

## Bohemia in English Religious Controversy before the Henrician Reformation

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In the period between the Council of Constance (1414-18) and the Henrician Reformation (1530-38),<sup>1</sup> religious controversialists in England referred to the Bohemian Revolution with striking regularity, suggesting a sustained interest in the situation there. This was a serious matter for the English, arousing the attention of such men as Thomas Netter, Reginald Pecock and Thomas Gascoigne in the fifteenth century, and Thomas More, Cardinal Wolsey and Henry VIII in the sixteenth. At the beginning of this period, not long after the Council of Constance, Thomas Netter emphasized the role that Wyclif's teachings had played in promoting heresy and revolution in Bohemia. Later in the fifteenth century controversialists complicated the matter, claiming a variety of social ailments (e.g., clerical absenteeism and the individualized interpretation of Scripture) as the primary causes of the Bohemian troubles.

By the sixteenth century, "Bohemia" had become synonymous with sedition and unchecked revolt in the context of English religious controversy. In the face of a new Lutheran predicament, sixteenth-century Catholic polemicists adapted to their new situation by drawing upon established polemical motifs concerning Bohemia – motifs originating in part from medieval controversy – refurbishing them for their attacks on Luther. And whereas fifteenth-century polemicists seldom acknowledge a clear distinction between Wycliffism and Hussitism, many controversialists similarly blur the line between Hussitism and Lutheranism in the early modern period.

Circumstances surrounding the Council of Constance and the Henrician Reformation altered the content and agendas of English accounts of the Bohemians in significant ways, bracketing off an intervening period of English polemic which had its own distinct characteristics. Before Constance, English interest in Bohemia was mainly restricted to Anne of Bohemia and her entourage – their presence in England in particular. The attention given to the queen had little to do with religious politics; with the exception of a few claims about Anne's vernacular Bible reading practices, there is not much evidence to corroborate a link between the queen and religious controversy. The Council of Constance

1 For an excellent discussion concerning the difficulty of defining (and dating) "The Reformation" in England, see Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993) esp. 12-21. I use the dates for the Henrician political Reformation because during this period legislation was passed which (among other things) helped put an end to the strand of polemic which I discuss in this paper.

prompted a shift in focus to events going on inside Bohemia itself. This was made possible by the unprecedented exchange of texts and information from across Europe, and by the amount of attention which the Council (including an influential English contingent) paid to the Lollard-Hussite alliance.

On the latter end of the period in question, Henry VIII's establishment of an English Church separate from Rome – and the perceived need to legitimize such an autonomous, national church – created institutional support for a new kind of discussion about Bohemia, one which was later popularized by Protestant polemicists like John Foxe in his martyrology, the *Actes and Monuments*. I shall touch on this later English historiography of Bohemia in the conclusion, but a fuller discussion will have to wait for a separate occasion.<sup>2</sup>

Between these two watershed events, English controversialists realized the gravity of the situation in Bohemia and its implications for England. This realization prompted an increased focus on Bohemian affairs, and from this new attention, Bohemia gained a reputation which remained associated with it for over a century in England. Whether that reputation amounts to an accurate picture – of life in Bohemia, of the nature of influence from Wyclif to Hus, or from Hus to Luther – is another matter. My point is that the reputation which Bohemia developed in the context of English religious controversy affected the course of that controversy, as well as having widespread political ramifications. As such, that reputation – multifarious as it was – deserves study in its own right.

### I. From Constance to Basel: Thomas Netter and international Wycliffism

Fifteenth-century English churchmen watched with increasing concern as the situation in Hussite Bohemia worsened from a widening schism with the Church to a protracted revolution. The English were not unique in their concern, as can be gathered from the widespread attention given to the trials of Jan Hus and Jerome of Prague during the Council of Constance, to the Hussite Wars which ensued shortly after, and eventually to the negotiations with the Bohemians at the Council of Basel. But when it came to the Bohemians, the English were not just one concerned party like all the rest—for the English had also produced John Wyclif and the Lollards, and the Lollards had a lot to do (particularly in contemporary estimation) with what was happening in Bohemia.

This awkward association posed unique problems for the English in the fifteenth century. While ecclesiastical and secular leaders from elsewhere in Europe were distressed by the revolution in Bohemia, continental leaders could

2 I am currently conducting research on sixteenth-century Protestant historiography of the Bohemian Revolution.

take some comfort in the notion that at least their countrymen had not contributed to it so directly.<sup>3</sup> For the English there was no such consolation – a detail which others were keen to point out. And still worse, if English Lollards and Bohemian Hussites (often called “Wyclefistae”) had a common root in the teachings of John Wyclif, as it was generally assumed, then what would stop revolution from flaring up in England, too? After all, Sir John Oldcastle had attempted a rising in 1414, and churchmen like Thomas Netter were well aware of Oldcastle’s communication with the Bohemians (though I have seen no allegation that the Bohemians had anything to do with the 1414 rising).<sup>4</sup> A few decades earlier, the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 had met with more success. The Lollards were not clearly the prime movers of that revolt, but there was plenty of accusation to the contrary. And later in 1431, William Perkins (*alias* Jack Sharpe) attempted still another Lollard rebellion.<sup>5</sup> In light of these circumstances, something had to be done not only to preserve reputations – were the English doing enough to combat heresy? – but also to prevent Bohemian-style sedition on English soil.

By the end of the 1420s, Thomas Netter (c. 1375-1430), English Carmelite theologian and controversialist, had completed his vast work, the *Doctrinale fidei ecclesiae*.<sup>6</sup> This scathing attack on the Lollards was so influential because it was both concrete and comprehensive; Netter did not merely undercut the logic of Wyclif’s doctrines as men like William Woodford had done, choosing instead to utilize Church tradition and history to establish precedents for his refutations. By virtue of this historical approach, his work remained influential well beyond the sixteenth century because it continued to be useful in countering Protestantism.<sup>7</sup> Nor was Netter’s tendency to situate his arguments in historical precedent limited to the distant past. Recent and ongoing events in Bohemia provided compelling illustrations of what Netter thought to be the logical extensions of Wycliffite doctrine.

Like many of his contemporaries, Netter believed that the Hussite movement had its origins in John Wyclif’s teachings. Wycliffism, according to such

3 This was especially true before the Hussite connections with the Waldensians became more pronounced. And of course, the Austrian Augustinian canon Conrad Waldhauser was also influential in what would become the Bohemian reform movement.

4 See below, n. 9.

5 For discussion of these rebellions, see Margaret Aston, “Lollardy and Sedition, 1381-1431,” in *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London, 1984) 1-47.

6 It is difficult to give exact dates for Netter’s composition of the three volumes of his *Doctrinale*. Most of the work must have been completed during the decade prior to Netter’s death (1430), though it is uncertain when he began writing. For more on the dating of the *Doctrinale* see Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation* (Oxford, 1988) 51.

7 For discussion, see Margaret Harvey, “The Diffusion of the *Doctrinale* of Thomas Netter in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” in Lesley Smith and Benedicta Ward, ed., *Intellectual Life in the Middle Ages* (London, 1992) 281.

thinking, was a broad European heresy, not just an English anomaly. As such, calling attention to the scale of this heresy enhanced the significance of the arguments Netter was making against the English Lollards, his primary adversaries.<sup>8</sup> A continental link suggested that Lollardy was not a contained insular movement and (equally important) neither was its Bohemian offshoot. That is the reason, I suggest, that Netter was so alarmed about events in Bohemia, and that he peppered his text with references to them: if the difference between the movements was essentially one of geographical location, what was to stop similar events from happening in England? Netter understood that in order to eliminate Wyclif's heresy, he would have to redefine the parameters of that heresy, and level an attack on a much broader scale. Indeed, he was the first major English opponent of Wyclif to make such a realization, and his treatment of the Bohemian crisis is the most detailed of any in England before the days of John Foxe.

Netter did not deliberately "construct" a line of direct descent from English to Bohemian reformers; there is every reason to suppose that he believed they were essentially members of the same movement (and there were, of course, many legitimate connections). His knowledge of the precise circumstances of Lollard-Hussite correspondence was incomplete,<sup>9</sup> but this does not change the

8 In fact, Netter's intention was never solely to attack the English Lollards. His original title (not printed in Blanciotti's edition [cited below, n. 9]) seems to have referred to Wycliffites and Hussites. Such a reference does appear in the Paris edition of 1532. Thomas Gascoigne indicates the scope of Netter's attack in his *Dictionarium theologicum*: "Ipse enim doctor Walden... scripsit contra Wyclif et Hus et Ieronimum de Praga tria volumina, vocata ab ipso doctrinale antiquitatum ecclesiae..." See J. E. T. Rogers, ed. *Loci e Libro Veritatum: Passages Selected from Gascoigne's Theological Dictionary* (Oxford, 1881) 2.

9 Netter's incomplete knowledge of the heretical correspondence is exemplified by his suspicion that Sir John Oldcastle had busied himself in obtaining many of Wyclif's books at the request of Jan Hus. See Thomas Netter, *Doctrinale Antiquitatum Fidei Catholicae Ecclesiae*, ed. B. Blanciotti (Venice, 1757-9; reprinted Farnborough, 1967) v.1, col. 623: "Dogma Wicleviticum praecipuus ejus discipulus Joannes Hus a Joanne veteris Castris [John Oldcastle] sibi demandari ab Anglia in Bohemiam petiit." Netter's charge had some truth in it, though it may have been Richard Wyche, rather than John Oldcastle, who was responsible for sending documents to Hus. In the letter by Jan Hus to Richard Wyche written in 1411 (the version in Novotný 83-85), Hus seems to thank Wyche for providing him with "exemplaria." For further discussion, see my "Conveying Heresy: 'a certayne student' and the Lollard-Hussite Fellowship," *Viator* 38 (2007): 217-34. There was, of course, some kind of correspondence between Hus and Oldcastle. In a letter to Wenceslaus IV (dated 7 September, but with no year specified), Oldcastle mentions that he has heard from Hus and others about Wenceslaus's diligent support for the reformist cause. However, aside from Netter's allegation, there is no evidence to suggest that Oldcastle sent texts to Hus. For Oldcastle's letter to Wenceslaus, see Johann Loserth, "Über die Beziehungen zwischen den englischen und böhmischen Wiclifiten in den beiden ersten Jahrzehnten des 15. Jahrhunderts," in *Mittheilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 12, ed. E. Mühlbacher (Innsbruck, 1891) 268-9. On other counts, Netter's information on Anglo-Bohemian heretical exchange is even more patchy; he does not seem to have been aware of Mikuláš Faulfiš or Jiří Kněhnic, the two Bohemian students studying at Oxford from 1406-7 who were responsible for transcribing Wyclif's *De Veritate Sacre Scripture, De Dominio Divino* and *De Ecclesia*.

fact that he knew such correspondence had taken place. These lacunae merely demonstrate that his main concern was evidently not to expose the heretics' travel routes or the correspondents who used them. He knew that Wyclif's doctrines *had* got to Bohemia, and that was what really mattered.

Even if Netter believed that Hussites were essentially Wycliffites, he was savvy enough to know that they were not identical in every way. He realizes, for example, that the Bohemians do not necessarily follow Wyclif in his doctrine of the Eucharist. No matter, though, for "all the Hussites are damned at the source of the Wycliffites, even if they may be separated from them in the heresy of the Eucharist."<sup>10</sup> To paraphrase, if two trunks grow from the same corrupt root, does it really matter if they have slightly different crooks in them?

Netter also picks up on the fact that Hus, after introducing Wyclif's heresies to Bohemia (together with Jerome of Prague), had gained a substantial following for himself. These days, Netter writes, "the followers of his [Hus's] heresy there are called 'Hussites,' having done away with the name of his leader, Wyclif; just as, having done away with the name of 'Donatists' in Africa, afterward his [Donatus'] followers began to be called 'Rogatists.'"<sup>11</sup> For Netter, such heresies are cults of personality more than anything else, invariably tending toward novelty. Elsewhere, in fact, he says as much about the Bohemian reformers – here the "Polluted Praguers" (*polluti Pragenses*) – contending that the Bohemians prefer their own Mass book, complete "with every Bohemian novelty" (*omni novitate Bohemica*), over the Scriptures.<sup>12</sup> And even among themselves, in Netter's estimate, the Bohemians cannot agree on the liturgy of their new Mass: "for the office of the Mass," he writes, "certain of the Prague Wycliffites are permitted to say the entire Gospel following John, *Ante diem festum Paschae*: certain others [are permitted to say], *Qui pridie*, and still others [are permitted to say] something else."<sup>13</sup>

For Netter, though, the Bohemians' disorganized doctrine and liturgy is only part of the problem: on a more worrisome scale, the heretics inflict their disorder on the entire kingdom. In the sixth and final book of the *Doctrinale, De Sacramentalibus*, Netter provides a striking illustration of events rumoured to be occurring in Bohemia – events which, he claims, expose how savage the Wycliffites really can be, if only they are given the chance. "In England," he writes: devout men have felt this persecution in the form of losses to their prop-

10 *Doctrinale* v.2, col. 26: "Hussitae omnes sunt in Wiclevistarum fonte damnati, quamvis ab eis in haeresi Eucharistiae sint semoti."

11 *Ibid.* v.1, col. 355: "Sectores illius haeresis ibi appellantur Hussitae, amisso nomine principis sui Wicleffi; quaemadmodum amisso nomine Donati in Africa, postmodum Sectatores illius Rogatistae dici coeperunt."

12 *Ibid.* v.3, col. 146.

13 *Ibid.* v.3, col. 199: "Pragensium Wiclevissarum quidam feruntur pro Missae officio Evangelium totum dicere secundum Joannem, *Ante diem festum Paschae*: quidam, *Qui pridie*: quidam aliud."

erty and the agitation caused by heretics' slanders. But in Bohemia the devout are all experiencing the most extreme form of Wycliffite savagery: the ransacking of holy sites, the burning of monasteries, the rape of virgins; terrible slaughters, the butchering of saints, the use of hammers to dismember them limb by limb; even the use of millstones to grind the saints' bodies; they drink molten metals, and willingly accept exile in return for their great devotion. They are afflicted a hundred times more cruelly by "Christians" who bear that name falsely than by actual Turks or Saracens.<sup>14</sup>

While those who are pious in England have not gone unscathed, Netter implies, the English do not really know the potential of the Wycliffite threat (again, following his assumption that Lollards and Hussites are all "Wyclefistae"). When combined, Netter's references to Bohemia give the impression that schism is endemic to Bohemian society under the Hussites; doctrinal fissures have become physical violence, a battle of doctrines turned civil war.

Thomas Netter's concern about the Bohemians peaked earlier than that of many in the English Church and secular hierarchies. By 1427 he had already dedicated the first two parts of his *Doctrinale* (books 1-5) to Pope Martin V, who received them warmly.<sup>15</sup> These sections contained several of Netter's references to the Bohemians, though not his most gruesome report (from book 6, quoted above) detailing the Wycliffite savagery in Bohemia. His decision to dedicate portions of the *Doctrinale* to the pope was timely, occurring in the midst of the ongoing crusading campaign against the Bohemian heretics. And as Netter was probably writing the third part of his work, *De Sacramentalibus*, tidings from Rome reached the English.

Evidently it was not with men like Netter in mind that Pope Martin V, in a letter dated 9 October 1428, admonished the English Church hierarchy, roundly warning them of the Bohemian threat to England and criticizing their apparent laxity in routing out heretics in their own land –heretics who (he argued) were fuelling the Bohemian menace. In fact, Netter may be responsible in part for influencing the pope's views on the exchanges between English and

14 *Ibid.* v.3, col. 568: "Hanc persecutionem, religiosi viri damnis rerum, & opprobriis haereticis agitantibus senserunt in Anglia. Sed extremam saevitiam Wiclevistarum ipsi omnes experiuntur in Bohemia, ubi locorum sanctorum eversiones, claustrorum combustiones, violationes virginum, caedes horrendae, sanctorum jugulationes, mactationes sub malleis de membro in membrum, contritiones sanctorum corporum etiam petris molaribus, liquentia item metalla gustant, & exilia vice magnae pietatis gratanter accipiunt: centies acrius sub falsi tituli christianis, quam sub veris Turcis, & Saracenis afflicti." Netter's references to "the ransacking of holy sites," "the burning of monasteries," and "terrible slaughters" are not unusual in accounts of Bohemia, but I have found no precedent for his references to more specific forms of torture.

15 The papal letters acknowledging the first two volumes of Netter's *Doctrinale* are dated 1 April 1426 (vol. 1) and 8 August 1427 (vol. 2). For discussion of the dedication, see Margaret Aston, "William White's Lollard Followers," in *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London, 1984) 76-7 and notes.

Bohemian heretics.<sup>16</sup> Martin V reminds the English churchmen that the Bohemian heresy began in England, and that if the English are to preserve their reputation, they will need not only to recognize this fact, but to act upon it. He points out that whenever this matter enters into the conversation of men, “soon it is added that [the heresy in Bohemia] originated in England”; apparently, he implies, this is old news to everyone but the English. “Furthermore,” writes the pope, there have remained there [in England] not a few shoots of this heresy which, unless they are quickly rooted out, will continue thus to grow high; so that there is great doubt whether England (may God in His mercy prevent it) may not come to the same fate as Bohemia. Even if no indications appeared in former times, it has been detected more evidently in recent days, when in different parts of England, many heretics have been detected and captured. A rumour reports, and it is very likely, that they have many associates and a great number of allies who (as daily it comes to pass), infecting and seducing others to the destruction of the entire realm, will increase and become more abundant, until this heresy thrives in Bohemia. Similarly, we have been informed by a trustworthy source (and you certainly ought to have perceived) that frequently messengers of the Wycliffites, hiding in England, set out for Bohemia, to encourage them [the Hussites] in their faithlessness and provide them with the hope of assistance and support.<sup>17</sup>

It may seem strange at a time when the Lancastrians, in association with the ecclesiastical hierarchy, were very much intent upon stamping out Lollardy, that the pope should question the seriousness with which the English were addressing heresy. To understand this apparent irony, however, we should keep in mind that churchmen (especially outside of England, it seems) typically made very little distinction between “Wycliffites” in England or Bohemia. The pope suggests

16 See *ibid.* for discussion.

17 The Latin text of the complete letter may be found in Gratius Ortwinus, *Fasciculus rerum expendarum et fugiendarum*, 2 vv, ed. Edward Brown (London, 1690) 2:616-17. The relevant portion is as follows: “... cum abinde haec pestifera & abominanda haeresis, quae tantum nequitiae & scandali in Christianitate seminavit, radices traxerit: propter quod Anglici proprio honori & famae consulentes, nil magis cogitare deberent. Caeterum, quomodo haec pestis extingueretur, de qua cum sermo inter homines contingit, mox subjungitur, ex Anglia eam derivasse, & inde hoc malum duxisse originem? Praeterea remanserunt ibidem hujus haeresis non parvi surculi, qui nisi celeriter extirpentur, adhuc ita exurgent in altum, quod valde dubitandum est ne Angliae (quod Deus per suam misericordiam avertat) adveniat quemadmodum & Bohemiae: quod & si superiori tempore nonnulla indicia apparuerunt, a paucis citra diebus evidentius detectum est; cum in diversis Angliae partibus multi reperti sunt & capti haeretici, quos & fama refert, & valde verisimile est, multos habere participes & magnum sociorum numerum, qui, ut quotidie fieri solet, inficientes & seducentes alios in perniciem totius regni crescent & abundabunt magis, quamdiu vigebit in Bohemia haec haeresis. Et a fide dignis accepimus, & vos certius intellexisse debetis, quod saepenumero a Wicklefistis in Anglia latentibus, in Bohemiam proficiscuntur nuntii, illos in sua perfidia confortantes, & praebentes eisdem auxilii & subsidii spem.”

that the English are out of step with the times: if the Lancastrian regime is really serious about Lollardy, it can no longer define it as an English heresy.

English reaction to the papal warning was rather lukewarm initially,<sup>18</sup> but slowly they came round to the idea that confronting the Hussites was in their best interest.<sup>19</sup> Still, even after their papal rebuke, the English were not eager to expand their initiatives against the international heresy in material terms – a likely reason being that they were already engaged in the Hundred Years War with the French. A diplomatic solution to the Bohemian schism was more attractive than a military one (and surely they knew how poorly the crusades were going); the Council of Basel would provide them an opportunity to exercise their diplomacy.<sup>20</sup> And from the very beginning of the English correspondence with the Council, they made it clear that their primary interest in sending an embassy was to restore the Bohemians to the Church.<sup>21</sup>

18 This reaction can be gauged in part by the response the Privy Council gave to Cardinal Henry Beaufort (the papal legate responsible for crusade initiatives against the Hussites) in December 1428, granting only part of what Beaufort had petitioned for in his request for aid in the crusade against the Hussites. See Thomas A. Fudge, *The Crusade Against Heretics in Bohemia, 1418-1437* (Aldershot, Hampshire, England, 2002) 251-253 (for Beaufort's petition) and 253-255 (response from the Privy Council). The St. Albans chronicler gives a somewhat different impression about the English response to the papal request. He mentions the convocation during which the pope asked the English clergy for a tenth (integram decimam) "in destructione haereticorum Boemiae" (24). See *Chronica monasterii S. Albani a Johanne Amundesham*, 2vv, ed. H. T. Riley (London, 1870) 1:24. The account does not mention whether or not the pope got what he requested, giving only the vague statement that "statuta et ordinationes edita sunt contra Lollardos in hac Convocatione, qui tam Boemiae quam in pluribus partibus Angliae nimium saevire et rebellare contra Christianam fidem dolose elaboravere et laborant" (1:32). These "statuta et ordinationes" probably include the permission given to Cardinal Beaufort to proclaim the cross and raise a volunteer army (funded by Rome) throughout England. In any case, there is no explicit indication in this account that the English were sluggish in their response.

19 The Lollard rising in 1431 may have reminded them of the chastisement that Martin V had given them three years earlier. This rising was crushed with disproportionate force, perhaps with the intention that the English response would be noticed abroad. The response also demonstrated that the English were aware of their tarnished reputation.

20 When the Council got underway, the English had not yet sent an official delegation. Among the reasons for the embassy's absence was that Henry VI, though interested in the Council, was conducting negotiations with Pope Eugene IV, who did not recognize the Council's authority, and had set up a rival Council at Bologna. Once Henry had done his best to appease the pope, he began to correspond with representatives of the Council of Basel in greater earnest.

21 The royal procurator "De Tractando super Reductione Boemorum," issued 1 December 1432, is printed in *Foedera, Conventions, litterae et cuiuscumque generis acta publica &c.*, 20 vv, ed. T. Rymer (London, 1727) 10:529-30. For further discussion of English involvement at the Council, see A. N. E. D. Schofield, "The First English Delegation to the Council of Basel," *JEH* 12 (1961) 167-96. Even as the English were showing signs that they would add their support to the conciliar cause, however, they remained hesitant. Before Henry made his decision to send his ambassadors, he had faced substantial pressure by many of the European princes who supported the Council. His correspondence with the Council, as well as with the pope, indicates that this pressure had affected his decision. Henry was also dissatisfied with the news from Basel telling him that, instead of voting by "nations," as had been the practice at Constance, decisions at this Council

## II. “Bohemia” as an English byword

English involvement at Basel brought greater visibility to the Bohemian issue in England. This is one way to account for the fact that references to the Bohemian Revolution become more frequent in the second half of the fifteenth century. Netter’s ideas about Bohemia also held currency (at least analogously) in England after Basel, even if his influence over later treatments of the Bohemian Revolution was not necessarily direct.<sup>22</sup> During this period, English assessments of the Bohemian Revolution came from several directions, and as a polemical motif, “Bohemia” became much more adaptable than before. Everyone agreed that something had gone terribly wrong in Bohemia; the reason this happened was another matter. Many of the suggestions have more to do with a particular author’s pet issues than with Bohemia. And while they were feasible causes, these examples suggest that English discussions of Bohemia were more about England than anything else.

Reginald Pecock (c. 1395-c. 1460) was the next major anti-Lollard polemicist in England after Netter to reference Bohemia for polemical purposes. In his *Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy* (completed c. 1455), Pecock was intent to reveal (among other things) the dangers that were sure to ensue should the “lay party ... adhere to and trust their own knowledge” in the exposition of Scripture, rather than heeding more “substantially learned” clerks.<sup>23</sup>

would be made by “deputations” consisting of international groupings. Largely as a result of this new system of voting, the English refused to become fully incorporated members of the Council; they would never be completely on board with policies that could in any way compromise what they perceived to be their domestic interests.

- 22 His work seems to have had its greatest readership in Carmelite and conciliar circles. However, Thomas Gascoigne (discussed below) was familiar with Netter’s work, as well as the fact that Netter had written against Wyclif, Hus and Jerome of Prague (see above, n. 8).
- 23 Reginald Pecock, *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming the Clergy*, ed. Churchill Babington (London, 1860; reprinted 1966) 85. For audience considerations, I provide modernized renderings of Middle English and early modern English passages in the body of this paper. Transcriptions from the original versions appear in the footnotes. To keep the footnotes from becoming more cumbersome than they already are, I have not modernized passages which appear only in the footnotes. Relevant Middle English passages from Pecock (85-6) are as follows: “If substantiali learned clerkis in logik and in moral philosophie and in dyvynyte, and ripeli exercised ther yn, weren not and schulden not be forto wiseli and dewli zeue trewe vndirstondingis and expositiouns to textis of Holi Scripture: or ellis, thouz suche clerkis ben, and the lay parti wolen not attende to the doctrine, whiche tho clerkis mowe and wolen (bi proof of sufficient and open euydence) mynys-tre to the lay part; but the lay parti wolen attende and truste to her owne wittis, and wolen lene to textis of the Bible oonli, y dare weel seie so many dyuerse opinions schulden rise in lay men-nys wittis bi occasioun of textis in Holy Scripture aboute mennys moral conuersacioun, that al the world schulde be cumbrid therwith, and men schulden accorde to gidere in keping her seruice to God, as doggis doon in a market, whanne ech of hem terith otheris coot. [...] [A]nd than if no iuge schulde be had forto deeme bitwixe hem so diuersely holding, eende schulde ther neuere be of her strijf, into tyme that thei schulden falle into fisting and into werre and bateil; and thanne schulde al thrift and grace passe away, and noon of her holdingis schulde in eny point be therbi strengthid or confermed.

He feared that unregulated interpretation of such a complex and foundational text as the Bible would soon degenerate into backbiting, where people act “as dogs do in a market, when each of them tears the other’s coat.”<sup>24</sup>

Pecock worries, though, that things will get much worse than people bickering like “dogs...in a market”: “end should there never be of their [i.e., the lay party’s] strife,” he claims, “until the time that they should fall to fighting and to war and battle; and then should all prosperity and grace pass away, and none of their positions should in any point be strengthened or confirmed.”<sup>25</sup> Pecock’s point is that the confusion which arises from unrestrained interpretation is unlikely to remain on a hermeneutic level; inevitably this confusion finds its way into physical violence on a more destructive scale, making its prevention all the more urgent. And after all, Pecock wasn’t making this up: “Surely in this way and in this manner,” he recalls, “and by this cause befell the rueful and lamentable destruction of the worthy city and university of Prague, and of the whole realm of Bohemia, as I have had there of information enough.”<sup>26</sup> Surely it was no wonder that “to them [the Bohemians] befell that wretched

Certis in this wise and in this now seid maner and bi this now seid cause bifille the rewful and wepeable destruccioun of the worthi citee and vniuersite of Prage, and of the hool rewme of Beeme, as y haue had ther of enformacioun ynou3. And now, aftir the destruccioun of the rewme, the peple ben glad for to resorte and turne asen into the catholik and general feith and loore of the chirche, and in her pouerte bildith up asen what was brent and throwun doun, and noon of her holdingis can thrive. But for that Crist in his prophecying muste needis be trewe, that ech kingdom deuidid in hem silf schal be destroyed, therefore to hem bifille the now seid wrecchid mys chaunce. God for his merci and pitee kepe Ynglond, that he come not into lijk daunce.”

24 *Ibid.* 85-86. The stance that individualized interpretation easily gives way to communal strife was often put forth during the debate on vernacular translation at Oxford (1401) and in the years leading up to and beyond Arundel’s *Constitutions* (implemented 1409), the legislation that sought to curtail vernacular translation in England. For discussion of religious politics during this period, see Nicholas Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s *Constitutions* of 1409,” *Speculum* 70 (1995) 822-864 (especially 840-47); and Anne Hudson, “The Debate on Bible Translation, Oxford 1401” *English Historical Review* 90 (1975) 1-18. It must be noted here, of course, that Pecock is not discussing translation, but interpretation. Nonetheless, he has applied many of the arguments that had been used in the past against translation for his own purposes here. With his bestial imagery, too, Pecock draws upon an established polemical motif in England, one in which humans behave like brutes in the absence of a strict, well-run social hierarchy. Chroniclers recounting the 1381 Peasants’ Revolt, as well as John Gower, who treated the same event in his poem *Vox Clamantis*, provide some of the most notable examples of this motif. Cardinal Wolsey’s account (below) specifically depicts the Bohemians acting like beasts.

25 *Repressor*, 86.

26 *Ibid.* When Pecock refers to the destruction of the “vniuersite of Prage,” he is likely making an oblique reference to the exodus of German faculty and students from Charles University in 1409, which occurred after Jan Hus and others convinced Wenceslaus IV to pass the decree of Kutná Hora (18 January 1409), thereby giving more votes to the Bohemian “nation” of the university. This event did indeed result in what could be considered the “wepeable destruccioun” of most of the university faculties. Hus’s actual role in this process is uncertain. For discussion, see František Šmahel, “The Kuttenberg Decree and the Withdrawal of the German Students from Prague in 1409: A Discussion,” in *Die Prager Universität im Mittelalter* (Brill, 2007) 159-71.

misfortune”—this had all been foretold in Christ’s prophecy (Luke 11.17) “*that each kingdom divided in itself shall be destroyed.*”<sup>27</sup>

Pecock’s logical progression sounds a lot like Netter’s; both men agree that in the absence of some kind of stabilizing oversight, individualized interpretation leads to progressively serious forms of discord. But whereas for Netter the hermeneutic conflict was closely bound up with Wyclif’s heresy (not individualized interpretation broadly defined), Pecock does not make the same explicit connection. His ambiguity is consistent with his practice of avoiding terms like “Lollard” in his treatise, probably so that his arguments would appear less confrontational – he wants to bring the Lollards back into the fold through gentle correction, not crushing critique. Pecock still assumes some kind of circumstantial similarity between England and Bohemia (“God in his mercy and pity protect England, that it come not into a similar predicament,” he prays).<sup>28</sup> But without explicitly referencing the Lollard-Hussite alliance, Pecock’s warning applies even to those who may not be Lollards, but may nevertheless sympathize with their interpretational practices.

Thomas Gascoigne (1404-58) had other ideas about what caused the troubles in Bohemia. Gascoigne’s *Dictionarium theologicum* (which he compiled throughout much of his life) is an alphabetically arranged preaching guide with entries on a variety of theological topics, as well as a lively repository of his views on historical and contemporary issues. Included in the collection are two related issues which aroused his particular scorn: clerical absenteeism and plurality of benefice. So detrimental were these clerical abuses, he claimed, that they were largely responsible for what had happened to Bohemia.

In the entry on “*Appropriacio et non residencia*” Gascoigne offers the following assessment of Bohemia’s downfall: “Indeed the unworthy advancement of incapable persons and the appropriation of parish churches were the reasons that the kingdom of Bohemia was destroyed, and that heretics ruined that country and kingdom....”<sup>29</sup> Gascoigne knew that the situation in Bohemia arose from a number of factors. The heretics were allowed to take over the realm of Bohemia because the clerics – who were incompetent and who were not occupying their benefices to begin with – were not around to stop them. Such a lack of shepherding reached all the way to Rome, he argues; when the University of Prague sought help from Martin V, no help came to them. No wonder, then, that opportunistic heretics took over: when the Church would send no help,

27 *Repressor*, 86.

28 *Ibid.* Pecock’s statement here sounds very similar to a comment expressed by Pope Martin V in his letter to the English church hierarchy in 1428 (above).

29 Gascoigne, *Loci e Libro Veritatum* 5: “*Indigna enim promocio inhabilium personarum et appropriacio ecclesiarum parochialium causae fuerunt destruccions regni Bohemorum, et hereticorum illam patriam et regnum destruentium....*”

“the kingdom of Bohemia was destroyed, and the churches ruined and burned by Hus, the prince of heretics, and by Peter Clark the Englishman [i.e., Peter Payne]....”<sup>30</sup> Gascoigne clearly has no sympathy for the heretics (and especially for Peter Payne, whom he criticizes on several occasions),<sup>31</sup> but he is generous enough to acknowledge that corruption and ineptitude within the Church were just as much to blame for what has happened to Bohemia.<sup>32</sup>

### III. “new heretics... old heresies”:

#### Bohemia in early sixteenth-century England

In early sixteenth-century English polemic, Thomas Netter’s historical approach became standard procedure – an obvious difference being that the new heretics of the previous century became the old heretics of the current one. It became a commonplace to mention Luther and Hus in the same breath, even without explaining what one had to do with the other. This new association stemmed mainly from comments made during the Leipzig Disputation (1519), where Johann Eck had aimed to link Luther’s teachings with several of Hus’s con-

30 *Ibid.*: “destructum est regnum Bohemorum et ecclesiae destructae et combustae per Hus hereticorum principem et per Petrum Clark Anglicum...” The entire passage is as follows (*Ibid.* 5-6): “Indigna enim promocio inhabilium personarum et appropriacio ecclesiarum parochialium causae fuerunt destructionis regni Bohemorum, et hereticorum illam patriam et regnum destruentium, et quando verisimile fuit quod talia mala imminerent regno Bohemiae, per indignos praelatos, per appropriationem ecclesiarum, et per curatos non residentes in curis suis, Universitas Pragensis scripsit Martino 5<sup>o</sup> pro remedio horum malorum, sed remedium non fuit consecutum sed destructum est regnum Bohemorum et ecclesiae destructae et combustae per Hus hereticorum principem et per Petrum Clark Anglicum, magistrum artium inutilem Oxoniae, qui fuit natus in Anglia in villa juxta Grawntham vocata Anglice Hoch, et ibi mansit pater ejus, qui fuit Gallus seu Francus nacione, natus in Gallia, qui Petrus associatus fuit malo heretico Procopio, in Praga principali heretico.” Gascoigne’s sources of information about Bohemia include Netter’s *Doctrinale* (see above, n. 8), and copies of the Acta from the Councils of Constance and Basel, which he claims to have seen (see, for example, pp. 115 and 116).

31 *Ibid.* 5-6, 10, 20, 186, 187.

32 At another point (*ibid.* 9-10) Gascoigne also blames the queen of Bohemia for defending Hus and his followers, as well as Peter Payne. In fact, there was plenty of blame to go around, and not everyone who cited the Bohemian situation did so in the context of religious polemic. Surely political ineptitude must have had something to do with the revolution in Bohemia, suggests John Fortescue (c. 1397-1479), political theorist and likely tutor to Prince Edward. Indeed, Fortescue gives no indication that heresy (let alone an Anglo-Bohemian heretical alliance) had anything to do with the destruction in Bohemia. As far as he was concerned, the revolution was not a religious issue, but the result of poor governance. In his *Difference between an Absolute and Limited Monarchy* (c. 1471, known commonly as *The Governance of England*), he embeds his reference to Bohemia in an argument against the idea that a king can prevent uprisings among the commoners by keeping them poor. “[I]t seems,” he argues, “that poverty has been the whole cause of all such risings. The poor man has been stirred thereto by occasion of his poverty, in order to get goods, and the rich men have gone with them, because they did not want to be made poor by losing their goods. What then would happen, if all the commons were poor? Truly it is likely that this land then should be like the realm of Bohemia, where the commons, because of poverty, rose upon the nobles, and made all their goods to be in common.” See Sir John Fortescue, *On the Laws and Governance of England*, ed. Shelley Lockwood (Cambridge, 1997) 109.

demned positions.<sup>33</sup> Initially Luther was anxious to deny the charges, but gradually he came to appreciate many of Hus's teachings (particularly with respect to Hus's ecclesiology). Soon Luther made the job of his opponents much easier when in 1520 he boldly asserted that "we are all Hussites without even knowing it."<sup>34</sup>

Several English public figures exploited Luther's wavering attitude toward the Bohemians. In his *Assertio septem Sacramentorum adversus Martinum Lutherum* (1521),<sup>35</sup> Henry VIII (r. 1509-47) characterizes Luther as an indecisive opportunist for flattering the Bohemian heretics "whose perfidiousness he before detested."<sup>36</sup> Indeed, writes Henry, "Luther flatters the very scum of the Bohemian commonality: and not without reason...for he foresees that the Germans (which he formerly deceived under the form of a simple sheep) would reject him as soon as they should perceive him to be a devouring wolf."<sup>37</sup> Later in the same decade, Thomas More (1478-1535) commented in his *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529) that at one time Luther considered the Bohemians to be "damnable heretics" for disobeying the pope; but later "the Bohemians whom he had in his writings before called damnable heretics were good Christian men and all their opinions good and catholic."<sup>38</sup>

But when it came to establishing the relationship between Luther and Hus in more precise terms, English polemicists tended to allow Bohemia's reputation to do the explication for them. John Clerk (c. 1481-1541), in his preface to

33 For discussion of the Leipzig Disputation, and especially the dispute over Luther's debt to Hus, see Scott H. Hendrix, "We Are All Hussites? Hus and Luther Revisited," *AR* 65 (1974) 134-61.

34 Luther wrote this in a letter to Georg Spalatin, dated 14 February 1520. The relevant passage is as follows: "Ego imprudens hucusque omnia Iohannis Huss et docui et tenui. Docuit eadem imprudentia et Iohannes Staupitz. Breviter: sumus omnes Hussitae ignorantēs. Denique Paulus et Augustinus ad verbum sunt Hussitae. Vide monstra, quaeso, in quae venimus sine duce et doctore Bohemico. Ego prae stupore nescio, quid cogitem, videns tam terribilia Dei iudicia in hominibus, quod veritas evangelica apertissima iam publice plus centum annis exusta, pro damnata habetur, nec licet hoc confiteri." From *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Briefwechsel*, 18 vv. (Weimar, 1930-85) 2:42.

35 The English translation (from which I quote in this paper) is in Henry VIII, *Assertion of the Seven Sacraments in Miscellaneous Writings of Henry the Eighth*, ed. Francis Macnamara (London, 1924) 25-154. This is the treatise which, after it was presented to Pope Leo X, helped earn Henry his title "fidei Defensor."

36 *Ibid.* 55.

37 *Ibid.*

38 Thomas More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 2 vv, ed. Thomas M.C. Lawler, et al. The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More 6 (New Haven, Connecticut, 1981) 2:361: "[Luther] sayd that all crysten men were bounden to stand and obey [the judgment of the pope] / and that the Bohemes were dampnable heretiques for doying the contrary. But sone after whan he was in suche wyse answered by good and cunning men / that he perceyued hym selfe vnable to defend that he had affermed / than fell he from reasonyng to raylyng / and vtterly denied that he had byfore affyrmed. And than bygan to wryte that the pope had no power at all / neyther by god nor man. And that the Bohemes whom he had in hys wrytyngs byfore called dampnable heretykes / were good cristen men / and all their opynions good and catholyque."

Henry's *Assertio*, writes that Luther fled to Bohemia in order to find souls that were more sympathetic to his teachings than those of the Germans. If the pope had allowed Luther to remain there, however, what danger, what devouring conflagration had this plague brought to all Christendom let the Hussitarian heresy evince. Which though contented at first with small beginnings, yet through the neglect of Superiors [cf. Gascoigne], increased to such a height that at last it turned not only cities and people but also that most populous Kingdom of Bohemia from the Christian Faith, reducing it to that misery under which it now languishes.<sup>39</sup>

Bohemia – which John Clerk calls “the mother and nurse of [Luther’s] heresies”<sup>40</sup> – is cast as the refuge of heretics, producing them as well as sheltering them. The proposition that the “Hussitarian heresy” is able to “evince” the destruction that Luther would have caused (if he had remained in Bohemia) rests on the argument that Luther is unoriginal – a mere increaser of Hus’s inventions (much like what Netter had said of Hus’s relation to Wyclif).<sup>41</sup> And as an imitator of the condemned Bohemian heretic, Luther now bears all of the baggage that Bohemia has accumulated over the past century in English religious controversy.

Like John Clerk, Thomas More does not define exactly how (other than by analogy) the Lutherans and Bohemians are related groups. More suggests in his *Dialogue* that – severed from the True Church – the people of Saxony and Bohemia have become increasingly sectarian as a result of widespread disagreement:

For in Saxony first and among all the Lutherans there are just as many heads as wits, and all as wise as wild geese. And as recently as they began, yet there are not only as many sects almost as [there are] men, but also the masters themselves change their minds and their opinions every day, and know not where to keep them. Bohemia is also in the same situation: one faith in the town, another in the field; one in Prague, another in the next town. And yet in Prague itself, [there is] one faith in one street, another in the next, so that if you attribute something to Bohemia, you must tell in what town, and if you name a town, yet must you tell in what street.<sup>42</sup>

39 *Miscellaneous Writings of Henry the Eighth* 28.

40 *Ibid.*

41 *Ibid.* Clark elaborates on Luther’s relationship with Hus as follows: “...tracing the steps of the Hussites [Luther] has added so much poison to them, that now the enemy appears more formidable; by how much more he equalizes all arch-heretics in his doctrine, & surpasses them in his malicious and wicked intentions: indeed the danger is also so much the greater, as ‘tis easier to add worse proceedings to bad beginnings than to begin ill; and to increase inventions than to invent.”

42 *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* 1:192: “For in Saxony fyrst and amonge all the Lutheranes there be as many heddes as many wyttes. And all as wyse as wylde gees. And as late as they began / yet be there not onely as many sectes almost as men / but also the maysters them selfe change

Put in context, More intends for this passage to explain why none of the sects in Saxony or Bohemia can rightly claim to be the True Church. To be dignified as such, a sect has to demonstrate a certain degree of continuity throughout history, which these groups can't do (just look at how they squabble amongst themselves already!). But More also uses the familiar example of Bohemia for its ability to resonate with the less familiar (because recent) example of Lutheran Saxony. The coincidental similarity of the two countries (both are fractious) is taken for causal similarity – and More feels no obligation to demonstrate the connection.

To a modern readership, passages like these are interesting because, among other things, their authors feel no obligation to explain themselves in terms of logical progression (this is *our* problem, not theirs). But if we understand the assumptions which an English audience likely brought to such texts (and the sources of these assumptions), the connection – in More's case, between Saxony and Bohemia – becomes much more clear. Most immediately, as I have said, the assumed connection between Luther and Bohemia stems from the recent controversy at Leipzig (even Luther made the connection); but less directly, the implications of a Lutheran-Hussite connection are informed by the reputation Bohemia has gathered over the past century in the course of English polemic. Once the link between Luther and Bohemia has been suggested in the accounts quoted above, the remaining amplifications run very much along the lines of what we have come to expect in discussions of Bohemia from the fifteenth century.<sup>43</sup>

At the same time, religious polemic (old and new) was not the only source of information about the situation in Bohemia. News about Bohemia travelled freely from the continent to England, and of course there was communication between Bohemia and the rest of Europe in the sixteenth century. The wide correspondence of Erasmus (c. 1466-1536), who acted as a nexus of pan-European communication, is a case in point. Erasmus was party to a series of epistolary exchanges with several of his Czech admirers. These letters make it clear that aspects of the English references to Bohemia we have been discussing form

they myndes and they oppynyons euery day / and wote nere where to holde them. Boheme is also in the same case. One fayth in the towne / another in the felde. One in prage / another in the nexte towne. And yet in prage it selfe one faythe in one strete / an other in the nexte. So that yf ye assygne it in Boheme / ye muste tell in what towne. And yf ye name a towne / yet must ye tell in what strete.”

43 More often relies on argument-by-analogy in the *Dialogue*. On another occasion he mentions that Wyclif, whose teachings were brought to Bohemia and taught by Hus and others, “was the occasyon of the vtter subuersyon of that hole realme bothe in fayth & good lyuyng / with the losse also of many a thousand lyues.” Then More gives the following analogy: “And as he [Wyclif] began agayn the olde heresydes of those auntyent heretykes whom & whos errorrs the chyrch of cryst had condempned & subdued many dyuers agys afore so doth luther agayn begyn to set vp his” (1:315).

part of a wider European – and not exclusively Catholic – discussion of Bohemia as a fallen land.<sup>44</sup>

In 1519, Erasmus mentions some interesting details in his reply to Jan Šlechta, a Bohemian nobleman, in the process of refusing a warm welcome to Prague, which was accompanied by promises of safe conduct. “I do not care for countries in which convoy of this kind is necessary,” he writes. “Here I am free to go where I please, even by myself. Not that I have any doubt of finding in your part of the world, as you say in your letter, plenty of good scholars and religious men, not polluted by the vices of schism. But it surprises me that none can be found to bring this whole division to an end.”<sup>45</sup> Erasmus provides a valuable perspective because, unlike the others we have been examining, he is not necessarily opposed to – or even in favour of – any of the factions in the troubled Czech lands. Instead he argues that “it is better to have concord on conditions that are not wholly fair than perfect fairness and divisions” (without clearly suggesting which party is in the best position to provide and enforce such concord).<sup>46</sup>

In other letters, Erasmus shows considerable sympathy for the Bohemian Brethren, though he never advocates a break with Catholic tradition. Still, he is disgusted by the danger and division in Bohemia, and says as much without ever having travelled there. Erasmus’ references to Šlechta’s letter (now lost) show that the anecdotes we have been citing about Bohemia were not mere fabrications, written in bad faith for polemical purposes. And with Erasmus’ close communication with Englishmen like Thomas More, Cardinal Wolsey and John Fisher during this same period, many of the English accounts cited in this paper may have been influenced by Erasmian attitudes, as well as English polemical tradition.<sup>47</sup>

As Henry VIII’s “great matter” began to take shape not just as a marital, but also a political and religious issue, many of his advisers worried that his former opposition to Luther was beginning to slacken. In the *Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey* (composed 1554-8; first printed edition 1641), George Cavendish (1494-c. 1562) records a conversation between Cardinal Wolsey and Sir William Kingston which took place when Wolsey was on his deathbed (1530). Wolsey requests of Kingston that, if Kingston was made a member of Henry’s Privy Council (which was likely), he should be sure “that [the king] have a vigilant eye” so as not to allow the Lutheran sect to grow within his dominions.

44 See especially Ep. 950. (*The Correspondence of Erasmus, Letters 842 to 992, 1518-1519*, tr. R.A.B. Mynors and D.F.S. Thomson. Collected Works of Erasmus 6 [Toronto, 1982] 321-323.)

45 *Ibid.* 323/49-54.

46 *Ibid.* 323/54-56.

47 For discussion of Erasmus’ correspondence with the Bohemians, see P.S. Allen, “Erasmus and the Bohemian Brethren,” in *The Age of Erasmus* (Oxford, 1914) 276-298.

Wolsey cites the Bohemians as a stark warning of what could happen to England if Henry does not take the Lutheran threat seriously. The troubles in Bohemia began, he says, because the Bohemian king failed to subdue his commoners, then “infected with Wyclif’s heresies,” who, feeling at liberty to “spoil and murder the spiritual men and religious persons of his realm” in a “frantic rage,” gathered such courage by turns that they “disdained their prince and sovereign lord, with all the other noble personages and the head governors of the country.” They gathered such force, in fact, that they “slew the king, the lords and all the gentlemen of the realm,” who could not withstand their strength in battle. “By means of which slaughter,” says Wolsey, “they have lived ever since in great misery and poverty, without a head or governor, but have lived all in common like wild beasts, abhorred by all Christian nations.”<sup>48</sup>

Once again, the connection between the Lutheran sect and the Bohemians is tacitly assumed. Bohemia’s reputation still carried weight at the time of Wolsey’s death, and it would not lose this reputation any time soon. But with times changing as they were, this version of the story would only be preserved in certain circles.<sup>49</sup> The characterizations of Bohemia by both Henry VIII and Cardinal Wolsey – stated less than a decade apart – serve as a gauge of Henry’s

48 George Cavendish, *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, ed. Richard S. Sylvester. [Early English Text Society 243] (London, 1959) 179-80: “Therefore mr kyngeston / if it chaunce hereafter you to be oon of hys pryvee counsell [...] I warne you to be well advysed & assured what matter ye put in his hed / ffor ye shall neuer pull it owt agayn / And sey furthermore that I requyer his grace [...] that he haue a vigilant eye / to depresse this newe peruers sekte of the lutarnaunce that it do not encrease within his domynions thorough hys necligence / in suche a sort as that he shalbe fayn at lengthe to put harnoyes vppon hys bake to subdewe them As the kyng of Beame did / who had good game to se his rewde Commyns (than enfectwed with wycklyfes heresies) to spoyell and murder the sperytuall men & Religious persons of hys Realme / the whiche fled to the kyng & his nobles for socours ayenst ther frantyeke rage / of whome they could gett no helpe of defence / or refuge / but laughed theme to scorne hauyng good game at ther spoyle & consumpcion not regarding ther dewties nor ther owen defence / And whan thes erroneus heretykes had subdud all the clargy and sperytuall persons takyng the spoyell of ther riches / bothe of chirches / monastorys / And all other sperytuall thynges havyng no more to spoyle caught suche a Corage of ther former libertie / that / than they disdayned ther prynce and souerayn lord / with all other noble personages And the hed gouerners of the Contrie / And began to fall in hand with the temporall lordes to slee & spoyle theme without pitie or mercye most cruelly / In so myche that the kyng and other hys nobles ware constrayned to put harnoyes vppon ther bakkes to resist the ongodly powers of thes traterous heretykes And to defend ther lyves & liberties / who pitched a feld Royall ayenst theme / in whiche fyld thes traitors so stowtly encounterd / that in fyne they ware victors / and slewe the kyng / the lordes & all the gentilmen of the Realme / leavyng not oon person that bare the name or port of a gentilman a lyve / or of any person that had any Rewle or auctorytie in the Comen wele / by means of whiche slaughter they haue lyved euer synce in great mysery & pouertie / with out an hed or gouernor but lyved all in Comen lyke wyld bestes / abhorred of all Cristyan nacions / lett this be to hyme an evydent example to avoyd the lyke daynger I pray you good mr kyngeston”

49 Andrew Boorde tells of Bohemia in his *Fyrst Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge* (London, 1542), ch. 13: “I am the kingdom of Boeme / I do not tel al men what I do meane; / For the popes curse I do lytle care / The more the fox is cursed the better he doth fare. / Ever sense Wyclif did dwel

changing attitudes toward Protestant reform. Far from the person he was when the *Assertio* was printed, at the time of Wolsey's death, Wolsey suggests that Henry has become wilfully ignorant of the encroaching reform, or even sympathetic with it. And indeed, the next major account of the Bohemians in England would be written by a Protestant.

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When in 1531 William Barlow (c. 1480-1568) called Martin Luther the "chief captain of new heretics, and bringer forth of old heresies," he was repeating what had been said before of Wyclif and Hus.<sup>50</sup> It was not a precise characterization, of course, but the assumptions which under-girded it were the same ones that helped to shape English religious controversy and foreign policy at several points throughout the previous one hundred years. The assumption that Lollards and Hussites fell under the aegis of "Wycliffism" also allowed Bohemia to serve as a warning for a number of issues in England. The terrible things that happened in Bohemia could happen in England too, since Wycliffites could be found in both countries (the argument being that like breeds like).

And remarkably, when John Foxe (c. 1516-87) compiled his *Actes and Monuments* in the sixteenth century, telling the memorable story of the Bohemians from a reformist perspective, he never questioned the assumption that English Lollards were responsible for the Bohemian movement. Foxe suggests that the Bohemians not only received their reformist drive from English Lollards, but that the gospels themselves were imparted to them in the same way. Wyclif becomes an apostle for Foxe, infusing the hearts of the Czechs with pious zeal.<sup>51</sup>

Ironically, in fact, many Roman Catholic controversialists in the sixteenth century granted greater autonomy to the Hussite movement than some later English Protestants did, insofar as they cast Luther as an imitator of Hus, and

with me / I did never set by the popes auctorite." Boorde also tells of fantastical beasts which are said to be found in Bohemia. No doubt he relied on hearsay for his account; Bohemia's reputation had developed for a long time, and references to fantastical creatures dwelling there became a commonplace. It should also be noted that Boorde dedicated his *Boke* to "the right honorable and gracious lady Mary daughter of our souerayne lord kyng Henry the eyght."

50 *A dialoge describing the originall grou[n]d of these Lutheran faccyons* (London, 1531), sig. Ev.

51 Foxe attributes the exchanges between England and Bohemia to the coming of Queen Anne, saying that "by the occasion of Queene Anne... the Bohemians comming therby to the knowledge of Wickliffes bookes here in England, began first to taste and sauor Christes gospell, til at length by the preaching of Iohn Husse, they increased more and more in knowledge." (Foxe's marginal note here says: "The Bohemians receiuing the Gospell".) See *Actes and Monuments* (London, 1583) 588. This condescending attitude certainly leaves no room for Czech influences on Hus. It also gives the English a central role in carrying the torch of the "True Church", which the Bohemians would safeguard until the Reformation. In other words, diminishing the role of the English in this process would also diminish the centrality of the English to salvation history.

did not consistently mention Wyclif's contribution to the Bohemian movement. There was, of course, a major difference in the way Foxe conflated Hus with Wyclif and the way certain polemicists discussed in the present paper did so: for Foxe this relationship ennobled Hus; for his predecessors it condemned him.