antichrist) under the title of concubine.”²⁰⁷ As the comical version of Skelton opens up about this concubine, his criticism and abuse of the other clerics presented in the remainder of the jest book are taken less seriously. Taking into regard the enthusiasm in the early modern period against clerical marriage, early modern readers probably would not approve of Skelton’s wife and therefore regard him as a hypocrite.

Therefore, whereas the criticism which Skelton voiced in his poetry was taken seriously by its readers, Skelton’s mocking of the clerics in the jest book is not. In one of the only two jests in which Skelton preaches, Skelton enters the pulpit is to mock a friar limitor who has come to preach in Skelton’s parish against his will. Skelton declares: “here is a wonderful a thing as ever was seen ... contrary to all nature, a calf hath begotten a bull. For this friar, being a calf, hat gotten a bull of the Bishop of Rome.”²⁰⁸ Whereas Skelton speaks out against the friar, he offers

²⁰³ Anonymous, *Merie Tales Newly Imprinted and made by Master Skelton* (London, Thomas Colwell, 1567), A4v.

²⁰⁴ Helen Cooper, “Reception and Afterlife,” in *A Critical Companion to John Skelton*, ed. Sebastian Sobcecki and John Scattergood (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2018), 201.

²⁰⁵ Anonymous, *Merie Tales*, A8v.

²⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, B1r.

²⁰⁷ John Bale, “John Bale on the Life of Skelton 1557,” in *Skelton: The Critical Heritage*, ed. A.S.G. Edwards (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), 55.

²⁰⁸ Anonymous, *Merie Tales*, B3v.

no criticism of his practice but merely mocks him. In an even more bawdy fashion, another jest presents Skelton as he “shite[s] upon the freres navel and bellye,” to gain a bed for himself in an inn.²⁰⁹ In the long jest “How Master Skelton’s miller deceived him may times by playing the thief, and how he was pardoned by Master Skelton, after the stealing away of a priest out of his bed at midnight,” Skelton orders a miller to “steale master parson out of hys bed, at midnight, that he shall not know where he is become.”²¹⁰ The miller lures the priest to the church in the middle of the night, where he meets the priest and tells him that he is Saint Peter, who has come down to bring the priest to heaven. The priest is treated harshly in this jest, as the miller puts him in a sack, throws him over the church stile, down a hill, and finally over a threshold, after which the miller hangs the sack with the priest in it from his chimney. Apart from this harsh treatment of the Catholic priest, this jest reaffirms the little concern Skelton holds for his parishioners. When the parishioners send the sexton to ask Skelton where their priest is, Skelton is said to “marueyled at that, and bethought hym of the crafty doying of the miller.”²¹¹

Skelton’s comical representation raises some questions which also apply to Scoggin’s foolish scholar: does the comical cleric mock other clerics who resemble actual clerics, or, are clerics merely mocked innocently, as the agency of the jester becomes questionable? Another possibility is that the jests present a post hoc attempt at (self-)mockery, in which clerical members become a caricature of themselves as they mock certain types of preachers, whereby the jest book applauds others. The latter is more likely for Skelton than for Scoggin’s foolish scholar. Skelton’s reputation were well-known to early modern readers, and it undoubtedly influenced their reading of *Merie Tales ... made by Master Skelton*. However, as priests become comical character, their characters mock Catholicism both by their own derisive jests against other clergymen as well as by their characters themselves, as the jest book portrays them as worldly and unlearned, with more concern for the secular world than Scripture. As a result however, the jests also gain a friendly tone, as the jesters lack the agency to mock other clerics and the jests can be enjoyed for their nostalgic insights into the chaotic world of Catholicism.

An essential difference between the two jest books, however, is that in *Scoggin’s Iests*, the title-character regains the central position in the jest book and it is therefore not the comical cleric who mocks or jests with other clerics. This change in character results in two possible interpretations and effects. Either the juxtaposition, as is clearly established in *Merie Tales* between

²⁰⁹ Ibidem, B4v.

²¹⁰ Ibidem, C5v.

²¹¹ Ibidem, D1r.

the two types of clerics, is apparent as a result of the contrast between the foolish scholar and the later clerics. Alternatively, the clerical jests which follow the ones about the foolish scholar are not interpreted as directed against the actual clergy as the clerical image which prevails in this jest book is that of the foolish cleric. The latter is less likely since the remainder of jests do not include comments on preaching, education or Scripture, which were the main subject of the jests surrounding the foolish scholar, but instead, focus on clerics portrayed as greedy. In “How Scoggin prayed to a Roode for an Hundred French crowns,” the title-character tricks the parson who gives him one crown instead of the hundred French crowns which Scoggin asked for, which the parson later regrets although Scoggin presents himself as a poor person. Similarly, in “How Scoggin overtook a Priest, and kept company with him, and how he and the priest prayed for money,” Scoggin provides the priest with food and drink, but the jester does not receive any money in return, after which he tricks the priest and steals his money. Both clerics are again clearly Catholic and mocked for their greed. The focus on the clerics’ greed might refer back to the beginning of the jest book when the scholar became a priest because he paid them money. In that case, the readers learn throughout the jest book that money is indeed better than learning, by which greed becomes an inherent part of the mocking and hypocrisy of Catholic clerics in this jest book. Whereas *Scoggins Iests* does not present anti-clerical representations, the jest book instead uses both the representations of the comical cleric and the actual clerics to expose the clergy and Catholicism in general as corrupt and hypocrite.

Conclusion

With England moving towards Protestantism again during the second phase of jest book publishing (1555 – 1585), the jest books increasingly set their clerical jests in a Catholic past. Jest books of a nostalgic nature usually do not comment on the exact moment of the Catholic past. The jests in *Mery Tales*, *Wittie Questions and Quick Answers*, on the other hand, include apparent markers of time and place their jests during the reign of Henry VIII and the fifteenth century. Whereas, the jests in *Mery Tales* do not differ much from Catholic jests as those presented in *The Schoolemaster of Philosophie* with their pleasant and friendly tone, their remarks gain political flavours with Elizabeth I on the throne. In *Merie Jestes ... Made by Master Skelton* and *Scoggins Iests* on the other hand, the creation of the comical cleric diminishes the jesters’ agency, and the clerical criticism and mockery becomes less harsh and rude as a result. Overall, except for *Mery Tales*, the jest books of this second phase mainly return to the positive aspects of Catholicism and the merry England it was connotated with, in which priests are laughed at in a pleasantly mocking way. The jests made about nuns during this period, however, show a more hostile view of Catholicism, as the jests

mock nuns, and therefore Catholics and women, for their sexual nature and inability to think for themselves. The jest books present this behaviour as deserving of mockery and punishment, which has a gendered aspect to it. At the same time, these jests also illustrate that the religious clergy remains an object of criticism and ridicule, mainly for the inability to keep their vows. The following chapter will demonstrate how the sentiment expressed in the jests about nuns become more prevalent and pertain to the Catholic clergy in general, as jest books once again embrace the anti-clericalism expressed in the early singular jests before they become more and more secular at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Chapter 4:

Clerical Jest during the Scurrilous Writing of the Nasty Nineties and the Secular Turn (1590 – 1609)

The third and final phase of jest book publishing (1590 – 1609) witnesses the introduction of what Schulz has coined the comic novella, a type of jest book which tells stories as well as jokes and is greatly indebted to works as Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*.²¹² This chapter will discuss the three comic novellas published during this period, *Tarltons Newes out of Purgatorie* (1590), *The Cobler of Caunterburie* (1592) and *Dobsons Drie Bobbes: Sonne and Heire to Skoggin, full of mirth and delightful recreation* (1607) as well as the collections of detached jests, *Jack of Dover* (1604), *Pasquil's Jestes* (1604), *Pleasant Conceits of Old Hobson* (1607) and *Iests to make you merie* (1607). Whereas clerics still play a significant role in the comical novellas, they are less present in the collections of detached jests, in which they used to take a prominent place, as the jests in these collections become more secular.

Similarly to the jests in the previous phase of jest book publishing, the works published in this final phase continue the return to a Catholic past. Whereas various critics touch upon the friendly, pleasant, tongue-in-cheek tone of both *Tarltons Newes* and *Cobler of Caunterburie*, the two works are significantly harsher towards the clergy than the earlier jest books discussed in this thesis. Contrary to the earlier collections of detached jests, the two comic novellas present anti-clerical and anti-Catholic tales which deride and harshly punish clerics and subsequently mock their Catholic traditions. This chapter sets out to argue that Catholic clerics were open to harsher laughter as their political significance decreased. By laughing at what Protestants assumed the absurdities of the past religious enemy, the comic novellas consequently minimised Catholicism. As a result, the two pamphlets could soften the tension of new religious enemies and ridicule religious strife in general. Additionally, this chapter considers how the jest book moves from the religious to the secular world in *Dobsons Drie Bobbes* and the collections of detached jests published in the first decade of the seventeenth century. These jest books illustrate the demise of the popularity of the clergy in jest books as jests move from the religious to the secular.

Historiography

Overall, most people seem to have been content with the Elizabethan Settlement in so far that, apart from the Rising of the North in 1569, there were no significant uprisings. People were free

²¹² F.P. Wilson, "The English Jestbooks," 138, 140 - 41.

to practice their religion as long as they conformed to outward practices of the established Church. In the words of Christopher Haigh, the established Church was a “political compromise,” which included elements of Catholic as well as Protestant practices.²¹³ Fincham and Tyacke, argue that the compromise left more people dissatisfied than scholars often acknowledge, as the settlement rapidly unravelled “as conservative and reforming forces continued to pull in opposite directions.”²¹⁴

For Protestants, the voice for reform and change came mainly from Presbyterians and Puritans. Presbyterians violently and polemically voiced their criticism of the established Church in the anonymous *Marprelate Tracts*: seven witty but belligerent pamphlets which were published under the pseudonym Martin Marprelate between 1588 and 1590. The pamphlets expressed four main arguments of Protestant reform, namely, the immutability of Scripture, the fourfold ministry, ministerial equality and the separation of ministry and magistracy.²¹⁵ In these pamphlets, the anonymous authors mainly accused the clergy of “pride, ambition, greed, lordliness and various misuses of spiritual and secular power.”²¹⁶ Similarly to when the English Church was under attack by Protestant authors in the first decades of the sixteenth century, the Church hired writers to publish pamphlets in response to the Marprelate Tracts. The Church recruited well-known, and now canonical authors of drama and poetry, such as Robert Greene, John Lyly and Thomas Nashe to respond to Marprelate, which they did by writing pamphlets in a similar offensive and polemical style. The Marprelate pamphlet war was only one of many in this period, as the responses from the writers selected by the Church received criticism in the form of harsh scurrilous writing.²¹⁷

Catholics, on the other hand, rapidly became a minor religion during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.²¹⁸ The relative tolerance offered to Catholics during the 1560s changed when the Pope excommunicated Elizabeth in 1570. Moreover, in 1585, the government passed the “Act Against Jesuits and Seminarists,” which commended Catholic priests, both native and foreign, to

²¹³ Christopher Haigh, “The Reformation in England to 1603,” in *A Companion to the Reformation World*, ed. R. Po-Chia Hsia (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 145.

²¹⁴ Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored: The Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547 – 1700* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 39.

²¹⁵ Joseph L. Black, “Introduction,” in *The Martin Marprelate Tracts, A Modernized and Annotated Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), xviii.

²¹⁶ *Ibidem*, xix.

²¹⁷ Stelling, “Leaving their Humours,” 141.

²¹⁸ Christopher Haigh, “From Monopoly to Minority: Catholicism in early modern England,” *Transactions of the Historical Society* vol 31 (1981): 129.

leave England in the next forty days.²¹⁹ Susan Doran calls the decline of Catholicism “a gradual but inevitable process,” after Mary Queen of Scots was beheaded in 1587 and English Catholics lost the prospect of a Catholic ruler.²²⁰ However, even before these events, there was a decline in Catholicism, which became less visible in England, as many members of the monastic clergy were in exile and other Catholics endured the Established Church.

Anti-Clericalism in *Tarltons Newes* and *The Cobler of Caunterburie*

Whereas Catholicism became less prevalent in early modern English society, the Catholic clergy remained present in the comic novellas of the period, *Tarltons Newes out of Purgatorie* and *The Cobler of Caunterburie*. *Tarltons Newes* survives in three editions from the sixteenth and seventeenth century and was presumably written between 3 September 1588, the date Tarlton passed away and 26 June 1590, when the work is first entered into the Stationers’ Register.²²¹ Ernst Schulz and F.P. Wilson categorise *Tarltons Newes* as the aforementioned comic novella, but the work also implements various features of the pamphlet tradition of the late sixteenth century, the dream vision and the medieval news from Hell.²²² The pamphlet opens with one of Tarlton’s admirers falling asleep outside of the theatre and encounters the beloved fool and jester Richard Tarlton in his dream. What follows is a trip through purgatory narrated by Tarlton, in which he shares various, mainly anti-clerical, tales of the people residing in purgatory. Many of the stories originate from Boccaccio’s *Il Decameron* which are in some instances mixed with the vernacular jesting tradition from the early sixteenth century as the author also incorporates jests from *A, C Mery Talys*.²²³ Three of the eight central tales include clerical members, but the pamphlet also presents the clergy in the framework which surrounds the tales. Purgatory itself, for instance, is guarded by all the previous Popes who have passed away, “except the first thirty after Christ, and they went presentlie to heaven . . . because Purgatorie was then but a building, and not fully finished.”²²⁴

The Cobler of Caunterburie was, also anonymously, published in response to *Tarltons Newes*. Only four copies of *The Cobler* survive, two of the 1590 edition and one each of 1608 and 1614.

²¹⁹ The act is included in: Henry Gee and William John Hardy, ed., *Documents Illustrative of English Church History* (New York: Macmillan, 1896), 485.

²²⁰ Susan Doran, *Elizabeth I and Religion 1558 – 1603* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), 63.

²²¹ Jane Belfield, “Bibliographical Introduction,” in *The Cobler of Caunterburie and Tarltons Newes out of Purgatorie*, ed. Geoffrey Creigh and Jane Belfield (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), 114, 116.

²²² Belfield, “Introduction,” 117 and F.P. Wilson, “The English Jest Books,” 155.

²²³ Belfield, “Introduction,” 118.

²²⁴ Anonymous, “Tarltons Newes,” 148.

The work was presumably highly popular in its day and “appears to have achieved an immediate notoriety” as a result of its response to *Tarltons Newes*.²²⁵ *The Cobler* is also a comic novellas and presents six tales which are set in the framework of an imaginary journey from Billingsgate to Gravesend, during which the travellers tell each other stories, as in Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*. Two of these six tales include religious clerics, a prior and an abbot. The tales present both clerics as worldly and lusty as they engage in lechery. Because of the characteristics attributed to these clergymen in *The Cobler*, the clergy resembles the portrayals of the clerical members in the earliest singular jests. This resemblance might be explained by the medieval source material which forms the basis for both *The Cobler* and the singular jests. Especially with the introduction of the abbot in the somner’s tale, it feels like the jest books seem to have come full circle back to *Dane hen, the lusty monk of Leicestre* as the abbot is introduced as “lustie and frolike and coveted to acquaint himselfe with all the faire wives of the Towne.”²²⁶

Various critics comment upon the mild and pleasant tone of both *Tarltons Newes* and *The Cobler*, but the two works are more violent towards clerical members and Catholicism compared to the jest books published throughout the sixteenth century. The observation that both *Tarltons Newes* and *The Cobler* are rather friendly and pleasant makes sense when compared to other literary works published during the same period. Patrick Collinson speaks of “the nastiness of the nineties” and regards the earlier mentioned *Marprelate Tracts* as “the polemical climax of the Elizabethan Puritan movement.”²²⁷ Lieke Stelling argues that *Tarltons Newes* and *The Cobler* present a “mini mock pamphlet war” and consequently offered a “friendly counterpoise and antidote” to the Marprelate pamphlet dispute.²²⁸ Jane Belfield, on the other hand, focuses on the clerical tales of *Tarltons Newes* and deems the punishments of friar Onion and the vicar of Bergamo “in no way ... unjust or undeserved” but comments that the punishments are “absurdly light” considering that the two clergymen are guilty of blasphemy.²²⁹ Belfield’s argument might be somewhat valid for the vicar, who in his tale plans to present his parishioners with a fake relic, a golden feather he bought in Pisa, as an apology for closing down the Sunday breakfasts in the alehouse. The vicar is outsmarted by two brothers who want to take revenge for the abolition of the Sunday breakfasts

²²⁵ Belfield “Biographical Introduction,” 3 & “Introduction,” 7.

²²⁶ Anonymous, “Cobbler of Caunterburie,” 75.

²²⁷ Patrick Collinson, “Ecclesiastical Vitriol: Religious Satire in the 1590s and the Invention of Puritanism,” in *The reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP: 1999), 154, 164.

²²⁸ Stelling, “Leaving their Humours,” 153.

²²⁹ Jane Belfield, *Tarlton’s News Out of Purgatorie: A Modern-Spelling Edition, with Introduction and Commentary*, (PhD diss., Shakespeare Institute, 1987), 111.

and replace the feather with a casket full of coal. The vicar finds out during mass and presents the coals instead, as a new relic:

I have here a relique no lesse precious then that, ... these be the coales that Saint Lawrence the holy Martyr was broild with ... I will come downe and marke you all with the holy relique of Saint Lawrence; so he stept downe out of the pulpit, and crost them all to his great profit, and their content.²³⁰

The vicar is not punished during his lifetime, but instead, he is forced to stand in purgatory with a lump of coal in his mouth. Whereas the vicar's sentence is indeed not very drastic, the fact that the vicar faces the consequences of his deeds in this tale is already more than most clerics in the previous two chapters.

Friar Onion, on the other hand, is treated much more severely compared to earlier examples regarded in this thesis, and the vicar of Bergamo, after the friar has disguised himself as the angel Gabriel to sleep with the beautiful but not so intelligent Lisetta. The friar stays in hiding with an old man when the entire town of Florence is on the lookout for the lecherous friar. Friar Onion asks the man to help him escape and return to the abbey. The man agrees and makes the friar unrecognisable by covering him with honey and feathers and placing a visor over his face so that the friar will pose as a "strange sight" for the Duke of Florence.²³¹ When the two enter the market place, the man exposes the friar as "the Angell Gabriell ... in that amorous dignitie that he did usually visit the Dames of Florence."²³² The friar is left to stand on the marketplace where he is tortured by various wasps which are attracted to the honey, and almost sting the friar to death. During the night, other friars free friar Onion and bring him home, after which they put him in prison where he dies of sorrow. After his death, friar Onion, still tormented by the many wasps which continually sting him, spends his time in purgatory where he has to repent for dishonouring the other friars.

What is striking in this case, is not that the punishments of these two clerics are "absurdly light," but instead, that they differ enormously in their cruelty. In this respect, it is helpful to revisit the idea of the logic of the jest book. Whereas both clerics engage in blasphemous behaviour, the vicar of Bergamo represents a cunning trickster who is not held accountable as he cleverly deceits his parishioners. Friar Onion, on the other hand, is caught and exposed, and

²³⁰ Anonymous, "Tarltons Newes," 169.

²³¹ Ibidem, 158.

²³² Ibidem.

therefore the loser of the jest. Whereas this logic explains the difference in punishment, the anti-clerical themes of both jests must also be acknowledged, as the two tales still expose hypocrisy and blasphemy of the Catholic Church.

Stelling argues that *Tarltons Newes* is “purposefully nostalgic,” of a Catholic past and therefore uses an inclusive rather than exclusive humour with regards to Catholics.²³³ Stelling partly attributes this to the fact that clerical jests lose their political significance after the abolition of the monasteries, but she also touches upon Belfield’s findings that the characters in *Tarltons Newes* are more humane and less anti-clerical than Boccaccio’s original.²³⁴ Even though the nostalgia is visible throughout *Tarltons Newes* with references to “our grandmothers” and the appropriation of older genres and tales, nostalgia also serves another function, as ridiculing Catholics serves as a way to diffuse the tension of current religious strife.

The Catholic clergymen in both *Tarltons Newes* and *Cobler of Caunterburie* serve a similar purpose as Frances E. Dolan argues for nuns in early modern literature, as they touch upon “that part of Catholicism that is to be dismissed rather than feared.”²³⁵ Dolan attributes this quality of the nun to a particular place in time, after the Reformation and before Catholic emancipation, during which the nun only existed in the imaginative space.²³⁶ In a similar way that the nun was out of view for most people in early modern England as she resided in the cloisters, both Catholic laity and clergy became less visible during the final decades of the sixteenth century, as they belonged to the past or foreign countries. The jest books of this phase could revisit this past and ridicule the religion safely and innocently, as Catholicism became part of the (comical) imagination, and therefore, the jest books do not criticise or attack living Catholics based in England at the time.

The primary forms of criticism which Dolan attributes to the nun’s comical representation are the inability of Catholics to think for themselves, the overvaluation of objects and the “eroticism of spiritual practice,” all of which, the male clerics in the two comic novellas also portray.²³⁷ In *Tarltons Newes*, the tale of the vicar of Bergamo mocks the inability of Catholics to think for themselves when the vicar presents lumps of coals to his laity as a religious relic, with which he crosses his parishioners “to his great profit, and their content.”²³⁸ Both the vicar’s

²³³ Stelling, “Leaving their Humours,” 150.

²³⁴ Ibidem.

²³⁵ Dolan, “Why are Nuns Funny,” 509.

²³⁶ Ibidem, 510.

²³⁷ Ibidem, 526, 530, quote 530.

²³⁸ Anonymous, “Tarltons Newes,” 169.

golden feather which he intended to use as a relic and the lump of coal also criticise the overvaluation of objects, which strengthens the earlier critique of Catholic's inability to think for themselves. The fact that the relic is fake adds another layer to the jest with regards to the clergy, as the jest shares the idea that the clergy is aware of the power of objects, a power which they subsequently abuse to save themselves, similarly to the clerics who abuse Scripture in the first jest books.

The Cobler ridicules the incapacity of Catholics to think for themselves in "The Somner's Tale," in which an abbot and a monk burry a man alive, and convince the man that he is in purgatory while the abbot sleeps with the man's wife. When the wife finds out that she is pregnant, the abbot and monk bring the man back alive from purgatory. The two clerics claim that the monk's prayer brought about the man's revival, which they elevate above the prayer of ordinary laity. Afterwards, the monks carry the man home in a holy procession, admired by the laypeople presented in the tale. The people listening to the somner in the framework of *The Cobler* share this excitement, as "he somner hauing told his tale, the people commended the great deuotion of the Abbot, wishing all ielous fooles to passe the like in purgatory."²³⁹ This ironic and mocking ending to the somner's tale enhances the mockery of the foolish Catholics, who even when they have heard in the tale how the abbot and monk staged purgatory, still seem to believe in the powers of the Catholic clergy.

Finally, it is of interest to return to the tale of friar Onion, who embodies the eroticism of spiritual practice and abuses this alleged spirituality to persuade Lisetta to sleep with him. In the tale, friar Onion tells Lisetta that the angel Gabriel is in love with her, but that there is one problem: the angel Gabriel is a spirit and requires a human body to encounter Lisetta. The friar is quick to suggest a solution, however, and he offers his own body to receive the angel, so that "my soule may enjoye the sight and pleasures of paradise: so shall you not hinder yourself and to me an unspeakable benefit."²⁴⁰ The jest differs from other lecherous clerical jests presented in earlier collections, but also to the other lecherous jest in *The Cobler*, in which an abbot secretly sleeps with a married woman simply because he wants to.²⁴¹ In the instance of friar Onion, however, the ultimate spiritual pleasure for a Catholic cleric equals a vow-breaking, sexual

²³⁹ Anonymous, "The Cobbler of Caunterburie," 79.

²⁴⁰ Anonymous, "Tarltons Newes," 155.

²⁴¹ See: "The Coblers Tale" in Anonymous, "The Cobler of Caunterburie," 24 – 32. In this jest, an abbot disguises himself as the monasteries kitchen help to secretly enter the house of the monasteries's laundrywoman to sleep with her. Eventually, the woman's jealous husband finds out about the affair and he punishes both the abbot and his wife by whipping them.

encounter. As a result, the jest mocks both the vows of chastity and Catholic spiritual practice as well as the inability to think for oneself which Lisetta embodies in this jest as she is portrayed as the gullible Catholic woman.

The question which remains is that of why both *Tarltons Newes* and *The Cobler* present tales of blasphemous clerics and ignorant laity in order to comment upon Catholicism. Therefore, it is useful to return to the feeling of nostalgia, which as this thesis has shown, becomes an inherent part of jest books during the latter half of the sixteenth century. Both comic novellas illustrate the absurdity of Catholicism in emphasising the hypocrisy and shortcomings of the Catholic clergy as well as the effects of their behaviour on the Catholic laity. In doing so, the comic novellas achieve a few ends. The readers of the two jest books laugh at Catholics, a past enemy of the established faith, in a time where Presbyterians and Puritans became the main threat to the English Church. As the jest books ridicule Catholicism, they take away the danger of their former enemy, exposing the absurdity of this past faith, which, indirectly, ridicules other religious enemies as well, but at the same time, religious strife altogether.

Whereas critics mainly acknowledge the mild anti-Catholicism of these two jest books, this chapter illustrates that the jests are harsher and more critical than before, intending to ridicule faith by exposing the clergy, instead of advocating reform in the Catholic clergy. The jests can become crueller during this period precisely because Catholicism belongs to the past, and the jests lose their political significance. Whereas during the first phase of jest book publishing, clerics themselves arguably applied anti-monastic and anti-fraternal jests to decrease the popularity of the religious clergy. In this final phase, the same strategy is appropriated to reduce the popularity of Catholicism, and subsequently to diminish their religious threat.

Sir Thomas Pentley in *Dobsons Drie Bobbes* and the Secular Turn

Whereas the two previously discussed comic novellas portray lecherous and corrupt clerical members, *Dobsons Drie Bobbes* (1607) presents an entirely different type of cleric. Sir Thomas Pentley is the canon of Durham, where he lives piously, and spends his money on his parishioners, rather than on himself. When his sister comes to visit him with her family to benefit from the canon's generosity, the canon reprimands them and takes custody over their eldest son, George Dobson. The jest book calls Dobson "heire to Skoggin," and introduces him as the chief jester of the jest book, in which he is often blamed and bullied by his friends in school, as well as

by the people of Durham.²⁴² F.P. Wilson praises the jest book's "unusual originality in form and in subject matter" as the jest book plays with the genres of the comic novella and the jest-biography.²⁴³ Avil S. O'Brien regards *Dobson* as an essential early modern work for students of the development of the novel, with its original descriptions of sixteenth-century Durham as well as its "vividly drawn" elaborate and original characters.²⁴⁴ Because of the detailed descriptions and narrative in *Dobson*, this jest book is also of great value to the study of the clergy in the early modern jest book. This jest book does not reduce the canon to a stereotype or includes the cleric to voice criticism, but rather, provides the reader with a layered, detailed and more complex character, even though the character is only secondary to the story.

The book is of interest for this particular study due to its originality and detail, but also because E.A. Horsman, a modern editor of the book, has found that the characters in *Dobson* are based on actual people who lived in Durham during the time of Queen Mary.²⁴⁵ Therefore, by portraying a clerical member who is presumably closer to reality, the jest book offers a stark contrast to the clergymen in other early modern jest books discussed throughout this thesis. The author presumably includes Sir Thomas in this jest book because of his nephew, and not as a result of foolishness, unusual behaviour or clerical misconduct. The emphasis in the introduction of the character of Sir Thomas also lies on his Christian values and education: "exquisite skill in musicke, ... learned and a man of modest life ... liuing always vnmarried, and kéeping no houshold" except for one his sisters whom he keeps as a housewife after the abolition of her cloister.²⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the jest book does not present Sir Thomas in his clerical duties but rather focuses on his role in the parish. As a result, this jest book takes place in the secular world and not the religious setting of earlier jests, a trend which continues in the collections of detached jests discussed later on in this chapter.

At the beginning of the book, Sir Thomas serves as a father figure for Dobson, who he both laughs with and reprimands when he is in trouble at school. At school, Dobson has ripped the book of the merchant's son in pieces and hit him on the head. The merchant's wife complains of this to Sir Thomas, who promises to reprimand Dobson, "yet hée could not but

²⁴² Anonymous, *Dobsons Drie Bobbes: Sonne and Heire to Skoggin, full of mirth and delightful recreation* (London: Vaelentine Simmes, 1607), A2r (title page).

²⁴³ F.P. Wilson, "The English Jestbooks," 156.

²⁴⁴ Avil S. O'Brien, "Dobsons Drie Bobbes: A Significant Contribution to the Development of Prose Fiction," *Studies in English Literature* 12, no. 1 (December 1973), 55 – 56, quote 61.

²⁴⁵ J. R. "Review of *Dobsons Drie Bobbes* by E. A. Horsman," *The Review of English Studies* 7, no. 27 (1956): 309-10.

²⁴⁶ Anonymous, *Dobsons Drie Bobbes*, B1r.

laughe in his minde, at the knauery of his Nephew, and the chollericke stomacke of the Merchants wife.”²⁴⁷ This insight into the relationship between Dobson and his uncle the canon call to mind that between Howleglas and his many clerical friends, as the canon represents a merry man who laughs at the jesting behaviour of his nephew. Even when Sir Thomas rebukes his nephew, he is “not able to containe himselfe from smiling, turning away ... [and] laughing a good space.”²⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Sir Thomas disciplines Dobson because he had promised the merchant’s wife that he would do so, instead of for personal reasons. In doing so, the jest book reaffirms Sir Thomas’ Christian values, as it illustrates that personal reasons do not influence Sir Thomas’ judgement, but instead, he acts in a way that he believes is right, keeping his promises to others.

The relationship between Sir Thomas and Dobson deteriorates during the middle chapters of the jestbook after Sir Thomas has punched Dobson in the face for oppressing his schoolfriend. What follows are various forms of revenge against Sir Thomas plotted by Dobson, from harsh forms of punishment as being bound and gagged in a tree at night to a more innocent jig as corrupting his ale by filling half the trunk with water. Even though their disputes are personal instead of religious and Sir Thomas never acts blasphemous in any way or form, the jests are of interest with regards to the clergy in early modern England in Sir Thomas’ contact with the laity. When Sir Thomas is found bound in the tree, the people of Durham rush over there to help him, “much lamenting Sir Thomas his euill chaunce,” and they regret not being there earlier.²⁴⁹ In a similar vein, other chapters of the jest book present Sir Thomas in conversation with various people of the town, and apart from one instance when the people of Durham accuse Sir Thomas of helping his nephew Dobson, he is loved by his parishioners, and he figures as a central figure in his parish. In a way, he not only serves as a father figure for Dobson, but also for the people of Durham.

Sir Thomas is not much present in the final chapters of the book when Dobson is at university. However, Dobson is expelled from the university in the penultimate chapter, and he returns to Durham, and therefore his uncle, in the final chapter. Naturally, Dobson causes trouble on his way home, which results in his imprisonment in York where he will be hanged. At this moment, Sir Thomas returns to the story, and he procures a pardon for Dobson, who promises “future reformation and to reclaime himselfe from al lewd behauiours,” and he requests

²⁴⁷ Ibidem, B4r.

²⁴⁸ Ibidem, B4v.

²⁴⁹ Ibidem, F3v.

a place as a canon in the nearby city of Dunholm, which he is granted.²⁵⁰ Dobson's character turns completely in these final lines of the book where he sees the light of God:

He spent the residue of his course in an admirable course of ciulity ... he was generally respected of all the people & the whole Cleargie, and after the death of his Vnkell, possessed of all his substance and beneficed with his Vicarige, in which estate he ended and finished his life.²⁵¹

Dobson's reformation is not the first time that the jest book presents a jester who rises to a clerical position, but it is the first time that the jester is knowledgeable, educated and suited for the position, despite his jesting history. Additionally, it is striking that the jest book finishes with Dobson's reformation, as this also implies that his jesting days are over, and that his life as a canon will not provide any more jests worth collecting in *Dobsons Drei Bobbes*. Perhaps, this also voices the idea that religion and jesting are no longer considered a suitable connection. As the text emphasises Dobson's changing ways, and the forgiveness granted by the clergy and the townspeople, the reader is reminded of Catholic penitence. As the jest book presents Dobson's reform as earnest, it is probably not applied mockingly in this instance. Instead, as the reader probably sympathises with Dobson throughout the book his reform and repentance present a positive aspect of the past religion.

Up until now, this chapter has only been concerned with the new genre of the comic novella in the final phase of jest book publishing. Nevertheless, this period also witnesses publications of collections of detached jests as *Jack of Dover, His quest of Inquiry* (1604), *The Merie Conceited Jestes of George Peele* (1605 – 07), *Iests to Make you Merie* (1607), *The Pleasant Conceits of Old Hobson, the merie Londoner* (1607) and *Pasquils Jestes Mixed with Mother Bunches Merriments* (1604). Whereas the comic novellas and earlier collected jests brim with clerical members as comic characters and references to religious traditions and customs, they almost completely disappear from the scene in the collections of detached jests. In *The Merie Conceited Jestes of George Peele*, there are even no mentions of any clerical member at all.

The gradual disappearance of the clergy from the sixteenth-century jest book is striking, seeing that jests from earlier collections as *A, C Mery Talys* and *Tales and Quicke Answers* appear to remain popular as some of these jests are appropriated in the new collections. Nevertheless, when the jest books mentioned above appropriate earlier jests, the collectors often replace the

²⁵⁰ Ibidem, O3v.

²⁵¹ Ibidem.

clergy with other characters and move the jests into the secular world. *Pasquils Jestes*, for instance, replaces the “chaplain of Louen” who steals a pot in *Tales and Quicke Answeres* with “Merry Andrew of Manchester” who steals the pot instead of the chaplain.²⁵² *Pasquils Jestes* also includes and appropriates the jest which follows in *Tales and Quicke Answeres*, “of the same chaplen and the one that spited him,” where Merry Andrew of Manchester again takes the chaplain’s place.²⁵³

Strikingly, another popular jest from *Tales and Quicke Answeres*, which is appropriated multiple times is that of the steeple and the pulpit. The original version introduces a bishop who asks an “uplandishe man” why the bells did not ring when he entered the parish.²⁵⁴ In *Pasquils Jestes*, the character changes from a bishop to an abbot, who is, similar to the bishop in the original, accused of lack of preaching in the parish.²⁵⁵ The clerical member is likely altered in this jest to refer to a nostalgic Catholic past and not blame the bishops of the current established Church. This jest is not only appropriated in *Pasquils Jestes* but also in *Pleasant Conceits of Old Hobson*, where the jest becomes more secular. Lord Hobson is said to work as a churchwarden in his parish, and a servant asks him why the bells are not ringing on “Satint (sic) Hewes day, being the seventeenth of November, upon which day the tryumph was holden for Queene Elizabeths hapy government.”²⁵⁶ As in the other versions of this jest, the answer is that the bells are away for repair and thus the servant remarks that the parish may “very wel sel away [their] steeple.”²⁵⁷ To which Hobson replies that they may also sell away their pulpit as there has been no sermon delivered there over last year. The jest ends with the mention that “the parson of the church preached very Sonday following.”²⁵⁸ An interesting alteration is that the jest does not let the parson speak, and neither is he the one who voices the criticism, taking the notion of Catholic hypocrisy away from the jest. Additionally, the comment on the lack of bells is not made from a religious point of view but rather from a secular perspective, as they should ring for the Queen’s birthday.

Other appropriated jests which move to the secular world also take away the practice of jesting from the sermons and the church. Hobson tells the joke which compares Saint

²⁵² See: Anonymous, *Tales and Quick Answeres* jest no. 100, J4v & Anonymous, *Pasquils Jestes, Mixed with Mother Bunches Merriments* [1604], ed. W.H. Hazlitt (London, 1866), 28 - 29.

²⁵³ See: Anonymous, *Tales and Quick Answeres*, jest no. 101, K1r – K1v & Anonymous, *Pasquils Jestes*, 29 – 30.

²⁵⁴ Anonymous, *Tales and Quick Answeres*, A3v.

²⁵⁵ Anonymous, *Pasquils Jestes*, 35 - 36.

²⁵⁶ Anonymous, *The Pleasant Conceits of Old Hobson the Merry Londoner* (London: John Wright, 1607), 17.

²⁵⁷ Ibidem.

²⁵⁸ Ibidem, 18.

Christopher, the bearer of Christ, to the “asse that bore both [Jesus] and his mother” to his neighbours.²⁵⁹ Thereby, the jest alters the original setting of the jest and takes the jest out of the church, where the original jest takes place between a preaching friar and a layman. A final clerical jest which is appropriated in *Hobson* is “of the fryer that prayesd saint Frauncis,” in which a friar lauds Saint Francis and does not know where to place him in the religious hierarchy, to which a man in the church responds: “than set hym here in my place: for I am weary. And so went his way.”²⁶⁰ In *Hobson*, on the other hand, the element of nostalgia returns as Hobson retells the jest and it is a “popish friar,” who “in the reign of Queene Mary, when this land was blinded with superstition,” compares the Pope to Saint Peter.²⁶¹ These jests mix the element of nostalgia with criticism of the Catholic Church. More striking, however, is the fact that the jests no longer take place in the church but move to the secular world, where they comment on various Catholic practices of the past.

The same is true for, the extremely rare, new jests which include clerical members in these new collections. In *Jack of Dover*, there is only the mention of a petty canon who tricks a musician in such a way that the musician provides him with free music for the entire day.²⁶² Thomas Dekker’s *Iests to Make you Merry* also includes one jest with a clerical member, where a “mad parson” and a “Precisian,” an English Puritan, meet over dinner.²⁶³ The parson believes the Puritan to be a scholar because he is dressed all in black, and so the parson addresses the man in Latin, who only hears offensive words as piss, turd and fart, and is so offended that he leaves. The Latin used in the jest is explained to the audience, presumably because they do not understand Latin and would otherwise misunderstand the jest. By explaining the meaning behind the Latin, the jest shows that the “mad parson” meant well, directing the laughter to the Precisian who is offended without cause. Unfortunately, there are no other jests in these collections which portray the extraordinary meeting of a Precisian and a Catholic cleric to compare this jest with, but it is of interest that the Puritan becomes the object of the joke instead of the Parson, as the Latin of the past is lost on him.

These changes in the jest book collections published at the beginning of the seventeenth century lead to the questions why the jest books become secular, and the clergy’s presence

²⁵⁹ Anonymous, *Tales and Quick Answers*, A1r.

²⁶⁰ Anonymous, *Mery Tales, Wittie Questions and Quicke Answers*, H4v – H5r.

²⁶¹ Anonymous, *Hobson*, 30.

²⁶² Anonymous, *Jack of Dover, his Quest of Inquirie or his Privy Search for the Veriest Foole in England* [1604], ed. Thomas Wright (London: Percy Society, 1842), 12 - 13.

²⁶³ T[homas] D[ekker] and George Wilkins, *Iests to make you merie*, 2-3.

diminishes. A straightforward answer would be that the Catholic clergy was no longer of interest for the Protestant English. However, based on the appropriations in the collected jests, it is more likely that religion and humour were no longer connected in the same way as before. Whereas the jests remain popular, the appropriations show that the jests are removed from the church and instead feature in the secular world. Despite the secular setting, the jests still mock and ridicule Catholicism and its clergymen in a nostalgic fashion, but it is no longer the clergy themselves who jest. Possibly, the clergy also moved to another genre, as they are no longer explicitly an object of laughter, but remain an object of interest. The anonymous author of *Dobsons Drie Bobbes* was not the only author to apply jest book material to narrative work, both Thomas Nashe and Thomas Deloney had already included work from earlier jest books in their longer narrative fictions.²⁶⁴ Additionally, the popularity of the English theatre ever since the Elizabethan period might have something to do with changes in the early modern jest book ever since the 1590s, as theatre became the new mass medium of popular culture. Nonetheless, the length and scope of this thesis restrict a possible comparison with these other works of popular fiction, which would be of interest after the analysis of *Dobsons Drie Bobbes* and its representation of a more rounded and detailed cleric.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented analyses of the changing role of the various clerical members in the comic novellas and collections of detached jests which were published during the final phase of jest book publishing. The two comic novellas *Tarltons Newes out of Purgatorie* and *The Cobler of Caunterburie* have both shown that the jest book, for the first time since the introduction of the singular jests at the beginning of the sixteenth century, appropriate anti-clerical representations in order to mock these clerics and, through them, Catholicism. While the jest books remain a friendly tone in their mocking as they inspire a pleasant type of laughter invoked not only by anti-clerical images but also by nostalgia, the jest books' treatment of the clergy is unquestionably more severe than in the jest books published during the previous two phases.

Dobsons Drie Bobbes, on the other hand, shows more positive and fond memories of the Catholic past in its portrayal of Sir Thomas Pentley. As the cleric is in this jest book not at the centre of the jest book, he does not engage in mockery or trickery, nor do others mock him. Instead, Sir Thomas Pentley is appreciated by his parishioners and shows the cleric as an essential part of early modern society. Finally, this chapter is not the place to elaborate on what happens

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with the clergy after their initial demise during the first decade of the seventeenth century. Nonetheless, it is an interesting observation that through the demise of the clergy, the jest book also becomes more secular, and jests are no longer overtly concerned with religion. It would be an interesting subject for future studies, especially with regards to Puritanism the English Civil War a few decades later.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to analyse representations of the religious and secular clergy in the sixteenth-century vernacular jest book. By dividing this thesis into three chronological phases of jest book publishing, this thesis has shown how comical conceptions of the religious and secular clergy functioned throughout the sixteenth century as the Reformation progressed, and the role of the Catholic clergy changed conspicuously. Whereas earlier scholarship often minimised the role of the clergy in the jest book or dismissed it as simply anti-clerical, this thesis has shown that the opposite is often true, and that the clergy serve a variety of functions.

The analyses presented in this study have illustrated that the first clerical representations of the sixteenth-century appear in the singular merry jests which seem inspired by anti-fraternal and anti-monastic satire. These jests display lecherous, ignorant, worldly members of the religious clergy whom the jest books deride and mock. When Christian humanism adopts the practice of jesting, however, the focus shifts and clerical jests no longer focus on unfit worldly behaviour, but instead, place the clerics in the church, where the jests comment on how the clergy practices and teaches religion to the laity. These jests approach both the secular and religious clergy in a more positive and pleasant, but nonetheless critical, tone. When the sixteenth-century jest book reaches its climax with regards to the number of publications towards the end of the century, the jests instead employ a kind, mocking tone and approach which betray nostalgic pleasurable feelings towards the clergy, as well as Catholicism in general. Nevertheless, this thesis demonstrates that these feelings of nostalgia are also applied to ridicule Catholicism as the jests return to anti-clerical images. This does not mean, however, that these jests deride clerical members from an anti-clericalist standpoint, as many of the jests comment on the Catholic laity instead.

From these analyses, this study can present a few conclusions with regard to the use of the clergy in jest books. One of the most striking finds of this thesis is that the jests which include clergymen are often not anti-clerical at all. It is important to note that the jest books, overall, employ a rather positive approach and a friendly tone towards the various clerical members. Arguably, this approach is related to the functions of humour and laughter in the Renaissance period, and especially the type of humour which is applied in the jest books. Nevertheless, whereas jests may offer criticism of various clerics in this friendly tone, these jests more often expose the gullibility and ignorance of the Catholic laity through representations of the clergy.

Additionally, it is especially interesting to see where jest books and their clerical jests stand in relation to the scurrilous polemical writing of the period. Both the beginning and the end of the sixteenth century witnessed periods of polemical writing. This thesis has argued that the jest books, whose presumed authors were very likely also engaged in polemical writing, employed clerical jests in such a way that they offered a friendly take on religion and reform which was deemed appropriate for a broad audience. As a result, jest books can be regarded as interesting media for the sixteenth-century Reformation, as the books argued for ways of reform which were not directed strictly at the clergy, but also at the laity, as they were exposed to the supposed failings of the clergy. The jests published at the end of the sixteenth century, however, do employ anti-clerical images, but again, this is not done to ridicule the clergy itself. Instead, the jest books portray the absurdity of Catholicism as its past religious enemy, within England at least, to alleviate the threats and tensions of Presbyterianism and Puritanism.

This study has also demonstrated that the jest book becomes more secular during the first decades of the seventeenth century. Where the jest books were first abundant with representations of clerical members and were often set in religious environments, jests about religion are no longer made by clerics themselves or to clerics in the early seventeenth century. Furthermore, when the clergy still plays a significant role in one of the jest books, the book does not regard their religious duties, but instead, their place in early modern culture and society. It is unclear what happens to the clergy or why they become a less popular character in the early seventeenth century. Whereas the final chapter suggests that the clergy instead become an object of interest for other genres as plays or fictional narratives, this is merely a suggestion and more research is needed to provide a satisfactory answer.

Additionally, further research is needed on the various uses of monasticism, and particularly the nun, in the comical literature of the sixteenth century. This thesis has noted a few instances in which jests treated the religious clergy strikingly more severely than their secular counterparts. This comical treatment of the religious clergy was often significantly more harmful towards women. Whereas the nuns are not often portrayed in the sixteenth-century jest book, their representations are striking in relation to their male counterparts, as they often focused on the sexual nature of women. While Frances E. Dolan touches upon the subject of the comical representation and functions of the nun in the seventeenth century, a similar study lacks for the sixteenth century. For reasons of scope and space, this thesis has not elaborated on the subject, but encourages further research on the gendered aspects of anti-monasticism in the sixteenth-century comical tradition by including a wider variety of humorous sources.

The main shortcoming of this study is that there are, at present, no studies on the comical representation of the early modern clergy in jest books to add to or challenge. In addition, mainly due to restrictions in time and space, this thesis has only considered comical representations of the clergy in jest books, and ignored other forms of humorous literature as comic drama, ballads or pamphlets. Nevertheless, this thesis opens up a new field of enquiry that future research may build on. The previous analyses have shown the diversity and complexity of clerical and religious jests in the sixteenth-century English jest books and how the books were used to voice criticism as well as dismiss criticism of the clergy, but also in later periods, to recollect memories of a Catholic past.

Overall this study has demonstrated that the Catholic clergy remains popular all throughout the sixteenth century. Even though jokes have the power to challenge or subvert existing hierarchy clerical members were, overall, respected in the early modern jest book, which suggests that people were perhaps more favourable to Catholicism and its clergy than is often believed. Whereas the jests contest Catholicism through comical representations of its clergy, the jests remain friendly, and contrary to popular scholarly belief, they only rarely become anti-clerical, as they often reprimand the laity rather than the clergy. Most importantly, though, this thesis has revealed that both early modern jest books and the clergy portrayed in these jest books are worth researching as their comical representations are often more complex than first meets the eye and the works provide an interesting and vital source for studies of the English Reformation.

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