

Voicing Dissent: Heresy Trials in Later Medieval England¹

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In 1527 John Pykas, a baker from Colchester, was tried for heresy. Among other things, he confessed that:

about twelfth month agow he had conversation with the said Robert Best in his owne house ij tymes as he now remembers of the Epistles of James so begynnyng James the true servant of God. Also he saith that the said Robert Best had knowledge in the Epistles of James and could say them by hert ... Moreover ... the said Sir Robert Best hath hym taken and reputed by the tyme of a twelfth month last past as a knowen man and a broder in crist. By the which it is understood that the said Robert is of the same sect and lernyng as the deponent was.²

We find various other examples of people being noted as 'known men' and 'known women' from these and other trials; and from his own evidence, and other witnesses

¹ This article is based upon the corpus of surviving heresy trials in late medieval England. Unpublished episcopal registers were accessed via microfilm held in the Institute of Historical Research, London. The following abbreviations are used throughout (published registers are given an abbreviation upon first citation): BL Harl. 421 - British Library MS Harley 421 (Foxe's papers); Reg. Aiscough - Register of William Aiscough, bishop of Salisbury (1438-50), Wiltshire Record Office; Reg. Audelay - Register of Edmund Audelay, bishop of Salisbury (1502-24), Wiltshire Record Office; Reg. Bainbridge - Register of Christopher Bainbridge, archbishop of York (1508-14), Borthwick Institute, York; Reg. Chedworth - Register of John Chedworth, bishop of Lincoln (1462-64), Lincolnshire Record Office; Reg. Christ Church - Register of Christ Church Cathedral Priory, Canterbury; Reg. Fitzjames - Register of Richard Fitzjames, bishop of London (1506-22), London, Guildhall Library MS 9531/9; Reg. Grey - Register of William Grey, bishop of Ely (1454-78), Ely Diocesan Records, Cambridge University Library; Reg. J. Blythe (Salisbury) - Register of John Blythe, bishop of Salisbury (1494-99), Wiltshire Record Office; Reg. Longland (Lincoln) - Register of John Longland, bishop of Lincoln (1521-47), Lincolnshire Record Office; Reg. Neville - Register of Robert Neville, bishop of Salisbury (1427-1438), Wiltshire Record Office.

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² BL Harl. 421, fol. 21r; a slightly inaccurate and re-ordered transcription can be found in J. Strype, *Ecclesiastical memorials*, 3 vols (London, 1721), I.i, 126-29.

against him, Pykas clearly emerges as part of a network of religious radicals, who lent each other books, debated vernacular scripture, and shared a collective sense of dissenting faith. He was, in short, a Lollard heretic.

But what do we think we mean when we say that? ‘What is a Lollard?’ is by now a familiar question among those who work on late medieval England, and is in fact just one instance of a much broader trend in the study of medieval heresies in general, which in recent years has focussed ever more on the ‘constructedness’ of heresy by orthodoxy. Studies of ancient and high medieval heresies have asked how much of their intellectual content and apparent coherence may have been imposed from without, by hostile polemical sources, and via the distorting categorizations of bishops and inquisitors.³ Thus, in some analyses, those prosecuted as ‘heretics’ were innocent bystanders in wider ideological conflicts, unaware – initially at least – that their spiritual enthusiasms or practices of worship might be problematic or divergent from an orthodox norm.⁴ From this perspective, ‘heretics’ are always made thus by authority, not only in the specific labels attached to them, but by manufacturing their dissent as a useful phantom threat to orthodox authority.

It seems very likely that nobody in the middle ages set out to be ‘a heretic’. But it remains legitimate to ask whether some of those prosecuted for heresy knew, in advance, that they were pushing radically against orthodox opinion, with some sense of the likely

³ Most influentially R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, 2nd edn (London, 2007) and now idem, *The War on Heresy: Faith and Power in Medieval Europe* (London, 2012). See also Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge MA, 2003); Virginia Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic: Gender, Authority and the Priscillianist Controversy* (Berkeley, 1995); Robert Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1972); Mark Gregory Pegg, *The Corruption of Angels: The Great Inquisition of 1245-1246* (Princeton, 2001); and for similar issues in early modern cases, Patrick Collinson, ‘Antipuritanism’, in J. Coffey and P. C. H. Lim (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge, 2008), 19-33; C. W. Marsh, *The Family of Love in English Society, 1550-1630* (Cambridge, 1993), Michael P. Winship, *Making Heretics: Militant Protestantism and Free Grace in Massachusetts 1636-1641* (Princeton, 2002).

⁴ Most recently regarding Lollards see, for example, Andrew Cole, *Literature and Heresy in the Age of Chaucer* (Cambridge, 2008); for an historiographical overview and critique of European trends, Pete Biller, ‘Goodbye to Waldensianism?’, *Past and Present*, cxcii (2006). Arguments over the existence or non-existence of ‘Cathar’ heretics are presented in Antonio Sennis (ed.), *Cathars in Question* (York/Woodbridge, 2016); my contribution to that volume explores some of the wider historiographical issues.

potential consequences; and to ask if, when they expressed dissent, they were lone and idiosyncratic voices or part of a wider potential grouping. Recent work on early modern Puritanism provides some model for thinking about how ideas, opinions and styles of expression might provide a shared dissenting identity, even whilst recognising the exterior constructions that tended to shape that identity, including the constructions used by modern historians. As Peter Lake writes, in the conclusion to his vast and magisterial study of two quarreling seventeenth-century London radicals:

when it comes to puritanism there were at least some contemporaries who espoused ideological positions virtually identical to the historian's ideal type. Such people recognised themselves as a coherent group ... and were recognised as such by their contemporaries. Moreover, both from the inside looking out and from the outside looking in, the word puritan was often used to denote this social and ideological entity.⁵

There are important differences of context between Lake's early modern puritans and the late medieval Lollards, notably the importance of pamphlet publication, and the multiplicity of publicly-expressed theological positions, in seventeenth-century London. But Lake's suggested dynamic, which explores speech and ideas as something flowing more broadly in society whilst given *particular* meaning and import in specific situations, is nonetheless a very useful one.

With Lollardy in particular, a long-standing inflection to the issue has been to consider the extent of John Wyclif's theological influence: a clearly and consciously 'dissenting' set of ideas by the end of the fourteenth century, the presence or absence of which has often been read as underpinning or undermining its intellectual coherence, and more broadly its historical importance as a contribution to Christian religion.⁶ Jeremy Catto warned some years ago that the very notion of 'religious adherence' may be an

⁵ Peter Lake, *The Boxmaker's Revenge* (Manchester, 2001), 390.

⁶ Foundational positions here are K. B. McFarlane, *John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Non-conformity* (London, 1952) and Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988). The literature on Lollardy is vast, and ever growing: see the comprehensive bibliography in the appendix to Fiona Somerset, Jill C. Havens and Derek G. Pitard (eds.), *Lollards and Their Influence in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2003) and on-line at http://lollardsociety.org/?page_id=6 <accessed 18/12/2018>.

anachronism, in the early fifteenth century at least. His point is well made as a corrective to the rather more schematic way in which K. B. McFarlane framed his earlier discussion of the 'guilt' or 'innocence' of the group of 'Lollard knights' connected with the royal court. But as Anne Hudson has emphasized (in response to a variety of attempts to diminish the reality of Lollardy) at least some people, from an early period, made a conscious - and in some cases fatal - decision to adhere to a faith position, which we might fairly label Wycliffite.⁷ Thus for example Jacob Wyllys, tried in 1462, was pressed hard on his belief that after consecration the Host remained but bread and was not the true body of Christ; 'and thus he said that he believed and did not wish to believe otherwise nor in any other fashion, even to death, and that he wished to hold this opinion before any Judges whatsoever, whilst he could hold and defend it'.⁸ He was clear in his beliefs, in the particularly fraught context of being forced into the binary choice of adherence or abjuration by an inquisitor.

Most recently, J. Patrick Hornbeck has helpfully explored the range of theological positions found across Lollard trials and other materials, aiming to demonstrate nuance and variation whilst still holding on to 'Lollardy' as a reasonably coherent movement; and in a rather different direction, Fiona Somerset has concentrated on theological texts and sermons alone, to argue powerfully and imaginatively for a particular kind of Lollard 'style' of spirituality, centred on a particular set of affective aspirations and practices.⁹ Both projects have done much to explore the 'grey area' that various in the field have previously noted, when reflecting on the lack of a clear division between late medieval heterodox and orthodox piety.

⁷Jeremy Catto, 'Fellows and Helpers: The Religious Identity of the Followers of Wyclif', in Peter Biller and Barrie Dobson (eds.), *The Medieval Church: Universities, Heresy, and the Religious Life* (Studies in Church History subsidia xi, Woodbridge, 1999), 159. K. B. McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights* (Oxford, 1972). A. Hudson, 'Preface', in Somerset et al., *Lollards and Their Influence*.

⁸... *et dicit quod credit et non aliter nec alio modo vult credere usque ad mortem et quod hanc opinionem coram quibuscumque Iudicibus vult tenere et pro posse suo tenere et defendere* [Reg. Chedworth, f. 57v].

⁹J. Patrick Hornbeck, *What is a Lollard? Dissent and Belief in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 2010); Fiona Somerset, *Feeling Like Saints: Lollard Writings after Wycliffe* (Ithaca, 2014). Note that David Aers earlier called for discussion of how individual Lollards related to their faith: Aers, 'Walter Brut's Theology of the Sacrament of the Altar', in Somerset et al., *Lollards and their Influence*.

The interests of this article overlap particularly with Hornbeck's and Somerset's projects, but with a somewhat different intent. The approach adopted here considers the linguistic expression of dissent: the recurrent trends in speech through which specific opinions and beliefs are voiced *as a challenge*, and the linguistic and social contexts within which they give rise to wider meanings - including collective identifications.¹⁰ In the trial material that relates to Lollardy we have an opportunity to think about how the verbal expression of dissent sits at an intersection between wider cultural discourses and particular social contexts. That conjunction - between an individual moment of utterance, the existent tradition of speech upon which it draws, and the social context of delivery and reception - presents the possibility of analysing 'dissent' as something neither preprogrammed by obedient membership of a sect, nor simply imposed from without by the authority identifying it as such. We can thus ask, first, how the words, thoughts, feelings and activities of an individual like John Pykas *function* in regard to the larger notional entity of 'Lollardy', and in that sense to continue to ask questions of what 'adherence' to a dissenting movement really means, beyond the moment when one is identified as being part of such a sect. But in so doing we can also consider, second, the expression of dissenting belief or disbelief itself, as something which is individual, reflective, interiorized and perhaps emotionally charged *but also* social, verbal, externalized and thus culturally situated.

We gain access to these dissenting words via the records of heresy trials. These are complex and problematic sources. Whilst there was concern about and legislation against Wycliffism in the late fourteenth century, large-scale prosecution of Lollardy is more apparent only from the 1420s onward (possibly in the aftermath of the alleged rising led Sir John Oldcastle in 1414), and depended to a large extent on how much an individual bishop was concerned by the issue. Trials survive from most decades of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, but cluster in different geographical locales areas over time; others may have occurred for which no record now survives. In many cases, we lack most

¹⁰ My approach is influenced by the questions raised by Rodney Needham, *Belief, Language and Experience* (Oxford, 1972); also useful (and similarly Wittgensteinian) is Lars Haikola, *Religion as Language Game* (Lund, 1977) which 'looks at language as something you *act* with, an activity, something "living", and not as an abstract entity or a logical structure'.

of the detail of the trial itself, being left with a condensed statement of the deponent's beliefs, produced for the purpose of sentencing them. Where we have details, they are shaped by the questions asked, sometimes drawn from prepared interrogatories, and always affected by the ideological concerns and conceptions of the interrogators. In short, there is no unmediated access to the original words. Nonetheless, beyond the repetition of condemned theological positions, the trials do provide a wealth of intriguingly *varied* statements of belief. It is this variety that provides a point of entry. The legal and ideological mechanisms of prosecution tend toward repetition and homogenization; but, as has been argued elsewhere for continental inquisition records, the process of inquisition can be seen as also tending to produce an 'excess' of speech that eludes easy categorization, and which arguably troubled the interrogators in its unfixedity, and thus prompted its record in writing.¹¹ And, moreover, we must entertain the possibility that it was precisely within the context of interrogation that the dissenting meaning of some statements was concretized (a point to which I shall return in the conclusion).

Previous scholarship on Lollardy has noted this 'excess' but has found it difficult to analyse in detail, focussing instead on the fairly repetitive and explicitly theological statements or admissions found across the trials.¹² A literary and intellectual approach to Lollardy as a 'movement', as most profoundly performed by Anne Hudson, tends to be interested in locating a coherent stream of Wycliffism; what diverges may end up relegated or discarded as marginal at best. Social history approaches to Lollardy, more interested in the lives of the deponents, nonetheless tend to replicate a similar pattern, focussing on personal contacts within and between households and localities, thus more

¹¹ John H. Arnold, *Inquisition and Power: Catharism and the Confessing Subject in Medieval Languedoc* (Philadelphia, 2001). A powerful recent example of a similar methodological approach: Melissa Vise, 'The Women and the Inquisitor: Peacemaking in Bologna, 1299', *Speculum*, xciii (2018). Inquiry procedures in England are analysed in detail in Ian Forrest, *The Detection of Heresy in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 2005). Source-critical analysis of inquisitorial evidence has tended to be found in a European context: see, for example, the essays by John H. Arnold, Caterina Bruschi and Mark Gregory Pegg, in Caterina Bruschi and Pete Biller (eds.), *Texts and the Repression of Medieval Heresy* (York, 2004).

¹² One important exception: Steven Justice, 'Inquisition, Speech and Writing: A Case from Late Medieval Norwich', *Representations*, xlviii (1994).

interested in what people did than in what they said.¹³ Whilst my aim is in part to find a way of embracing this more divergent speech and thus capturing something of the variation and complexity of ‘Lollard’ voices, I do not wish to dissolve Lollardy into hundreds of individual utterances. That language is a social, and hence shared, practice is an essential part of my analysis.

In what follows a series of headings characterize the individual moments of ‘excess’ speech: anticlerical, sceptical, disputational and rebellious. These are a heuristic device only, allowing some meaningful collation from across the entire corpus of trial evidence. I am not claiming that they fully capture Lollard voices – which would most surely require much more focus on precisely the theological positions explored by Hornbeck in particular – nor that they exhaust all the possible inflections of dissenting speech in late medieval England (where much more could of course be said about political rather than religious dissent). But they allow me to explore what larger sets of language might exist, within which the specifically *Lollard* expressions can be located. In an earlier article on Lollardy, Anne Hudson cautiously suggested that certain phrases might be seen as a ‘sect vocabulary’. The caution she displayed – and the fact that her title ended with a question mark – were missed by some subsequent approaches to Lollardy inspired by her example.¹⁴ Whilst I am perhaps more concerned with the sociolinguistic nature of a ‘sect’ than Hudson was in that piece, I draw inspiration from her earlier work as well as from those more revisionist scholars of Lollardy.

Anticlerical

Academic discussion of ‘anti-clericalism’ in pre-Reformation England has tended to be strongly partisan, sometimes taken as indicative of lay people’s dissatisfaction with the late medieval church, and sometimes seen as highly unusual and historically marginal.¹⁵

¹³ For example, Maureen Jurkowski, ‘Lollardy and Social Status in East Anglia’, *Speculum*, lxxxii (2007); Margaret Spufford (ed.), *The World of Rural Dissenters, 1520-1725* (Cambridge, 1995) – see Patrick Collinson’s ‘Critical Conclusion’ which, at 390, makes a similar point.

¹⁴ Anne Hudson, ‘A Lollard Sect Vocabulary?’, in Hudson, *Lollards and Their Books* (London, 1985); Matti Peikola, *Congregations of the Elect: Patterns of Self-Fashioning in English Lollard Writings* (Turku, 2000).

¹⁵ Christopher Marsh, *Popular Religion in Sixteenth-Century England* (Houndmills, 1998), 91-94.

Lollard voices have been given a key place in this discussion, as either an upswelling but premature Reformation, or as the marginal lunatic fringe. It should be noted that ‘anti-clericalism’ is not one thing, but includes a range of theological and social positions. The most recurrent anti-clericalism in Lollardy is of a part with disbelief in the sacraments (which we will examine further below): that priests cannot perform any sacramental work in the mass, or in marriage or in baptism, and that there is therefore no need for their intermediary position between God and man. This is in a sense the most absolute anti-clerical position, and in its purest form it is theological and ecclesiological in origin. Also theological, and specifically exegetical, is the anti-clericalism which equates the higher clergy to the beast of the apocalypse: Simon Swallow and John Barber, tried by the archbishop of Canterbury in 1489, admitted saying that ‘the pope is an hoore sittynge upon many waters havynge a cuppe of poyson in his hand. Also that ye pope is antecrist and all cardinals archebisshoppis bysshoppis prests and religious men be the disciples of antecrist’.¹⁶ This imagery is found in a number of other trials,¹⁷ and is apocalyptic in tone – though it is important to consider the possibility that apocalyptic imagery implies not so much full-blown millenial belief, but an amplified rhetoric of condemnation.¹⁸ A further potential distinction is specifically anti-fraternal belief, directed against the mendicant orders particularly on the grounds that they no longer fulfilled their role as the apostolic poor. For each of these anticlericalisms, there is both Wycliffite precedent and a longer cultural tradition.¹⁹

Intertwined with these ideas one can also find a more popular anti-clericalism, ‘popular’ not in the sense of being a majority opinion, but something less clearly theological in

¹⁶ Reg. Christ Church, f. 358r-v. Cf. Apoc. 17 and 18.

¹⁷ For example *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-31*, ed. N. Tanner (Camden Society 4th ser., xx, London, 1977), 61 (hereafter Tanner, *Norwich*); Reg. Chedworth, f. 13r; Reg. J. Blythe, fols. 77v, 78v.

¹⁸ As I argue in a different context in John H. Arnold, ‘Religion and Popular Rebellion, from the Capuciati to Niklashausen’, *Cultural and Social History*, vi (2009). However, in one late trial we do see a clear sense of imminent doom: John Polle of Salisbury, admitted that he had ‘holden and sayd that the tyme shall com that the world shalbe burned and the shall a water com and purge hit and so shall hit be oon of the vii hevyns and fall of [?]myrth every man of the world beyng her dwellyng and at the day of dome dwels hops to be saved and the shall no thyng be at hell but the syns of the world’ [Reg. Audley, f. 134v].

¹⁹ Penn Szittya, *Anti-fraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature* (Princeton, 1986); Wendy Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anti-Clericalism* (Cambridge, 1989). In a European context, Guy Geltner, ‘Brethren Behaving Badly: A Deviant approach to Medieval Antifraternalism’, *Speculum*, lxxxv (2010).

origin, and connected to a sense of plebeian grievance. For example, John Syklan of Bergh, tried in 1430, claimed that:

all temporel lordis and temporell man is bounde a peyne of dedly synne to take alle possessions and all temporell godis, hors, harneys and jowell from the covetous bisshops and proude prelates of the church, and yeve thair good to the pore puple, and compelle thaym to sustene thaymselves with labour of here owyn handes.²⁰

John Blumston, tried in Coventry in 1486, spoke against pilgrimage and images, said that Pope did not inherit Peter's keys, and 'Also that shamelessly, as it appears, he said in the vernacular: "A vengeance on all suche horseon prests for thay have gret envy that a pore man shulde gete hys levynge amonge hem"'.²¹ Henry Shercot, tried in 1517, spoke against images ('stokks and stones made by an erthly man as I am') partly on the grounds that setting candles before them was simply a way of benefitting priests. He went on, in more extreme vein:

Also I temptid to god to see noo churchs stondyng nother prests a lyfe within iij yerres. Also what bye popys, religiose men and prests by dyvylls or tyrany, they shuld teche as I teche the, but they wynat for they have the thrid parte of ye goods of ye world.²²

Other complaints focussed on sex: William Ayleward, a blacksmith from Henley, argued that confession 'is ordeyned that prestis may understand the lyvys of Women. And after the prest knowith such a woman he wol have to do with her and afterward assoyle [absolve] her'.²³

These are allegations echoed well beyond late medieval England. That priests are over-endowed with worldly goods was a position voiced periodically across centuries, from ecclesiastical reformers to popular rebels. Complaints about specific tithes, and

²⁰ Tanner, *Norwich*, 147. Arguing that the clergy should sustain themselves from their own labour is found in other contexts; a villager in fourteenth-century Languedoc said something similar, among other things, to his neighbours: *Le Registre d'inquisition de Jacques Fournier, évêque de Pamiers (1318-1325)*, ed. Jean Duvernoy, 3 vols (Toulouse, 1965), II, 323, 215.

²¹ *The Lollards of Coventry, 1486-1522*, ed. S. McSheffrey and N. Tanner (Camden Society, 5th ser. xxiii, 2003), 64 (hereafter McSheffrey and Tanner, *Coventry*).

²² Reg. Audelay, f. 160r.

²³ Reg. Chedworth, f. 61r.

complaints about oblations being treated as necessary payment for services rendered, are intermittently recurrent across medieval Europe, dating back to the rhetoric of Gregorian reform in the central middle ages, and likely to give rise to dispute ever after.²⁴

Questioning the clergy's commitment to celibacy, and associating them particularly with whoring, is similarly found in a variety of contexts - a common theme, for instance, in those vernacular stories known as *fabliaux* from the thirteenth century onward.²⁵ In England, there was also a rather specific precedent for both the financial and sexual strands of anti-clerical expression, arising from ecclesiastical and Parliamentary legislation in the aftermath of the second major wave of plague. In 1362 Simon Islip, archbishop of Canterbury, reissued an earlier constitution which forbade priests from overcharging for their services, prefaced by reference to how they cram themselves with excessive fees to the point of sickness, and how being enticed to 'various fleshly things, they drown themselves in desire [*libidinem*]'.²⁶

Islip may have intended *libidinem* to carry its broader theological meaning of worldly desire rather than simply sexual 'lust'. But linking priests with a combination of whoring and financial exploitation was a recurrent social trope, also found much later. Various examples appear in the Norwich Consistory Court from the early sixteenth century: John Wigon said that Sir Thomas Cleyton 'was a false preist and a untrew preiste and comyn horemaister comynly knowyn in the cite and country'; Benedict Newman: 'Sir John Thomas was and is a fals preste and a hoor maister, and that he wold prove'; Thomas Thurbern to Richard Fox of Wortham, 'Thou art a nought priest and a horemonger';

²⁴ See most recently T. D. Vann Sprecher, 'The Marketplace of the Ministry: The Impact of Sacerdotal Piecework on the Care of Souls in Paris, 1483-1505', *Speculum*, xci (2016).

²⁵ Daron Burrows, *The Stereotype of the Priest in the Old French Fabliaux* (Bern, 2005), which presents a nuanced understanding of 'anti-clericalism'; though as with much work on the *Fabliaux* is perhaps too easily persuaded that clerical sexual misbehaviour was more 'fictional' than 'real'. As a recent corrective see Jennifer Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest: Clerical Celibacy, Masculinity and Reform in England and Normandy, 1066-1300* (Philadelphia, 2015).

²⁶ *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae*, ed. David Wilkins, 4 vols (London, 1737), III, 50-51. See B. H. Putnam, 'Maximum Wage Laws for Priests after the Black Death, 1348-1381', *American Historical Review*, xxi (1915), at 20-21. Parliament picked up on the issue, though without the condemnatory language: *Parliament Rolls of Medieval England, volume 5 (Edward III, 1351-1377)*, ed. Chris Given-Wilson et al. (London, 2005), 147: Commons petition to parliament November 1362, where it is noted that part of the problem is those willing to *pay* the excessive fees, who are to be punished by having double their excess fee levied and distributed to charitable works.

Walter Southgate: ‘Ye vicar deall with me like 2 false horesins prestes, and wolde have my goodes to kepe their brothels on’.²⁷ The opposition of ‘false’ and ‘true’ has been associated with Lollard vocabulary, particularly when applied to priests, but the dyad clearly had a much wider compass in popular discourse.²⁸ The notion of being ‘false’ in the Consistory Court records focuses often on tithes, the taking of excessive tithes for example: Richard Gowld, of Finborough Magna, was alleged to have said that his priest ‘was a false priest’ and ‘toke falsely and untrewly tythes wyche he had no ryght to’; another had insulted his rector by saying ‘Thou art a fals polling [‘fleecing’] prest and a shaver, for thou has used polling, but I wollnott be polled and shaved on the’.²⁹ Being ‘false’ could be given a particular theological inflexion, but more broadly meant failing to live up to a received standard of behaviour, part of which was spiritual but part of which also was about taking an acceptable position within the social and financial economy of the parish.³⁰ Protesting or challenging tithes - expressing dissent - could be framed as heresy; indeed, in 1428 we find a group of men from Edington accused of ‘Lollard opinions’ when they formed a confederation to withdraw offerings for the churching of women, exequies for the dead and the blessing of marriages. But such actions are clearly not limited to Lollardy.³¹

It is worth remembering that whilst disputes over tithes have, for obvious reasons, a particular association with anticlericalism (and a particular visibility when looking specifically at ecclesiastical records), tithes are not the only way in which the spiritual, social and economic concerns of clergy and parishioners intersected – and occasionally prompted dispute. A parish priest would usually also have other financial dealings with

²⁷ *Norwich Consistory Court Depositions, 1499-1512 and 1518-1530*, ed. E. D. Stone et al. (Norfolk Record Society x, Norwich, 1938), nos. 272, 251, 73, 166 (hereafter *NCC*). See also Nos. 12, 167, 250.

²⁸ Hudson, ‘Lollard sect vocabulary?’, 166-67.

²⁹ *NCC*, No. 43, 21 June 1503; no. 294, 15 May 1523. My thanks to Andy Wood regarding the vernacular here.

³⁰ For readings which stress an eschatological element, see Tison Pugh, ‘“Falseness Reigns in Every Flock”: Literacy and Eschatological Discourse in the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381’, *Quidditas* xxi (2009); see also Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley, 1994), 182-8.

³¹ Reg. Neville, f. 32r. See similarly the group of villagers from Feversham accused of withdrawing tithes in 1511: *Kentish Visitations of Archbishop William Warham and His Deputies, 1511-12*, ed. K. L. Wood-Legh (Kent Records, xxiv, Maidstone, 1984), 176-77 (no. 146); and wider discussion and examples in Robert N. Swanson, ‘Problems of the Priesthood in Pre-Reformation England’, *English Historical Review* cv (1990).

his parishioners, some of which could also lead to arguments. Disputes founded upon the liturgical expectations of parishioners could be expressed in economic terms, and economic disputes could find para-liturgical expression. Where priests were not fulfilling the role that their parishioners thought due, we find some interesting cases demonstrating a kind of ‘local disendowment’ policy, though without any Wycliffite connection. For example, a dispute over the provision of parish bells in Wymondham in 1507 resulted in the disgruntled parishioners chopping down all the trees in the churchyard, thus depriving the priest of part of his material resource.³² About a decade later, Simon Robinson, priest of More Monkton in Yorkshire, complained to the court of Star Chamber that various local people, led by local squires (with the support of a knight), had been destroying his glebe crop, and not paying tithes, because he refused to farm out his benefice. On one occasion he had been beaten out of the church during divine service, by one Joseph Ughtred:

and that done, the foreseid Joseph sett hymself in the quere in the parsons place, and called to hym part of hys children, and so filled up that syed of the quere, and fourthwith commaunded hys wyf and the resedew of hys childer, both sonnes and doughters, to sit on the other syed of the quere, and browght a grett multitude off dogges... and with thiem fullfyllid and defoyled all the hole quere.

Here we see an apparently very literal lay usurpation of the clerical position; but one clearly grounded in parochial dispute rather than radical theology.³³

Of the various areas addressed in this article, it is perhaps most immediately obvious in the case of ‘anticlericalism’ that its compass extends well beyond Lollardy. Three things however bear emphasis, above and beyond this general point. One is that instances of anticlerical expression arose within specific contexts; they were prompted, and most often limited, by the particular. Richard Loose of Wissett in Suffolk was accused of having said that he ‘coule not broke the vicar of Bramefield’ and that ‘he had as leve see

³² H. Harrod, ‘Some Particulars Relating to the History of the Abbey Church of Wymondham’, *Archaeologia* xliii.2 (1872).

³³ *Yorkshire Star Chamber Proceedings I*, ed. W. Brown (Yorkshire Archaeological Society xli, Leeds, 1909), 166-72 (no. Lxxiv), at 168, undated. Robinson noted that he had tried to get justice locally in York but without success; it is clear from other details that the local lord was backing the faction of villagers.

an oester shell betwix the vicar's handes at the sacring of the masse as the blessed sacrament'; Loose partially excused himself however, on the grounds that he had spoken 'in passion' on account of abusive words that there had been between the vicar and himself.³⁴ The possibility of something heretical hovers here, but is quietened by the intervention of the court and the restoration of parochial relations.³⁵

Second, there are no absolute divisions between these anticlericalisms. Robert Swanson has rightly pointed out that many criticisms of priests are pro-, rather than anti-, clerical: that is, the resented lapses of an individual were being measured against a higher, shared standard of clerical behaviour.³⁶ But even this does not in fact clearly separate what one might call 'orthodox' anticlericalism from Lollardy, since much Lollard invective is similarly voiced in terms of priests failing to meet higher standards of behaviour. Statements in this area demonstrate both linguistic fluidity and context, in the choice of expression, the intent of the specific statement, and as importantly the community's interpretation of the words.

Third, when anticlerical words are spoken, they draw upon a much broader cultural tradition of such expression, and they are capable of being recognised as a *shared* form of speech (even if only shared by a particular sub-group of malcontents, in the opinion of their neighbours). From the records of episcopal visitation in Kent, witnesses said that a man called Richard Richard:

is and hathe bene of that condicione ever that he wold not by his wille suffer any preest to serve amongs theyme, He is soo infest ayenst preests that he is ever talking of theym and redy to say the worst ayenst theym and their order.³⁷

It is perfectly possible that Richard Richard was a Lollard, in the overlapping but distinguishable senses that if the visitation process had led to a heresy trial, he might have been thus identified; that a different group of neighbours might have glossed his

³⁴ *NCC*, no. 117 (24 June 1511).

³⁵ One could similarly note the occasion (*NCC*, no. 74) when Thomas Thurbern's insult to the priest Richard Fox (no. 73, quoted above) received the response from Fox 'thou art an heretike' - which prompted Thurbern to launch a counter claim.

³⁶ Swanson, 'Problems', 868.

³⁷ *Kentish Visitations*, 204 (no. 173).

behaviour thus; and that he himself might have positioned his dissent as part of a wider movement. But in this particular instance, ‘Lollardy’ does not seem quite to be the accusation or opinion of his neighbours; rather that he was ‘of that condition’ that could not abide priests. Something more familiar, if still marginal and dissenting, is signalled here; a grudgeful and localised anticlericalism. This kind of anticlericalism, and the examples cited most immediately above, are part of an articulation of the politics of parish.³⁸ As such, it forms part of a wider discourse, which can be deployed in specific situations. *One* of those situations is Lollardy; or, one might say, having deployed such an articulation, one might find oneself liable to having become a Lollard in the eyes of others – though, as Richard Richard’s case would seem to illustrate – such an outcome could be negotiated locally.

Sceptical

Various historians have noted a sceptical strand in Lollard speech, often voicing a kind of materialist or rationalist objection to certain orthodox practices and beliefs.³⁹ Thus William and Richard Sparke, tried in Lincoln diocese in 1457, admitted saying that ‘That priests have no greater power to make the body of Christ than does a straw or wheatsheaf to make it’.⁴⁰ In 1464, before the same bishop, the blacksmith William Ayleward (mentioned above) confessed that he had claimed that ‘the blode of hayles is but the blode of a dog or a drake ... and al these that levith upon it shall go to the dyvll and as well a synner shall see it as a good man’.⁴¹

I have discussed in detail elsewhere sceptical opinions against the Eucharist, noting among other things that they do not exist only in late medieval England.⁴² To summarize briefly here: disbelief in the Eucharist is attested throughout the Lollard trials, though (as

³⁸ Keith Wrightson, ‘The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England’, in Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steve Hindle (eds.), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (London, 1996), 10–46.

³⁹ J. A. F. Thomson, *The Later Lollards, 1414–1520* (Oxford, 1965), 244; Anne Hudson, ‘The Mouse in the Pyx: Popular Heresy and the Eucharist’, *Trivium*, xxvi (1991).

⁴⁰ Reg. Chedworth, f. 12v.

⁴¹ Reg. Chedworth, f. 61r; the Blood of Hailes was a relic of Christ’s blood.

⁴² John H. Arnold, ‘The Materiality of Unbelief in Late Medieval England’, in Sophie Page (ed.), *The Unorthodox Imagination in Late Medieval Britain* (Manchester, 2010), 65–95.

J. Patrick Hornbeck demonstrates) with notably varied inflexions.⁴³ Whilst there is no clear expression of Wyclif's idea of the 'Real Presence' of Christ remaining in spiritual form, there were many witnesses (some of whom we'll meet further below) who saw the Eucharist as commemorative, and hence potentially spiritual. There are various occasions similarly when Eucharist disbelief is expressed via biblical exegesis of the Last Supper. Others, however, clearly rejected in more *a priori* fashion the idea that it was anything other than material bread and wine, sometimes expressing this in scornful terms. As Anne Hudson has pointed out, this cannot derive directly from Wycliffite texts, which always encouraged some degree of reverence.⁴⁴ In fact, once again, a rejection of the Eucharist on materialist grounds was not limited to late medieval England; one finds it elsewhere in Europe both earlier and later. Moreover, orthodox pastoral works, from periods well before Wyclif, demonstrate in their discussions of the Eucharistic miracle that the Church had long been concerned that the experience of communion might engender doubt or disbelief, particularly via the sensory experience of the material Host.⁴⁵ Thus what are indisputably *Lollard* reflections on the materiality of the Eucharist are also as part of a much longer phenomenon of Eucharistic doubt; not by any means a majority opinion among the laity, but a persistent and recurrent tendency nonetheless.

Of a similar 'materialist' tone are certain rejections of orthodox images. Again, there can be different inflections to the same dissenting position. Some deponents specifically mention 'idolatry', an essentially theological point, for example.⁴⁶ But others also emphasize the inert and material nature of the images. In 1486, John Falsk of Coventry admitted saying that it was foolish to offer to an image of the Virgin Mary, and that 'Hyr hed shal be hoore ['old and grey'] or I offur to hur. What is hit but a blok? If hyt cothe speke to me, I wolde gyfe hit an halpeni worth of ale'.⁴⁷ From a trial in 1511, Michael Gamare of Wymondham St Giles confessed that he had spoken against offering candles

⁴³ Hornbeck, *What is a Lollard?*, 101-3.

⁴⁴ Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 290. On the Eucharist in Wycliffite writings, see also useful comments in Somerset, *Feeling Like Saints*, 263-4, 279-81.

⁴⁵ Arnold 'Materiality'; John H. Arnold, 'Belief and the Senses for the Medieval Laity', in Eric Palazzo (ed.), *Les cinq sens au moyen age* (Paris, 2016), particularly 638-43.

⁴⁶ See Margaret Aston, 'Lollardy and Images', in Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London, 1984).

⁴⁷ McSheffrey and Tanner, *Coventry*, 71-72.

to images, ‘for the verey saynt is in hevyn or where it pleasith god and y[e]t the image of saynt Gylys is but a stocke or a ston. And if the saide image fell downe it wold breke ther heds’.⁴⁸ The phrase ‘stokkes and stones’ is found repeatedly,⁴⁹ sometimes emphasizing materiality alone, at other times linked to idolatry, occasionally contrasted with either the *virtus* of the natural world or with the more deserving ‘image’ of ‘poor men’.⁵⁰

One might be tempted to think of ‘stokkes and stones’ as another piece of ‘sect vocabulary’, and in one sense I think it is precisely that. ‘Stokkes and stones’ probably has its original roots in the Old English translations of the Bible, for example Aelfric of Eynsham’s rendering of Deuteronomy 28:26, ‘you shall serve strange gods, *stoccum & stannum*’.⁵¹ In the Vulgate, the Latin is usually alliterative - *ligno et lapidi* - but in fact in many Wycliffite texts, including the Wycliffite bible, this is translated non-alliteratively as ‘tree and stone’. We similarly find ‘tree and stone’ in the ‘Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards’ from 1395 for example.⁵² The specifically alliterative phrase, adjectivally strengthened, is found several times in one early fifteenth-century polemic against images: ‘Dere Lord! What almes is it to peynte gayly dede stones and roton stokkis wiþ sich almes þat is pore mennus good and lyfelode’. Another fifteenth-century manuscript comes closest to the statements in the trial records, ridiculing the material inertness of

⁴⁸ Reg. Audelay, f. 158v.

⁴⁹ For example, Tanner, *Norwich*, 42, 44; Reg. Chedworth, f. 57r-v; *The Register of Thomas Langton, Bishop of Salisbury 1485-93*, ed. D. P. Wright (Canterbury and York Society lxxiv, Oxford, 1985), 81-2 (hereafter *Reg. Langton*); Reg J. Blythe (Salisbury), fols. 70r, 71r, 72r, 72v, 75v, 76r, 76v, 78r, 79v; *Kent Heresy Proceedings, 1511-12*, ed. N. Tanner (Kent Records xxvi, Stroud, 1997), 85, 108 (hereafter Tanner, *Kent*); Reg. Fitzjames, fols. 7r, 27r; Reg. Audelay, fols. 161v, 162r; John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments: A New and Complete Edition*, ed. S. R. Cattley, 8 vols (London, 1837-41), iv, 233 (hereafter *A&M*).

⁵⁰ Reg. Audelay, f. 148v (‘stocks and stonys and wayne ydols’); Tanner, *Norwich*, 95 (‘since trees growing in the woods have greater vigour and worth [*viriditatis et virtutis*] and would be better adored than dead stones or wood carved into the likeness of men’); Reg. J. Blythe, f. 70r (offerings should be given to the poor, ‘for we shuld rather worshipp the image that god hath maad that is to say the poore man than the Image that man hath maad and peynted the which standeth in the church’). Reginald Pecock notes that Lollards thought it a heresy ‘for to holde that a stok or a stoon graved is a fuller and a perfiter ymage of Crist than is a Cristen man’; Pecock, *Repressor of Over-Much Blaming of the Clergy*, ed. C. Babington, 2 vols (Rolls Series, London, 1860), I, 221-2.

⁵¹ *The Old English Illustrated Pentateuch: British Museum Cotton Claudius B. IV*, ed. C. R. Dodwell and Peter Clemoes (Copenhagen, 1974), fol. 135v.

⁵² ‘Twelve Conclusions’, *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Anne Hudson (Cambridge, 1978), 27. Forshall’s edition of the Wycliffite bible consistently provides the translation ‘tree and stone’ for *ligno et lapidi*, for example Deu. 4.28, Deu. 28.36, Isa. 37.19, Ezek., 20.32. I have only noticed ‘tree and stone’ once in a trial context: *The Register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury 1414-1443*, ed. E. F. Jacob, 4 vols (Canterbury and York Society xlii, xlv-xlvii, Oxford, 1941-45), iii, 206.

images: ‘for noiþer þe stok, noiþer þe craft of man is to be worschipid so ... Wo to him þat seiþ to a tre, be sterid, and a stil ston, arise’.⁵³

However, as we have seen, even if operating as a piece of ‘sect vocabulary’, the phrase does not originate in Wycliffite thought; nor does its use, even in regard to images and idolatry, remain bounded by a sense of Lollardy. In other times and places, the reminder that the image of a saint was but an inert prompt to inner devotion was perfectly acceptable – indeed, desirable. We find it thus in *Dives et Pauper*, an early fifteenth-century text which is now usually thought of as orthodox rather than Wycliffite. The emphasis here is on worshipping via the image, rather than the image itself, and the language is again familiar: ‘[Pauper:] [we dishonour God] 3yf we wurshepyn stockys or stonys or onye ymagys or doon hem ony seruise, as sey3t þe lawe’.⁵⁴ One would find similar reminders throughout late medieval European pastoralia. The alliterative phrase is in any case in common usage, as one would surely surmise from its continued use today (‘sticks and stones may break my bones...’). Biblical references keep us mostly in the realm of idolatry, but in Middle English literature there are various references to ‘swearing by sticks and stones’ and other phrases (for example ‘We meten so selden by stok oper ston’).⁵⁵ Thus, as an alliterative phrase, it has a much wider usage and availability than the heretical.

In another early sixteenth-century trial, Joan Baker was accused of having told her parish priest ‘that thow wolde do no more reverence to the crucifyx in the church than thow wold do to a dogg for thei be but stoks and stones etc’.⁵⁶ To liken something to a dog is clearly part of a general language of insult, with no specific link to Lollardy; similarly, I would argue, ‘stoks and stones etc’ – the ‘etc’ here being shorthand used by the trial

⁵³ ‘Images and Pilgrimages’, in *Selections*, ed. Hudson, 85; TCD MS 245, edited in *An Apology for Lollard Doctrines Attributed to Wicliffe*, ed. J. H. Todd (Camden Society old ser. xx, London, 1842), 85.

⁵⁴ *Dives and Pauper*, ed. P. H. Barnum, 2 vols (Early English Text Series, old ser. EETS o.s. cclxxv, cccxxiii, London, 1976-2004), I, i, 90 (commandment X, cap. v).

⁵⁵ Chaucer, *Troilus*, iii, l. 589 (*Riverside Chaucer*, ed. L. Benson et al. [Oxford, 1988], 521); *Pearl*, l. 380 (A. C. Cawley, *Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* [London, 1962], 17). See various other references under both ‘stok’ and ‘ston’ in the *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. H. Kurath et al. (Ann Arbor, 1952-2001).

⁵⁶ Reg. Fitzjames, f. 27r.

scribe – clearly also has a much wider usage. The key point is that it can however be *used* as part of Lollardy, and of dissent more broadly; this was certainly what Joan Baker was doing, as she strong voiced connection to others executed for their faith.⁵⁷ But then note that in 1499, a miller from Netherledcome in the diocese of Salisbury, Richard Herford, was denounced as a ‘misbelieving man’ and admitted the following:

I have holden and byleved that Images of the crucifix of our blessyd lady and of other sayntes be but dedd stockys and stonys and therefore they awght not to be wurshipped ner any offrynges to be maad unto theym. And that it is wrongfully doon to punyssh any man as a theef for takyng away of such offrynges. Insomuch that no long agow I was in company in Ledcombe aforsayd wher it was spoken that an evyl disposed man the which had robbed an Image of our Lady at Alleford in hampshir was sone after hanged therefore at Winchestre. Wherunto I answered ther openly that he had the more Wrong for if it so were than was he hanged for robbyng of a ded stocke.⁵⁸

This is *all* that Herford was accused of or admitted to; and the general belief against images clearly seems to be derived from the rather particular and solitary instance then specified. It seems unlikely that we would take Herford, from the available evidence, to be inspired by Wycliffite thought, and it is not clear that he was thought ‘a Lollard’ or a ‘heretic’ by those who denounced him. Nonetheless, in expressing what is undoubtedly a *dissenting* opinion – ‘a ded stocke’ – his language intertwines with theirs.

Disputational

Here we focus on what has often been seen as a key feature of Lollardy – the use of vernacular scriptural texts – but with a particular inflexion: as providing the basis for theological dispute. Here is evidence from William Carder of Tenterden, tried in 1511:

⁵⁷ Thomson, *Later Lollards*, 161, 166.

⁵⁸ Reg. J. Blythe, f. 72v. For a possible parallel, see Robert Crowther, tried in Coventry in 1486. He has no connection with other suspects, and his beliefs do not fit well with other Lollard ideas (for example, he thought that if one received the Eucharist in mortal sin or outside charity, it remained material bread); but he did say that pilgrimage to a local image of the Virgin was foolish because ‘it is only wood and stones’. McSheffrey and Tanner, *Coventry*, 67.

Robert Reignold of Tenterden, the Friday of the first weke in Lent last past, came and dyned at this deponents house and there redde in a booke and sermon of Seynt Austyn spekyng ageynst the sacrament of baptisme. And aftir that he had redde it he asked of this deponent: ‘How say ye nowe of the opinion of heretiks, what awayleth to cristen a childe in cold water?’ And this deponent aunswered agayn, ‘Ye be full of questyons, beleve ye as ye will: I woll beleve as a cristen man shuld do’.⁵⁹

It may be that Carder was putting his own inflection on his answering protestation, as other witnesses thought him guilty of other misbeliefs; but in any case, his account provides a clear image of not simply the presence of texts, but a context of debate and discussion.⁶⁰ Reignold's question - 'How say ye nowe...?' - emphasizes the dialectical context: this is not about reading scripture to prompt a shared sense of agreed piety, but an invitation to debate. We find similar instances where someone is reported as having cited scripture: William Stevens of Chinnor, tried in 1464, confessed that a man called Pope had persuaded him to abstain from going on pilgrimage, and had read to him: ‘that the Blessed apostle Paul said in his Epistle “knowlege ye whan to other” for ye lepers where healed of Ihu and he had hem go and shew them unto prestus. And what mede them so to do. Sith that Ihu had made them bowe before’.⁶¹ Several biblical passages appear to be conflated here, though whether by the scribe or the deponent is unclear. Pope similarly read to another resident of Chinnor, Henry Smyth: ‘[Pope] showed him a book in which was written that Lord Jesus sailed the sea in a certain boat...’.⁶²

⁵⁹ Tanner, *Kent*, 10.

⁶⁰ There are other instances where someone cites a specific text, in an attempt to make a particular point. For example, William Stevens of Chinnor, tried in 1464, confessed that a man called Pope had persuaded him to abstain from going on pilgrimage, and had read to him: *Item fatebatur in iudicio quod prefatus Pope dixit sibi quod Beatus apostolus paulus Jacobus dicit in Epistola sua ‘knowlege ye whan to other’ for ye lepers where healed of Ihu and he had hem go and shew them unto prestus. And what mede them so to do. Sith that Ihu had made them bowe before et dicit quod credidit verbis suis unum pacyt misericordium* [Reg. Chedworth, f. 62v]. Several biblical passages appear to be conflated here, though whether by the scribe or the deponent is unclear. Pope similarly read to another resident of Chinnor, Henry Smyth: [Pope] *ostendebat sibi liber in quo erat scriptum quod dominus Ihs in quadam naviculo navigabat in mare...* [Reg. Chedworth, f. 62r]. It should be noted that there is evidence of the inquisitors in these particular trials specifically questioning deponents about book ownership: Jacob Wyllys, a sixty-year old weaver, was asked whether he knew the Epistles of St Paul and the Apocalypse, and from whom he had his books [Reg. Chedworth, f. 57v].

⁶¹ Reg. Chedworth, f. 62v.

⁶² Reg. Chedworth, f. 62r.

The ownership and use of vernacular religious writings was of course not confined to Lollardy: late medieval orthodox vernacular treatises are numerous, and evidence for their possession by the laity (predominantly the gentry and urban elite) plentiful. Nor even, as various studies have shown, was the use of vernacular bibles solely a Lollard practice, despite Archbishop Arundel's Constitutions of 1407 which sought to license and hence limit their availability.⁶³ But it is not simply the presence of vernacular scripture that matters here, but rather the tone, which is frequently disputational, argumentative, citational. This is the linguistic point: not the fact of texts, but the habits of speech grounded in a culture of debate, which rested partly (but not wholly) on access to vernacular texts. As already noted, the trials record a considerable number of vernacular texts.⁶⁴ But more importantly for my current purposes, they also show instances of lay people citing scripture in the context of *argument*, and thus (to their minds) claiming a legitimate place within debate. Roger Gargrave, tried in 1511, said that 'if a calff were upon the altir I wold rather worship that than the said holy sacrament, alleging scripture for this'.⁶⁵ William Mundy of Wokingham, a 'chap-man' (pedlar) tried in 1412, was questioned on having spoken against giving alms to mendicants:

He replied that it is not alms to give anything to mendicant brothers inasmuch as their order is not founded on the law of God but expressly contrary, since they have chosen voluntary mendicancy whereas the proverb says 'I give riches or poverty' etc [Prov. 30.8].⁶⁶

⁶³ Shannon McSheffrey, 'Heresy, Orthodoxy, and English Vernacular Religion, 1480-1525', *Past and Present* clxxxvi (2005); Eyal Poley, 'Wycliffite Bibles as Orthodoxy', in Sabrina Corbellini (ed.), *Cultures of Reading in the Late Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2013). McFarlane noted that English gentry would long have had access to French vernacular bibles, a point which has not been much explored in regard to this field: McFarlane, *Lollard Knights*, 225.

⁶⁴ See Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, and Hudson, *Lollards and Their Books*, passim.

⁶⁵ Reg. Bainbridge, f. 75 r-v. Gargrave also said that 'the date was past that god determined him self to be in forme of bred' – an intriguing form of Eucharistic rejection, perhaps carrying a slight hint of apocalypticism (was now the time when God would return in more corporeal form?), but at any rate again suggesting an unfolding *interpretation* of scripture.

⁶⁶ *The Register of Robert Hallum, bishop of Salisbury 1407-17*, ed. J. M. Horn (Canterbury and York Society lxxii, Torquay, 1982), 219 (no. 1142) (hereafter *Reg. Hallum*). Mundy spoke also against the cross and images and against pilgrimage; he denied having said that married people were as high in dignity as the highest priest, that God 'had lied and made lies', and that the Eucharist was only bread.

In 1443, one Thomas Tykenor admitted that he had possession of ‘auld bokys and quayers conteynyng many and divers heresies’, from which he had determined that the Pope was the Antichrist and was ‘the hede of a dragon the whiche is specified in the apocolips’, going on to map bishops and monks to other parts of the dragon’s anatomy. He further spoke against baptism, confession, the Eucharist, marriage, clerical possessions, fasting, tithes, and against ‘Austyn, Ambrose, Gregory and James or eny other doctors’.⁶⁷ The programme of beliefs is strongly Wycliffite; but the rhetorical mode has a longer tradition, and in contrast to most other deponents, we again see here someone clearly asserting their position both within and against orthodox intellectual culture.

This claim to legitimate intellectual agency is found explicitly on a few occasions. Thomas Boughton, a rather complex figure in his beliefs,⁶⁸ admitted when tried in 1491 that he had been influenced by other heretics; in his youth he had, he said, planned to go on pilgrimage to Compostella, but was dissuaded from this ‘by ther evyl informacion’. He believed that no-one should worship images ‘for nothing wrought or graven with mannys hond owght to be honoured ... as I have herd redd dyvers tymes in an englissh booke that we calle the commandment boke’. Note ‘heard read’: Boughton’s access to learning is indirect. But his sense of legitimate involvement nonetheless remains strong, as he went on to explain:

Also I confesse and knowledge that sitz the tyme of my first acqweyntaunce with the said heretics I have had a great mynde to here sermons and prechynges of doctours and lerned men of the church. And as long as thei spack the veray wordys of the gospels and the epistles such as I had herd afore in our englissh books I herkened wele unto them and had great delight to here them. But assone as they began to declare scripture after their doctours and brought in other maters and spack of tythes and offrynges I was sone wery to here them and had no favour

⁶⁷ Reg. Aiscough, f. 53-v.

⁶⁸ He believed, among other things, that the soul ended upon death: see discussion in John H. Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London, 2005), 2-3, 11, 24.

in their wordys thynkyng that it was of their owen making, for their profight and avauntage.⁶⁹

Boughton here demonstrates a strong sense of self-assertion, not simply voicing a dissenting belief, but claiming a legitimate place within what might otherwise be thought a restricted intellectual realm of disputation.

One wonders if cavilling against this restriction is what lies behind a few instances where deponents explicitly defended the vernacular translation of scripture, alleging that such works were prohibited because of the ‘envy’ (*invidia*) of churchmen.⁷⁰ Envy is an interesting allegation, with more of an implication of hoarding up scripture, rather than mis-using or mis-interpreting it. When we see Lollards reading and debating scripture in small groups, one may perhaps imagine that part of the benefit derived was pleasure in asserting legitimate intellectual engagement. Witnesses against a suspected Lollard called William Wakeham alleged that he had said that lay people might as well say ‘bibullbabull’ as recite the Paternoster in Latin; and that Wakeham had claimed to have disputed before wise men, and to have proved to them ‘that the earth is above the sky’.⁷¹ The latter point might be pure eccentricity; but perhaps one could better read it as a claim to have trumped the intellectual culture of wise men – to have disputed with them in such a sophisticated fashion that they were persuaded ‘that black was white’, as one might say today.

Here the ‘bookish’ and literate end of Lollardy blurs into wider realms of lay argument and discussion. From another Hereford trial in 1472 we find Thomas Pakkar of Walford ‘publicly setting forth the ten commandments and the twelve articles of faith’, a performance partially echoed elsewhere.⁷² Knowledge of the ten commandments and the

⁶⁹ Reg. J. Blythe, f. 74v.

⁷⁰ *Register of John Stanbury, bishop of Hereford 1453-74*, ed. A. T. Bannister (Canterbury and York Society xxv, Hereford, 1919), 118-19 (John Cornewe, John Breche and Richard Atcombe, tried 1469), and 119-20, Thomas Tymbre and Walter Griffith of Lydney, tried in 1472: *et quod licitum est laicis habere libros sacre scripture in lingua Anglicana translatos et ipsos legere, sed invidia virorum ecclesiasticorum hoc fieri prohibet*. (Hereafter *Reg. Stanbury*).

⁷¹ Reg. Neville, f. 52v. For other occasions, where women are the disputants and the learning of the parish priest is explicitly denigrated, see A&M IV, 229, 231.

⁷² *Reg. Stanbury*, 124. For other recitations of the 10 commandments, see *Reg. Langton*, 49-51; A&M IV, 225, 228, 235, 238.

twelve articles, whilst probably not quite as universal as pastorally-reforming bishops would wish, was surely not something limited to Lollards.⁷³ That we find mention of this in a trial register is of course to do with the heretical context; but the point is that Pakkar's performance of the basics of Christian knowledge intersects with a wider current of lay assertion of religious knowledge, and hence on occasion, of spiritual interpretation. We can rarely see this wider sphere of discussion directly, but ecclesiastical authorities had long been aware that there was a tension between instructing the laity, and attempting to prevent the laity debating the faith: injunctions against lay discussion, particularly with regard to the nature of the sacraments, can be found well before the late fourteenth century.⁷⁴

I am not arguing that disputation inevitably leads to heresy (though that certainly was a fear for English bishops by the end of the fourteenth century and thereafter). Nor do I wish to suggest that Lollardy involved a more questioning or intellectually progressive mind-set than orthodox Catholicism. The point, rather, is that orthodox lay people also sometimes discussed their faith; that the attraction of theological 'disputation', notionally limited to an academic environment, could in fact have a wider call; and that, as with the other phenomena discussed in this article, these speech practices *intersect* with – and one might perhaps say 'enable' – one strand of Lollard expression and performance.

Rebellious

Elizabeth Sampson, tried in 1509 by Bishop Fitzjames of London, admitted having declared that:

our lady of Willesden was a brent ars Elfe and a brent ars stocke. And yf she myght have holpen men and women which go to hyre of pilgremage she wolde not have suffered her taylor to have byn brent. And what sholde worshippe our lady of Willesden or our lady of Crome for the t'one is but a brent ars stoke and

⁷³ Norman Tanner and Sethina Watson, 'The Least of the Laity: The Minimum Requirements for a Medieval Christian', *Journal of Medieval History*, xxxii (2006).

⁷⁴ Arnold, 'Materiality', 81-2.

the tother is but a popet. And better it wer for people to geff ther almys at home to pore people then to goo of pylgremage.⁷⁵

I will turn below to the language of insult displayed here, but want to concentrate first on the language of poverty. As noted above, ideas about ‘poor people’ (or more often simply ‘poor men’) are found throughout Lollardy, and of course poverty was both a key Christian trope since apostolic times and a particular locus of late medieval controversy.⁷⁶ However, as with the theme of anti-clericalism, it is necessary to listen closely for some slightly different inflexions to the notion of ‘the poor’. A key distinction is between statements where ‘the poor’ are a distinct group, most usually as the object of patronage and hence clearly separate from the speaker (as is the case in the example just quoted); and cases where the speaker appears to identify him or herself as one of ‘the poor’.

In the latter case, there are further distinctions. We find self-identification with ‘poor men’ throughout Wycliffite literature – ‘We pore men, tresoreris of Cryst and his apostlis’ proclaimed the opening of the Lollard *Twelve Conclusions*, allegedly posted on the doors of Parliament in 1395.⁷⁷ Here and elsewhere the primary connotation is apostolic poverty and simplicity – just as *pauperes* had long been used in orthodox discourse, claimed by monks and friars for example. Linked to this, but with a further particular inflection, are the spiritual ‘poor’ who are specifically *oppressed*. That image has particular roots in the Epistle of St James, where the spiritual validity of ‘the poor’ is predicated not simply on their need, but on their unjust oppression; this has an obvious appeal to Lollards, and the oppressed poor are for example a core theme in the Wycliffite text *The Lanterne of Light*. Both the *Lanterne* and James’s Epistle are mentioned in a number of trials, including that of John Pykas, baker of Colchester, with which we began. But we should note that the image of the spiritual-but-oppressed poor can be found also in pre-Wycliffite Middle English literature. We find them, for example, in the anonymous poem ‘Milicia Christi’ – late fourteenth-century but based upon an earlier Latin text –

⁷⁵ Reg. Fitzjames, f. 7r.

⁷⁶ See most recently Kate Crassons, *The Claims of Poverty: Literature, Culture and Ideology in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, 2010).

⁷⁷ ‘Twelve Conclusions’, 24.

which relates, among other things, how 'pore men' and 'symple men' are threatened by the overmighty.⁷⁸

There is also yet another self-identification with 'poor men', apparently related more directly to economic circumstance. In various passages above – and others found elsewhere in the trials – people express the view that alms would be better given to 'the poor' than to images, but occasionally this finds a particular further emphasis. Here are two examples from trials in 1499. Thomas Seward, a husbandman, spoke against visiting images at shrines: 'nor [should people] offre their money nor other thynges unto theym. Ffor alle such offrynges goo unto prestes awyle and profight which have inowe and to moche ['enough and too much']'.⁷⁹ Another husbandman, John Godson, said that:

a man shuld offer up his hert to almyghty god and kepe his goodys to hymself, affermyng that such offrynges as been used in the church serve of non other thyng but to make the prestys ryche and the laye men poore. [...] Also I have holden and spoken ayenst pilgrimages to holy sayntes or to their reliques sayng that they profighted not to the doers thereof but that the money offred and spent in such use was but wasted and lost which myght have been bystowed among pore people that have great need thereof.⁸⁰

That money given to shrines 'was but wasted and lost' is a common formulation in these particular trials, but Godson's final phrase is unique in this context. Whether or not Godson saw himself as one of the 'pore people' he certainly here associates himself *with* them, and sees them as *impoverished* – that is, not simply 'in need', but having been *placed* in need by the greed of the clergy. The same is implied, I think, by Seward's statement that priests have 'enough and too much'. This is similarly the case in a few other instances. Alice Hignell, tried in 1491, spoke against (and only against) images:

I have missaid ayenst the Image of seint Martyn in this wise seyng seint Martyn is but a foole: if he wer wise he wold not stonde so longe in that high place colde in

⁷⁸ The poem is in British Library (hereafter BL) MS Arundel 286, and has been edited as an appendix to Michael Evans, 'An Illustrated Fragment of Peraldus's *Summa* of Vice', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, xlv (1982); see particularly ll. 797-99.

⁷⁹ Reg. J. Blythe, f. 77r.

⁸⁰ Reg. J. Blythe, f. 77v.

the church but com down and sit by some poreman fier. Over this, when devote Cristen people be offering their candels to the ymage of seint Erasme I have wold I had an hachet in my hand and wer behynde them to knoke them on the heddis, And for the mor despite the seid Imagis have seid and and ben in full mynd willing and wysshing all tho Imagys that stondith in void placis of the church wer in my yarde at home havyng an axe in my hand to hewe them to sethe my mete and to make my potte to boyle.⁸¹

The focus upon material need – the poor man’s fire – gives this a particular inflexion rather different from more apostolic ideas of poverty and simplicity. What also shines through with Hignell, and might be thought present also in some of the other examples just quoted, is her anger. Perhaps this anger, and her apparently homicidal fantasy regarding pilgrims, had its roots in a theological objection to idolatry; but the language that she uses seems to link it more clearly to what one might call insubordinate or rebellious speech.⁸²

As Andy Wood has demonstrated for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the language of ‘poor men’, and fantasies of violence, form a backdrop to premodern popular uprisings.⁸³ This does not imply that we are here dealing in fact with a dispossessed underclass, nor does it say anything about the wider profile of Lollard adherence, which

⁸¹ *Reg. Langton*, 78 (no. 495). There is an echo here of the allegation in Henry Knighton’s chronicle that two Lollard men in Leicestershire burnt a statue of St Katherine in order to cook their cabbage; *Knighton’s Chronicle*, ed. G. H. Martin (Oxford, 1995), 294-8. There is a sense here of a thrillingly scandalous story that one might imagine could circulate more widely – and it’s notable that whilst presenting the tale in a condemnatory fashion, Knighton then includes a fairly lengthy verse (which he quite possibly wrote himself) re-telling it once more in a somewhat gleeful fashion.

⁸² I do not have space here to discuss the Lollard uprisings of 1414 and 1431, though it would be interesting to see whether any of this language can be found in the subsequent royal enquiries. Reference to explicit political dissent is almost absent from the trials. William Ayleward, the smith of Henley mentioned twice in the main text above, was alleged to have said: ‘that the king and all thoo that maynteyned the Churche shall go to the devyll. And inespéciall the king because of his grete supportacion of the church’. The register then notes in Latin ‘This article is to remain in silence [i.e. not read out publicly in court or when giving penance] on the mandate of the Lord Bishop of Lincoln’ (*Reg. Chedworth*, f. 61r). In the early sixteenth century, I find one other example, vaguely wishing for some kind of popular rising, though directed against the clergy and not the lay power (*A&M IV*, 233, concerning speech by Hakkar, who was connected to John Pykas).

⁸³ Andy Wood, “‘Poore Men Woll Speke One Daye’: Plebeian Languages of Deference and Defiance in England, c. 1520-1640”, in T. Harris (ed.), *The Politics of the Excluded in England, 1500-1850* (Houndmills, 2001).

recent research has tended to see as somewhat more socially elevated within the parish.⁸⁴ But it indicates that a *strand* of Lollard expression drew upon a different tradition, of rebellious speech; ‘rebellious’ in the broadest sense of protest, where the notion of poverty indicates, apart from anything else, conjoined social and moral right. For example, in a case before Star Chamber in 1529, the inhabitants of the Cambridgeshire town of Yaxley protested the actions of a local merchant for shipping peas to Scotland when they were still needed at home; the complainants presented themselves as representing the ‘pore men’ of the village, positioned throughout the complaint as the moral centre of the case.⁸⁵ This is somewhat in contrast to certain other Wycliffite voices, as in some sermons for example, where the theme of poverty is part of a call for apostolic reform focussed however on *preserving* social distinctions.⁸⁶

There is a further strand of rebellious expression, often dismissed as ‘crudity’ in the modern historiography. Margery Baxter, tried in 1429, declared memorably that ‘a thousand priests and more every day make a thousand such gods [in the form of the Eucharist] and then they eat such gods and passing through them they emit them from the rear into foul stinking privies, where you can find as many gods as you want if you care to look’.⁸⁷ Similar images can be found a century later. Raynold Bucker of Boxley, tried in 1531, told neighbours that ‘the sacrament of the altar was bread as other bread was, and that the knave priests did receive Him before noon and did piss and shit Him out at whores’ arses at afternoon’.⁸⁸ In Aylsham, in 1537, one man was reported by his neighbours for his opinion that ‘he shoulde have god aswell with a forke full of mucke as with a wax candell’.⁸⁹ I began this section with Elizabeth Sampson’s disrespectful words toward a Marian image, which drew on the language of sexual insult. Again, there are

⁸⁴ Jurkowski, ‘Lollardy and Social Status’, Rob Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England: Reconstructing Piety* (Woodbridge, 2006), chapter 5.

⁸⁵ *Select Cases before the King's Council in Star Chamber*, ed. I. S. Leadam (Selden Society xxv, London, 1922), 182-84.

⁸⁶ See discussion in Crassons, *Claims of Poverty*, 139-76, and particularly conclusion at 175.

⁸⁷ Tanner, *Norwich*, 45.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Ethan Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2003), 209.

⁸⁹ The National Archives (hereafter TNA): PRO, SP1/120, fols. 247r-v. My thanks to Andy Wood for this reference and transcription.

other echoes: in 1536 John Alger said that 'Yff our Lady were here in erth I wold no more fere to meddyll with her then with a comon hore'.⁹⁰

There is again a minor but persistent European tradition of speech in this vein, which insults authority – including the spiritual authority of saints – through low, bodily imagery. It can be found also in more clearly political contexts. In Germany, in some of the 1525 peasant uprisings, crosses were smeared with excrement. In 1549, when royal officers came to parlay with some Norfolk rebels camped on Mousehold Heath outside Norwich, a rebel youth defecated at their feet (and was slaughtered in response).⁹¹ Historians have tended to see such actions as essentially meaningless, unthinking brutishness; but for the possibility of a more constructive reading one could turn to the Russian theorist of language Mikhail Bakhtin. Shit, says Bakhtin, is 'gay matter, which degrades and relieves at the same time, transforming fear into laughter ... Dung and urine lend a bodily character to matter, to the world, to the cosmic elements, which become closer, more intimate, more easily grasped'.⁹² Speaking foully could thus be a means of collapsing the transcendental claims of shrines and sacraments and social authority. Fear and reverence are transformed into laughter, and through that transformation, one finds a place from whence to voice dissent. In some – but not necessarily all – cases, that dissent would be 'Lollard', for the audience, for the speaker, or for both.

A final example in this tone. In 1532, Guy Glazen was suspected of heresy and brought to trial before the bishop of Norwich:

Fyrste he sayde that he wolde not wurship the crosse then the crucyfyxxe. Item he sayde that if he hade the Rode that stondeth in the monasterye of Eye in the yerde

⁹⁰ TNA: PRO, SP1/113, fols. 107r-109r. My thanks to Andy Wood for this reference and transcription.

⁹¹ Andy Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Houndmills, 2001), 61; Andy Wood, 'Fear, Hatred and the Hidden Injuries of Class in Early Modern England', *Journal of Social History*, xxxix (2006). More broadly, see Gregory Heyworth, 'Ineloquent Ends: Simplicitas, Proctolalia and the Profane Vernacular in the Miller's Tale', *Speculum*, lxxxiv (2009); Valerie Allen, *On Farting: Language and Laughter in the Middle Ages* (New York, 2007).

⁹² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky (Bloomington, 1984), 335; see also Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture*, trans. J. M. Bak and P. A. Hollingsworth (Cambridge, 1988), 176-210.

he wolde brenne it. And he wolde shyte upon the hed to make it a fote hygher
then it is now (he sayde thies wurdes in the p[re]sence of John Smythe).⁹³

Guy Glasen was examined and confessed to the articles. He said that he held these opinions from the sermons of Bilney, at Hadley.⁹⁴ And that returns us to the start of this discussion, for Thomas Bilney – Cambridge scholar, famous early proselytizer for Erasmian reform, executed in Norwich for heresy in 1531 – was noted as a preacher by various of those tried by the bishop of London in the early sixteenth century. Amongst them, and specifically identifying Bilney as one of the inspirations to his heretical beliefs, was John Pykas, the heretical baker, the ‘known man’ and ‘brother in Christ’ with whom we began.

Conclusions

In the sections above, I have emphasized that various strands of expression found in the trial registers are not limited to Lollardy or Wycliffism alone. One might then be tempted to develop this analysis in a corrosive fashion, in an attempt to dissolve ‘Lollardy’ into nothing but a phantom conjured up by the authorities. But that is not my intention. It is quite clear that Lollards did exist, in the sense of people inspired by (and sharing with each other) radical theological ideas, the main roots of which can be traced to Wycliffite writings of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. In this article I have taken the presence of that more theological speech, found across the trial material, somewhat for granted; it has been discussed in detail elsewhere and the case for seeing it as fundamentally Wycliffite has been made most eloquently and influentially some time ago by Anne Hudson. There is moreover clear evidence of social contacts, some degree of organization, self-conscious proselytising, and particularly in the second half of the fifteenth century statements of ‘belonging’, with a sense of exclusivity, to a privileged faith. Here Lollardy perhaps comes closest to the modern sense of a ‘sect’.⁹⁵ Richard

⁹³ Norwich Record Office (hereafter NRO), DN/ACT/4b, 1532-33, f. 34r. My thanks again to Andy Wood.

⁹⁴ NRO, DN/ACT/4b, 1532-33, f. 34v.

⁹⁵ As Margaret Aston has usefully noted, in the medieval records the term ‘sect’ does not necessarily imply the kind of specific, separatist adherence to a group that it denotes today; rather, being of the same ‘sect and opinions’ (a phrase found throughout the later trials) might be better translated into modern English simply by the latter term, with an emphasis upon a current of thought than a group as such: Margaret Aston ‘Were the Lollards a Sect?’ in Biller and Dobson (eds.), *The Medieval Church*, 163-92.

Hyllyng of Newbury, for example, tried in 1491, confessed that 'I have seyde that within X yere space ther shalbe one folde and one sheppard meanyng herby that all heretikis and lollardis the which have receyved grace shall preche openly and no man shall dare say agayn them'.⁹⁶ William Berford, a carpenter, said that no-one 'of our sect and opinions' ought to make confession to a priest 'or to any other that were not of our byleve but oonly to oon of our sect'.⁹⁷ John Olyver, tried in 1512, said that Alice Rowley (a very active proselytiser in his area) had said that 'My beleve is better than thers save that we dar not speke it. And why shuld God geve us grete goods more than other men hath but bicause of our good stedefaste beleve and good books'.⁹⁸

These people clearly display adherence to beliefs, and – as importantly – a sense of connection to others who share those beliefs. Throughout the trial material, we see people sharing beliefs, and particularly sharing the reading of texts. In the Coventry trials of 1511-12 most notably, there are some further indications of a self-conscious 'group'.⁹⁹ Joan Warde attested that 'Agnes Margaret White, servant of [Alice] Rowley, is of the same breaking insasmuchas she says "I would have my husband of thy mind"'.¹⁰⁰ The modern editors note that the meaning of 'breaking' is unclear, but the context suggests that it is a synonym for 'sect': breaking away from orthodox religion and community, as the particular requisite for a husband makes clear.

So Lollards existed. But what I have been trying to demonstrate throughout this article is that important strands of the expression of 'Lollard' belief and identity emerge from and intertwine with other expressions of 'dissent', expressions which are spread more broadly and which in some cases pre-date Wycliffite thought; and that what makes particular instances of such expression 'Lollard' is not only the intent of the speaker, but the context

⁹⁶ *Reg. Langton*, 76 (both 'heretik' and 'Lollard' may be read as an inquisitorial gloss upon his words rather than his own language). See similarly William Carpenter (*ibid.*, 79): 'Item I have taught and belevyd that if the feith of lollardis wer not the world shuld be sone destroyed and in shortymne that Feith whos have it shuld be unto the uttermoste makyng and advaunsemente so he kepe that feith in counseill prively'. See also Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 168-73.

⁹⁷ *Reg. J. Blythe*, f. 78r; similarly *Reg. Gray*, f. 131r.

⁹⁸ McSheffrey and Tanner, *Coventry*, 240.

⁹⁹ See McSheffrey, 'Heresy, Orthodoxy'.

¹⁰⁰ McSheffrey and Tanner, *Coventry*, 181.

in which those words were received and interpreted, by neighbours as much as by inquisitors. What it means to 'be a Lollard' is thus not a simple 'in' or 'out' binary choice, but a more complex and ongoing question of how the individual, the moments in which they express dissent, and the wider community, come together.

Let us return to Pykas, and his Colchester trial in 1527, which gives quite a full account not only of his specific heresies, but of what he presents as the roots of his belief:

About a V yers last past at a certayn tyme his mother then dwellyng in Bury sent for hym and movyd hym that he shuld not beleive in the sacraments of the church for that was not the right way and then she showed to this respondant a Booke of powlis ['Paul's'] epistles in Englishe [and] bede hym lyve after the manner and way of the said epistles and gospell and not after the way that the churche doth teche. About ij yers last past he bowght in Colchister of [a?] Lomberd of London a new testament in Englishe and paid for it iiij s. Which new testament he kept by the space of ij yers and red it thorowghly many tymes. And afterwards, when he heard that the said New Testament was forboden that no man shuld kepe them he delivered it and the book of powlis epistles to his mother agen and soo in contynauce of tyme by the instruction of his mother and by reading of the said booke he fell into the errores and heresies ayenst the sacrament of the aulter [...]

Also in the house and presence of John Thompsby [... *and others* ...] with all and further persons often and many tymes have had conversation of the said articles whith hym and stedfastly belevyd them and did afferme them to be of truth as this respondent hath herd them say. Also he saith that he hath taught rehersed and affermed before all the aforesaid persons in ther houses at sondry tymes ayenst the sacrament of Baptym saying that ther shuld be no such thyng for ther is no baptym but of the holy goost and that he lerned in the new testament in Englishe Whereas John saith 'I baptyse ye but in water in token of repentance; but he that shall come after me is stronger than I, he shall baptyse you in the holy goost'.

Also he sayth that he hath in the places and persons aforesaid spoken ayenst the sacrament of confession saying that it was sufficient for a man that had offended to shew his synnes pryvyly to god without confession made to a preyst yet not

withstanding this respondent hath yerly byn confessyd and housled but for no other cause but that people shuld not wonder uppon hym. Also he saith that he hath herd divers prechers preche and specially Mr Bylney preche at Ipsewiche that it was but foly for a man to goo on pilgrimages to saynts for they be but stoks and stones for they cannot speke to a man nor do hym any good. And also that men shuld prey only to god and to no saynts for saynts can here no mannys prayers for they ar but servants which afterward this respondent had hert it preched did publishe and declare to divers persons and sett it forward asmuch as in hym was. Moreover he saith that Mr Bylney sermon was most goostly and made best for his purpose and opinions as any that ever he herd in hys lyef. [... *And Pykas had also spoken to various people against fasting, and that he kept no fasts except the Ember Days; and against Holy Days, other than Sunday; and against indulgences...*] Also he saith that all the fore said persones divers and many tymes hath resortid to this respondents company to many sondray places wheras they gladly and wyllingly hath herd thes articles red taught and disputid and he knowyth certaynly that though some of the forsaid persons be not so well lernid as he yet ther is none a one of them but that hath spoken and affermed the said articles to be trew and be infected with the same. Further he saith that he hath now in his custody a book called the *pryck of conshyence* and a nother of *Seven Wise Masters of Rome* which he had of a freyer of Colchester. Also a boke which begynneth *o thow most glorious and excellent lord etc* which had of Old Father Hacker alias Ebbe. Also he had the copy of a booke of *communication inter Fratrem et Clericum* of his brother Wylliam Pykas which he lost by negligence about a twelfth month past.¹⁰¹

There is no doubt that Pykas is a Lollard, albeit one also interacting with a more recent Reformation theology. He had close interaction with a number of other believers, in both Colchester and London, was connected with the production and loaning of radical books, and was identified by other believers as ‘a known man’ and a ‘brother in Christ’.

¹⁰¹ BL MS Harl. 421, fols. 17r-18v.

Nonetheless, the account he gives of his heretical faith displays an informative complexity of influence. The intellectual or theological materials for his Lollardy come from a variety of overlapping sources: Paul's Epistles, a vernacular New Testament, the Epistle of James (encountered orally), a number of other theological texts including the fairly early Wycliffite work *The Pricke of Conscience*, and the sermons of Thomas Bilney and others. The development or expression of his beliefs involve various social interactions: a mother's injunction to her son, collective reading, discussing and disputing tenets of orthodox faith, attending sermons, nervousness in the face of the explicit condemnation of owning vernacular scripture, and eschewing some orthodox practices but joining in with others.

So, whence come Pykas's beliefs and religious identity? Where does he 'belong' and at what *point*? Do we group him with Thomas Bilney (Cambridge scholar and proponent of learned continental reform) or with Guy Glazen (foul-mouthed shoemaker)? One may of course say, a bit of everything. But if so, we must recognise that there are differences here of *tone* at the very least: that Bilney, reading Erasmus but also using an established popular mode of expression, can sermonize images as 'stokkes and stones'; that his sermon can appeal to the bible-reading Pykas, and can at the same time prompt Glazen to declare that he would defecate on the crucifix. To extend the point: where we, as social historians, identify a group or movement, we must then continue with our questions rather than imagining that we have thus explained fully what brings people to dissent. Lollardy existed, and involved some degree of organised interaction and self-conscious separation from the orthodox mainstream. But 'card-carrying Lollards', neatly signed up to a pre-given programme of belief and behaviour, are but a convenient fiction. Dissenting belief occurs in the interactions between ideas, people, language and contexts; and these are in movement, involving individual and collective interpretations of speech and actions. Herein lies a wider point for social history: that our rebellious subjects are rarely, if ever, 'all or nothing', but are rather *in motion*, speaking and encountering neighbours and enemies, their identities both reflected and buffeted by their social reception.

As the inquisitors questioned the Coventry suspects, a sense of group becomes clearer: Robert Silkby 'confessed regarding Thomas Warde, that Richard Brown said to him that the same [Thomas] was of their opinions and knew all [*or*, knew all of them]. Hachet affirmed the same. Lyeff is one of them, as Landesdale asserted to this deponent. And Hachet asserted the same'.¹⁰² The precise sense of being 'of them' may be an inquisitorial imposition, but Silkby is at any rate capable of being made to recognise a kinship and grouping based on a shared sense of faith. Whether or not this sense preceded the inquisitorial encounter (and Agnes Margaret White's statement noted above, wishing a husband to be of the same 'mind', perhaps suggests that it sometimes did), it is at any rate *latent* in the thoughts, behaviour and connections between Silkby, Warde, Brown, Hachet and the others. That is, when pushed by the inquisitor, their behaviour and ideas made them appear sect-like, both to themselves and to others. One thinks here of those others who admit that they went to church, despite not believing in Eucharist or saints or confession, only to avoid the 'rumour' of the people.¹⁰³ That is, however they saw themselves, they knew how others were liable to see them.

The Coventry trials also appear to show a 'secret vocabulary', as an inquisitorial question puts it, amongst the group, namely that when they met they said 'May we all drinke of a cuppe, and at the departyng, Gode kepe you and God blesse you'.¹⁰⁴ This was clearly framed as a 'secret' saying by the interrogators, though it is not clear how exclusive it really was – the departing phrase in particular would probably have had universal currency in any Christian social context. But that does not mean that we should not see it as part of the performance, by these particular people, of a collective spiritual identity. And this really is my point: that what makes Lollardy 'Lollardy', as a particular dissenting subset of belief more generally, is not a clear-cut position, is not a case of being definitively 'in' or 'out'. Rather, Lollardy – as a dissenting mode of speech, action, and self-presentation - depends upon an intertwining set of practices, ideas, languages and - above all else - interpretations. You *become* Lollard because you are identified as

¹⁰² McSheffrey and Tanner, *Coventry*, 147.

¹⁰³ Various examples in Reg. Audelay, f. 155v.

¹⁰⁴ McSheffrey and Tanner, *Coventry*, 117; see also 110, though the manuscript is apparently only partly legible at that point.

Lollard; or as a 'known man' or a 'brother in Christ'. The appellation does not mark a ceremonial entry or the bestowal of a membership card, but rather a moment of social and linguistic recognition, directed toward the production of a specifically dissenting sense of community. 'Known man' itself was almost certainly a re-appropriation of a negative legal term, for someone marked out as 'notorious' in the community, as we see in another early sixteenth-century deposition by one Thomas Acton: 'He says that three years ago a notoriously defamed person [*quidam notorie defamatus*] – "a knowen man" as he said in the vernacular...'.¹⁰⁵ The description of people as *notorius* or defamed – as 'known', when reported in vernacular speech – appears in a large number of trial documents unconnected to Lollardy or heresy, as in accusations that someone is a 'known thief' or a 'known harlot' for example.¹⁰⁶ So being a 'known man' was not a purely Lollard coinage, but rather a re-appropriation of a wider term.

That specific re-use and re-interpretation of language drawn from a wider discourse encapsulates the essential point I have been pursuing. As people voiced dissent – and as their neighbours (whether hostile or complicit) received and interpreted that which they voiced – they necessarily drew upon much wider currents of language that stretched far beyond the concerns of radical Oxonian theology, or the wider corpus of Wycliffite writings. This, however, does not make heretics disappear. It reminds us, rather, that moments of dissenting speech are social events as well as linguistic traces; that they are enunciated within contexts of interpretation which are intrinsic to their meaning and import. Those contexts were, finally, inquisitorial – as the dissenting speech was *respoken* for the benefit of the bishop's scribe – but were not limited to that realm. Other, wider social contexts of dissent, protest and scepticism precede the 'heretical', and the process by which one became recognised as a heretic – or indeed as a 'known man' – were not purely imposed from on high. Whilst we may wish, for very good reasons, to foreground the impositions of power and orthodoxy that 'made' heresy, we should be wary of making 'heretics' disappear completely. Through the records of prosecution, we

¹⁰⁵ McSheffrey and Tanner, *Coventry*, 150-1.

¹⁰⁶ But note also Hudson, 'Lollard Sect Vocabulary?', 168 which explores a biblical reference point.

can still hear something of the voices of those who chose to voice dissent; and we can give recognition to that choice as a form of dissenting agency.