CHAPTER FOUR

THE MORALITY OF HYPOCRISY:
GNAPHEUS’S LATIN PLAY HYPOCRISIS AND
THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION

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INTRODUCTION

In drama, moral judgment is not uttered through words alone; it can also be expressed through non-verbal and seemingly subsidiary things such as props, costumes and stage action.1 This paper will attempt to clarify how Gnapheus used his Latin plays, especially his Hypocrisis (‘Hypocrisy’, published in 1544 and 1564), in debates on religious matters. Gulielmus Gnapheus Hagiensis, or Willem de Volder (Fuller), or Van de Voldersgraft, of The Hague (1493–1568) is an example of a committed writer. He held outspoken views on the Protestant reformation, which he expounded in pamphlets and plays. Because of his commitment, his oeuvre is pre-eminently suitable as material in an investigation of the role literature played within public debate, and the effect it may have had on public opinion. Hypocrisis is his most outspoken play. It was written and produced in East Prussia, where Lutheranism was proclaimed as a state religion. This enabled the author (he may even have felt obliged) to expound his reformational ideas in a more direct, explicit and uncompromising manner than he would have done in the Low Countries and West Prussia, where he lived before the 1540s, and which at that time still remained officially Catholic. Though even here, in Lutheran East Prussia, Gnapheus came into conflict with the ecclesiastical authorities: he was indicted for heresy by the Lutheran theologian Staphylus.

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In order to decide for or against the rhetorical or even propagandistic function of drama, a contextual and intertextual approach has been chosen. I will first sketch the social context in which the play was written, staged, printed and read: that of the Latin school and University of Königsberg, where the play was performed, the court of the Duke of East Prussia, the printers and publishers of the play in Basel and Wittenberg, and Gnapheus’s Lutheran critics. Furthermore, Hypocrisis will be positioned within a broader perspective: the discourse of the Reformation in general, and that of the Lutheran Reformation in particular. This paper will explain how the context of Protestant criticism affected Gnapheus’s dramatic works and impinged upon other genres such as that of the vernacular morality play and on other means of communication, such as visual ones, for instance tableaux vivants, or printed ones, such as popular woodcuts. It will be argued that in his Latin plays Gnapheus makes use of the generic conventions and the same well-known motifs and representational modes that were also used by vernacular playwrights and pamphleteers. The specific sources Gnapheus used when writing his plays can no longer be traced, so this analysis will make use of representative examples, or sample texts with themes common at this time. These ‘texts’ are: Gnapheus’s other works, Luther’s writings, a Dutch table or dinner play, and pamphlets referred to in Scribner’s work on popular propaganda during the Lutheran Reformation in Germany. The popular woodcuts Scribner discusses were thought to be pre-eminently suited to reach and educate the young, the illiterate and the semiliterate: ‘children and simple folk, who are more easily moved by pictures and images to recall divine history than through mere words or doctrines’. Humanist playwrights such as Gnapheus used their dramatic works first and foremost to the same ends: to teach their pupils at the Latin schools, just as the Dutch rhetoricians tried to educate their audiences. At the same time, they sought to appeal, by means of a printed publication of the play, to a humanist readership. And even though both their target audiences—their pupils and the respublica literaria—were familiar with classical antiquity, I want to show, by using a contextual approach, that Latin

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2 On this particular genre, see Pikhaus, *Het tafelspel bij de rederijkers*.
3 Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*; *idem, Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany*.
4 Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, p. xi.
5 Waite, *Reformers on Stage*, pp. 26–27, 203.