Religions in Shakespeare's Writings

Edited by
David V. Urban

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Special Issue Editor

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About the Special Issue Editor

David V. Urban is Professor of English at Calvin University. He is the author of *Milton and the Parables of Jesus: Self-Representation and the Bible in John Milton's Writings* (Penn State University Press, 2018), the co-editor of *Visionary Milton: Essays on Prophecy and Violence* (Duquesne University Press, 2010), and the co-compiler and co-editor of *John Milton: An Annotated Bibliography, 1989–1999* (Duquesne University Press, 2011). His articles on Milton, Shakespeare, Chekhov, Fugard, Tolstoy, Hopkins, Hawthorne, Melville, C. S. Lewis, and ancient rhetoric and the Bible have appeared in journals such as *Milton Studies, Milton Quarterly, Studies in Philology, Christianity and Literature, Renascence, Religions, Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies, Connotations, Appositions, Journal of Markets and Morality, Liberty Matters, Christian Libertarian Review, Australian Slavic and East European Studies, and Calvin Theological Journal*, as well as in several essay collections. He is a contributor to *The Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible, The Milton Encyclopedia, and the Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. He holds degrees in English literature (B.A., Northwestern University; M.A. and Ph.D., University of Illinois at Chicago) and in divinity (M.Div., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School). He thanks Calvin University for providing a course release through the Calvin Research Fellowship, and the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship for assistance in distributing this book.

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Editorial

Introduction to "Religions in Shakespeare's Writings"

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This special issue of *Religions* on "Religions in Shakespeare's Writings" invited contributors to explore the gamut of religious issues and characterizations throughout Shakespeare's writings. The issue's call for papers welcomed a variety of perspectives while emphasizing that the resultant volume would not try to present a Shakespeare whose particular religious beliefs can definitely be known or are displayed in a unified manner throughout his canon. Because this volume benefits from John Cox's expert essay on "Shakespeare and Religion" (Cox 2018), and because each essay has its own abstract, I will not here attempt a survey of the field of Shakespeare and religion, nor will I summarize the essays that follow. Rather, this brief Introduction will identify and discuss important themes that emerge within this special issue, recognizing that these themes, which developed organically through the individual authors' work and not by explicit editorial instruction, display themselves in various essays herein but by no means in all of them.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this collection is its elucidation of not simply the various manifestations of religions that appear in Shakespeare's writings, but, indeed, the tensions between these religions within Shakespeare's creative depictions. For example, the tensions between ancient pagan religion and Christianity are explored in a number of essays. Grace Tiffany identifies the turn from devotion to the Roman goddess Diana to a commitment to self-sacrificial marriage in *The Winter's Tale* as an embrace of Protestant Christianity. Tiffany's emphasis on tensions between religions is also evident in her argument that, in Shakespeare, devotion to Diana supports a Protestant marriage ideal rather than a Catholic ideal of celibacy. She shows that, in *The Comedy of Errors* and *Pericles*, Diana herself is transformed from patroness of virgins to Christian matron, offering scripture-based advice on how to be a companionate wife (Tiffany 2018). Benedict Whalen observes the conflict in *The Rape of Lucrece* between, on one hand, Tarquin's embrace of "Love and Fortune" as his "gods" in a way that justifies his sexual assault, and, on the other hand, the poem's allusion to 1 Corinthians 3.16–17, in which St. Paul warns against the violation of "the temple of God," which includes the bodies and souls of all Christians (Whalen 2019). Also discussing *The Rape of Lucrece*, Feisal Mohamed notes the tension between the depiction of female virginity in Roman civic religion and the heavenly reward for chaste obedience—in spite of any forced violation—offered through Christianity (Mohamed 2019). David Urban explores the tension between the pagan spiritual control that Prospero exercises throughout *The Tempest* and the Christian Providence that transcends Prospero's problematic efforts, a Providence whose workings ultimately precipitate Prospero's renunciation of such dubious control (Urban 2019). And Emily Stelzer details at length the history of *King Lear* criticism, observing throughout the significance of Shakespeare's often befuddling blending of pagan and Christian elements throughout the play (Stelzer 2019).

Various other kinds of tensions between religions in Shakespeare are also explored in this special issue. For example, contrary to the position offered by Tiffany (2018) regarding *The Winter's Tale*, John Curran asserts that Shakespeare, as he does in *Hamlet*, displays in *Macbeth* sympathy with "Catholic ways of seeing" (Curran 2018, p. 1), something evident in the spiritual complexities demonstrated in those dramas, offering a rubric superior to that offered by Protestantism. In an innovative reading of *Hamlet*, Benjamin Lockerd argues that the dualism articulated in some of Hamlet's speeches reflects beliefs in keeping with the Albigensian heresy of the late medieval period, a heresy in tension

with more orthodox Christian pronouncements elsewhere in the play (Lockerd 2019). In what is perhaps the collection's most daring essay, Bryan Adams Hampton, amid discussion of the colorful history of scholars and devotees of the Bard seeking to determine Shakespeare's beliefs, observes the tension between the "*religion* of Shakespeare" and the "religion *of Shakespeare*" (Hampton 2019, p. 12). Debra Johanyak discusses the far-reaching implications of the perhaps ubiquitous tension between Christianity and Islam throughout *Othello* (Johanyak 2019). And Cyndia Susan Clegg, in an essay exploring matters of the afterlife in no fewer than eleven plays, examines the tensions that exist amid Shakespeare's varied presentations of Islam, Roman religion, Christianity, and Judaism (Clegg 2019).

But tension is not the only interface between the religions represented in this collection. In the case of (Lupton 2019), it is perhaps more accurate to suggest that Julia Reinhard Lupton's innovative application of Black natural law to *The Tempest* serves to synthesize elements of various religious perspectives. Similarly, in (Smith 2018b), Matthew Smith argues "that in *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare uses law to synthesize certain aspects of religious experience from divergent corners" (Smith 2018b, p. 1)—including Catholic, Calvinist, Puritan, and agnostic perspectives.

Another significant theme within this collection concerns the political ramifications of religious matters. Although such ramifications are evident on some level in each contribution, they can be seen most explicitly in three essays. In (Besteman 2019), Bethany Besteman argues that *Measure for Measure* "presents a Reformed theo-political sensibility, not in order to criticize Calvinism, but to reveal limitations in dominant political theories" (Besteman 2019, p. 1). In (Mohamed 2019), Feisal Mohamed explores manifestations of Roman religion and Christianity in *The Rape of Lucrece* to demonstrate how "the resources of both" religions offer Lucrece "an aura of purity accentuating the profanity of the political" (Mohamed 2019, p. 3). Read from a perspective that pays proper attention to such manifestations of religion, Shakespeare's poem "reflects late Elizabethan skepticism on sacred kingship and fears of self-seeking factions awaiting to seize power after the death of the heirless queen" (Mohamed 2019, p. 3). And in (Skwire 2018), Sarah Skwire addresses her newly discovered allusion in *Richard III* to the stolen blessing of Genesis 27 as a vehicle by which to elucidate matters concerning not only Richard's relationship with Margaret, but also the succession crisis of the late Elizabethan era.

Skwire's discussion of Genesis 27's relevance to *Richard III* and Shakespeare's historical milieu is indicative of this collection's attention to the biblical texts' enduring relevance to Shakespeare's writings, a phenomenon amply attested to in scholarly works such as (Shaheen 1999; Marx 2000; Hamlin 2013; Fulton and Poole 2018). Two other essays in our collection—(Urban 2019; Stelzer 2019)—are largely based on heretofore unexplored biblical allusions within Shakespeare's plays, with Urban using Psalm 23 as a rubric by which to understand Alonso's and Prospero's respective journeys of redemptive progress in *The Tempest*, and with Stelzer using Luke 17:21 to elucidate the meaning of Lear's dying words. Other essays also make significant use of the Bible. Tiffany (2018) discusses the importance in *The Winter's Tale* of verses concerning marriage and celibacy, and holiness and grace. Smith (2018b) emphasizes the relevance in *Measure for Measure* of various parables of Jesus, also observing how the Mosaic law, as presented in Leviticus 24 and understood in Romans 4, pertains to the play's complex presentation of justice and mercy. Similarly, but from its own distinct perspective, Besteman (2019) emphasizes how, in the same play, matters of law, punishment, and mercy are illuminated by Romans 6:7–8, 7:19, 7:23, and 9:18. Lockerd (2019) notes how Hamlet's allusions to matters of sexual fruitfulness, the Godlike nature of humanity, the resurrection of the body, and God's sovereignty over life and death, as expressed, respectively, in Genesis 1:28, Psalm 8:4–6, 1 Corinthians 15:52, and Matthew 10:29, help illustrate the tension Lockerd sees between Hamlet's Albigensian and more orthodox Christian rhetoric. Whalen (2019), in addition to its aforementioned use of 1 Corinthians 3:16–17, also emphasizes, amid discussion of sin's harm to the community in *Hamlet* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, St. Paul's presentation in Romans 12 of the body of Christ and Jesus's prayer in John 17:21-23 for unity among believers. Clegg (2019) utilizes Moses's discussion in Numbers 30:1-2 of sacred vows to explain Shylock's "oath in heaven" in *The Merchant of Venice*'s court scene. Mohamed (2019) calls attention to *The Rape of Lucrece*'s reference to the imagery of Christ's pierced side's shed blood, an image that, paradoxically, shows the

possibility of a ravished woman's redemption through Christ even as it reminds readers of Lucrece's spiritual "remove from Christ's sinlessness" (Mohamed 2019, p. 8). And Johanyak (2019) observes how the "honor killing" principle of Sharia law finds parallels in Leviticus 20, a matter which further complicates the tension between Islam and Christianity that manifests itself so horrifically in Othello's killing of Desdemona.

A final theme is evident in a number of this collection's essays: that Shakespeare's various writings demonstrate a Christian grounding. This notion is particularly significant in light of various publications in the past decade that take a more skeptical view of Shakespeare and Christianity, a view that resists the idea that a positive understanding of Christianity is somehow foundational to Shakespeare's works (see for example, Shell 2010; Jackson and Marotti 2011; Sterrett 2012; McCoy 2013; Kastan 2014; Loewenstein and Witmore 2015). Within our present collection, (Tiffany 2018; Curran 2018; Lockerd 2019; Besteman 2019; Whalen 2019; Urban 2019; Stelzer 2019) each explicitly affirm or strongly suggest that such Christian grounding is evident in the works they analyze. Such essays are broadly in keeping with the earlier analyses offered in (Hunt 2004; Batson 2006; Cox 2007; Beauregard 2008), each of which asserts Shakespeare's plays' grounding in Protestant, Catholic, or "mere" Christianity.[1] In the present decade, such an understanding of Shakespeare's writings has been forcefully affirmed in (Maillet 2016), while other scholars have demonstrated Shakespeare's deep engagement of Christian practices and theology in discussions of forgiveness (Beckwith 2011), freedom (Cummings 2013), embodiment (Zysk 2017), belief (McEachern 2018), and theatricality (Smith 2018a). The Christian "grounding" of Shakespeare's plays, as discussed in these works, is not only theological, but occurs on physical, aesthetic, and phenomenological levels as well.

In closing, I should note that, because the essays in this special issue were published sequentially, authors whose essays were published later often made use of those published earlier, a practice that allows various essays to converse with each other briefly but fruitfully. The consequent interaction between these essays is an attractive feature of what is, we hope, a valuable contribution to the complex and multifaceted field of Shakespeare and religion.

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[1] A very helpful analysis of this controversy as it manifested itself in the first decade of the present century and earlier is offered by Cox (2006).

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Review

Shakespeare and Religion

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Abstract: Shakespeare's personal religious affiliation is impossible to determine. Nearly all the books published about him in the last ten years eschew an earlier attempt to identify him as Catholic and focus, instead, on the plays, not the playwright. Some attention has been paid to Judaism and Islam, but Christianity is the overwhelming favorite. Nearly all of these books include a discussion of *Measure for Measure*, the only play Shakespeare wrote with a biblical title and a central concern with Christian ethics. Though there is some inevitable overlap, each writer approaches religion in the plays differently.

Keywords: Shakespeare; religion; dramatic characters; review; books published principally between 2008 and 2018

Though Queen Elizabeth's government recognized only one true faith in Shakespeare's England, four distinct religions are discernible in his plays and poems: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and the state religion of ancient Rome.[1] The first has received the greatest share of attention by far, and appropriately so, because it defined the world he lived in, and it was violently divided against itself, with his preference in the plays tending toward moderate Protestantism, which was the state religion of England in his day. What he knew about the other three religions was based largely on his reading. The number of Jews in England was very small during Shakespeare's lifetime, but their concentration in London and their involvement in court entertainment suggest that he may have met some of them (Woods 1999, p. 49, n. 181). They bore little or no resemblance to the anti-Jewish stereotypes that inform Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, though these are much muted from Christopher Marlowe's blatant treatment of Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*—so much so that Shylock is increasingly seen as a sympathetic figure, rather than a threatening one.

Two important books have addressed this issue: James Shapiro's *Shakespeare and the Jews*, published in 1996 and reissued with a new preface in 2006 (Shapiro 2006), and Janet Adelman's *Blood Relations: Christian and Jew in* The Merchant of Venice (Adelman 2008). In a spirited reading, densely informed by historical context, Adelman forefronts her own identity as a Jew and describes how she overcame her resistance to the play by recognizing how close its antagonists are to each other. The family relationships in *The Merchant of Venice* reflect the sibling relationship between the play's two religions. The younger religion depends on the older one while simultaneously trying to deny the relationship by treating the Jew as "other". Even after Jessica converts to Christianity, she is still regarded as an outsider—as a Jew and her father's daughter. Adelman develops her argument over the course of four chapters, whose titles are descriptive: "Introduction: Strangers within Christianity", "Leaving the Jew's House: Father, Son, and Elder Brother", "Her Father's Blood: Conversion, Race, and Nation", "Incising Antonio: The Jew Within".

Islam is more peripheral to Shakespeare's writing than Judaism, even though the Turks were a serious political threat to Europe throughout his lifetime. The report in *Othello*, that a storm has

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[1] This essay updates and complements an earlier review essay I wrote on Shakespeare and Religion (Cox 2006, pp. 539–66).

"banged the Turks", turning back a threatened invasion of Cyprus, clearly addresses contemporary fears of the threat from the Middle East, though the reference may also recall the Spanish Armada in 1588. As Jane Hwang Degenhardt makes clear in *Islamic Conversion and Christian Resistance on the Early Modern Stage*, the danger posed by Catholic Europe was easily conflated with the danger represented by the Islamic Turks (Degenhardt 2010, pp. 6–8, 23–24). In the play, the report of the Turks' withdrawal reflects a reprieve in political reality, but the reprieve hardly matters, given the enormous scale of personal crisis that hangs in the air.

Two essays address the question of Shakespeare and Islam in helpful and informative ways. Cyndia Susan Clegg suggests that Shakespeare's Othello may have been perceived as a Muslim convert to Christianity. She identifies several books on Moors and Turks that were readily available in English at the time *Othello* was written, and she notes the strong emphasis on "rigorous notions of justice and law in Islamic societies" (Clegg 2006, p. 3). These may help to explain Othello's appeal to justice in his destruction of Desdemona, when he thinks she is unfaithful to him. The same points are made by Debra Johanyak in an essay that does not refer to Clegg's, but that offers a close reading of *Othello,* based on the same argument made by Clegg—that Shakespeare's Moor is a Muslim in origin. While "turning Turk" was a matter of opprobrium in Christian Europe, converting from Islam to Christianity was highly commendable, especially when the convert brought with him the military skills, experience, and qualities of leadership possessed by Othello.[2] At the same time, Othello reverts to Muslim values as they were understood in contemporary Europe, so in destroying his wife, because he thinks she has slept with Cassio, he "registers nascent English anxieties about cultural alterity and the looming threat of losing one's identity to the Islamic Ottoman Empire" (Johanyak 2010, p. 81). He is, thus, caught between two cultures that are defined by related, but distinctive, religions: "If a puritanical (Christian) conception of human sexuality informs Othello's marital relationship with Desdemona, his destructive distrust of her as a perceived adulteress that ensues then brings about retaliation that appears to have a basis in Islamic cultures as represented in various writings and plays of the period" (Johanyak 2010, pp. 84–85).

Degenhardt is the only scholar who has devoted a book to Shakespeare and Islam.[3] Her chapter on *Othello* includes a discussion of *The Comedy of Errors*—an unusual conjunction of plays, as she acknowledges, but she explains that both "explore the Pauline ideal of a universal fellowship of faith, but simultaneously fall back on the tangible materiality of physical differences to stabilize identity against conversion" (Degenhardt 2010, p. 28).[4] Even though critical commentary tends to assume that Othello is a convert from Islam, Degenhardt points out that "the play is explicitly ambiguous about its protagonist's origins and refuses to associate him with any one religion or geography" (Degenhardt 2010, p. 57). Instead of religion, Degenhardt emphasizes the difference between Othello's visible "otherness," i.e., his skin color, and the invisible qualities that enable both Othello's and Desdemona's romance and its undoing: his baptism and her chastity. Adelman's point about Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice* also applies to Othello: Degenhardt comments that after his conversion to Christianity his difference from white Europeans still sets him apart from the society in which he seeks acceptance. Degenhardt helpfully describes the context of *Othello* in 1604, when it was likely composed, with regard to the debate in the English church about predestination, which "could be used to challenge universal Pauline grace and narrow the limits of eligibility for salvation" (Degenhardt 2010, p. 63)—a debate perhaps alluded to in the dialogue between Iago and the drunken Cassio on Cyprus. Desdemona exemplifies the faith that Othello cannot sustain, in that she continues to love him even after he strikes

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2 "Turk" was not a neutral term for Elizabethans, including Shakespeare. Johanyak notes that "At least sixteen—nearly half—of Shakespeare's plays reference *Turks* (or variant terms)" (Johanyak 2010, p. 80), but it is worth adding that, among thirty-three uses of the word in Shakespeare's plays, only two (referring to Turkish fabrics) are positive; all the rest register some degree of fear or threat, or both.

3 Three recent essays have also been published on this topic: Britton (2011), Clegg (2006), and Johanyak (2010).

4 For the argument concerning Pauline discourse in *Othello*, see Lupton (1997).

her and calls her "whore." She thereby anticipates longsuffering female virtue that Shakespeare would celebrate later in *Cymbeline* (1608) and *The Winter's Tale* (1609) and Dekker and Massinger later still in *The Virgin Martyr* (1620).

In short, religion was unavoidable, ineradicable and troublesome in Shakespeare's England. Judaism and Islam were marginal and suspect, and the dominant religion was fraught, because Catholic powers on the continent were a constant threat to Elizabeth's Protestant regime. Tension and uncertainty thus characterized the religious world into which Shakespeare was born in 1564. He was baptized by an English Protestant priest in Holy Trinity Church, the same village church where his older sister, Joan, had been baptized eight years earlier by an English Catholic priest. The difference between the two baptisms was not determined by his parents' choice, but by the order of two complete strangers to his family. The strangers were half-sisters who ruled England successively in the mid-sixteenth century: Mary and Elizabeth Tudor. Mary was a faithful Catholic, who restored the English state church to Roman orthodoxy, after what she saw as years of Protestant apostasy under her father, Henry VIII (r. 1509–1547) and her brother, Edward VI (r. 1547–1553). Joan Shakespeare had been born just before the end of Mary's brief reign (1553–1558), but William was born under Elizabeth I, which made the difference in the way they were baptized. Though Elizabeth was also Henry VIII's daughter, she was a Protestant because her mother, Anne Boleyn, had been a Protestant. This meant that during Elizabeth's long reign (1558–1603), only Protestant priests were ordained in the English church, and that is why William Shakespeare was baptized as a Protestant in 1564.

Despite Elizabeth's longevity and the stability of her reign, her government heavily suppressed Catholicism because active Catholic political resistance to the Protestant establishment persisted in England. Religious and political identity were virtually synonymous, making religious moderation and tolerance difficult, if not impossible. In 1570, the year Shakespeare turned six, Pope Pius V pronounced absolution in advance for anyone who assassinated Queen Elizabeth, thereby increasing her Protestant courtiers' sense of threatened identity and constant vigilance. We have no record of how Shakespeare or his family reacted to these events but, at a time when religion was so troubled, it is natural to wonder about the playwright's own religious identity. If he was Catholic, he was not prosecuted for worshipping with Catholics or proselytizing in their behalf, so he must have appeared to be part of the Protestant mainstream, no matter what he may have believed. His baptism by a Protestant priest says nothing about his or even his parents' religious preference; it merely signals who had power in the kingdom, and how pervasive that power was. The law required regular attendance at the state church, and no other public worship was sanctioned, so one could be cited for failing to attend, and Shakespeare was never cited, but this does not prove he was a Protestant: he could have been a Catholic or an unbeliever who attended the Protestant state church because the law required him to.

The external facts of Shakespeare's life thus combine with his own silence to make his religious identity difficult, if not impossible, to specify. No diaries, journals, letters, or comments by him, or remembered by others, have survived to help answer the question, though that absence has not prevented people from trying to answer it. The stakes for Catholics are particularly high, because of the prestige Shakespeare has acquired in the centuries following his death. If he can be shown to have been loyal to a persecuted religious minority in England, their suffering can be vindicated on a secular level, as well as a spiritual one. Father Peter Milward, a Jesuit missionary to Japan, dedicated much of his long life to arguing the case for a Catholic Shakespeare, and he was especially sensitive to the persecution of Jesuit missionaries in England in the 1580s. He saw their plight as the inspiration for Shakespeare's depiction of the suffering of the outcast Edgar in *King Lear* (Milward 2005, p. 54; Milward 1973, pp. 217–18). As Milward's example indicates, one can try to counter the difficulty of finding external evidence for Shakespeare's religious identity by the way one interprets what Shakespeare wrote. The risk of circular argument is strong in this endeavor, with some scholars seemingly less aware of the risk than others (Asquith 2005; Wilson 2004). Perhaps, for that reason, the effort to establish

Shakespeare as a Catholic has declined in the last ten years, after a period of enthusiastic support for it in the early years of the twenty-first century (Ackroyd 2006; Greenblatt 2004).

The most recent effort is by David Beauregard OMV in *Catholic Theology in Shakespeare's Plays*. He is particularly interested in countering the argument that Shakespeare's plays are compatible with the official Elizabethan homilies, or sermons appointed to be read in churches. Alfred Hart first suggested that Shakespeare was indebted to the homilies in 1934, and Hart's argument was endorsed, in part, even by Milward in *Shakespeare's Religious Background* (Milward 1973). Beauregard disagrees, refuting Hart's argument in his first chapter and in an appendix, and asserting not only that Shakespeare was not indebted to the homilies, but that he actually wrote in opposition to them, from a Catholic perspective.

Beauregard's first chapter summarizes Shakespeare's Catholic background, and usefully distinguishes a Catholic interpretation from either a Protestant or a secular interpretation of the plays. When it comes to *Measure for Measure*, Beauregard avoids the naïve allegorizing that mars the weakest Catholic commentary on Shakespeare. His intention is to interpret the play as pro-Catholic, which he does, first, by arguing that it neither demonizes nor demystifies Catholic clergy, as other contemporary English plays do. This is true, but it is like arguing that Shakespeare was pro-Jewish, because he does not demonize Shylock in the same way Marlowe demonizes Barabas. More accurately, Shakespeare generally does not demonize human beings on the basis of social identity—including religious identity—but only on the basis of moral character ("motiveless malignity," as Coleridge called it in the case of Iago). Aaron, the Moor in *Titus Andronicus*, and Joan La Pucelle in *1 Henry VI*, are early collocations of race or national identity and demonic character, but Shakespeare did not repeat them.

Second, Beauregard construes Isabella positively from the outset, as a Catholic novice preparing successfully for the convent. He describes her response to Claudio's begging her to violate her chastity, in order to save his life, as a "brief show of anger" (Beauregard 2008, p. 65). Beauregard accurately describes Isabella's motive, but her anger is more than a "brief show": she calls Claudio a beast, doubts his legitimate birth, wishes for his death, and declares that she will pray a thousand prayers for him to die, but no word to save him. Her rejection of him thus reaches, momentarily, into the deepest recesses of her spiritual being. Critics who have described this reaction as wanting in charity would seem to be stating the obvious. They are not referring to her refusal to sleep with Angelo, as Beauregard avers (Beauregard 2008, p. 18) but to her literal dehumanization of her brother, which is surely not appropriate to one who is preparing for the convent. Later, when she begs the Duke to preserve Angelo's life, despite his belief that he raped her, her charity prevails over her repulsion, as she obeys the gospel command to forgive one's enemy. Her growth in charity would seem to be a more compelling way to understand her actions than her valuation of chastity as her primary virtue.

Most scholars have recently addressed the issue of Shakespeare and religion by recognizing that the plays are both Catholic and Protestant. This is the stated position of Beatrice Groves in an erudite and closely argued interpretation of six plays: *Romeo and Juliet*, *King John 1* and *2*, *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, and *Measure for Measure*. The "texts" of Groves' title are the English Bible with commentaries inspired by it, and "traditions" are the vestiges of Catholic liturgy that were retained by the English Church, much to the dismay of reformers who continued to demand a wider separation between the New Faith and the Old. In keeping with this conception, Groves introduces her discussions of the plays with two historical chapters, one that considers the impact of the English Bible on the early modern stage, and a second that describes how Shakespeare's "incarnational esthetic" registers the impact of the mystery plays on secular drama.

Groves' chapter on *Measure for Measure* belongs to the former category. This play is the only one Shakespeare wrote with a biblical title, and it deals with problems in Christian ethics as the action unfolds, so it is hard to avoid for those who treat religion seriously in Shakespeare's plays, and it makes a useful touchstone for comparison of one treatment with another. Groves presents her argument in three stages, focusing first on the Duke, who describes his role in Godlike terms that have invited comparison with King James's ideas of divine right: "Both the Duke and James demonstrate their

power over life and death and in both cases it is implicitly suggested that such power is quasi-divine" (Groves 2007, p. 162). Groves agrees with most other critics of the play, however, that in spite of the Duke's Godlike aspirations, Shakespeare makes Vincentio humanly fallible, and she offers two more examples of possible biblical influence in *Measure for Measure* that are ironized to emphasize human weakness. One is the seeming resurrection of Claudio, staged by the Duke at the play's end, when Claudio enters wrapped in grave cloths, like the biblical Lazarus. Insofar as the episode suggests an implicit parallel between the Duke and Jesus, it works to the Duke's detriment in several ways that Groves enumerates (Groves 2007, p. 166). She also proposes that Lucio's discomforting of the Duke when the Duke is disguised as a friar may suggest Christ's temptation in the wilderness. Just as Satan expresses uncertainty about Christ's identity in order to persuade him to reveal it spectacularly, so Lucio/Lucifer goads the "friar". "Lucio's twisted biblical allusions, both to the raising of Lazarus and to the Incarnation, bring forward the true model of divine kingship which the Duke tries to emulate but cannot attain" (Groves 2007, p. 180).

Where Shakespeare's "incarnational esthetic" is concerned, Groves turns to Shakespeare's Henry V as prince and king. She argues that Hal's motive for modeling himself on Christ is not to improve his piety and ensure his salvation; rather, Hal determines to appear Christlike in order to improve his political effectiveness. Groves implicitly distinguishes her way of understanding him as a Christ figure from G. Wilson Knight's effort in the same vein by her identification of features that ironize the parallels (Knight 1967). She makes her case with three instances that have precedents in the mystery plays. Hal presents himself as a redeemer in his soliloquy in *1 Henry IV*, but what he purposes to redeem is not human souls, as Christ did, but the continuum of secular time: Hal says he has adopted a wastrel's style of living, in order to misdirect attention from himself as the heir apparent, so he will appear "more goodly and attract more eyes" in the long run, when he seems to repent and come to himself. Groves sees Hal as a secular Christ, again, when he defeats Hotspur at the end of *1 Henry IV*, given Hotspur's links with Lucifer in the mystery plays. Finally, Shakespeare reinforces Henry V's parallel with Christ in the mystery plays when the King prays by himself on the eve of Agincourt, sending his officers away, as Christ sends away his disciples before praying alone in Gethsemane in *The Agony in the Garden*. Groves summarizes: "Hal is an extremely successful king, but the illusion of divinity is part of his masterful manipulation of appearance, not the direct result of his Christian kingship" (Groves 2007, p. 153).

Whereas Groves devotes four chapters to six plays by Shakespeare, Christopher Baker treats all the plays in one chapter, using the other four chapters of his book to discuss historical background, the plays in performance, and a review of relevant criticism. This procedure makes it difficult for him to treat his subject in any depth: "background" means a breathless history of Christianity from the first century to the sixteenth in twenty pages. His chapter on Shakespeare's works is organized generically and chronologically, and offers little more than plot summaries. Baker includes a passing reference to Henry V's command that two psalms, Te Deum and Non Nobis, be sung after the victory at Agincourt (Baker 2008, p. 58), but Baker does not mention that this is an anachronistic detail in *Henry V*, because the two psalms were only one psalm in the Vulgate. Shakespeare thought of them as separate, because that is how they were printed in the Elizabethan Book of Common Prayer. This would seem to be pertinent information in a book about religion in the age of Shakespeare. An anachronism on Baker's own part is his habitual use of "Anglican" to describe the English church in the sixteenth century. Though the term was known (the *OED*'s earliest instance is from 1598), it is more characteristic of the nineteenth century than the sixteenth.

Groves' comment about Shakespeare's "incarnational esthetic" is cited by Shell (2010, p. 2) in a remarkably learned, thematically organized challenge to the assumption that the plays are supportive of Christianity. On the contrary, Shell avers, her book "bears witness" to those who have found the plays "inimical to religious practice" (Shell 2010, p. 4). Her first two chapters thus focus, respectively, on opposition to the theater, per se, and on early Catholic critiques of Shakespeare, in particular. Anti-theatricalism is familiar from the work of Jonas Barish, in particular, (Barish 1981), and Shell

emphasizes that it was expressed by people of all backgrounds, not just radical Protestants. Her exposition of particular Catholic admonitions to Shakespeare himself is groundbreaking and singular.[5] She is agnostic on the question of Shakespeare's denominational affiliation, but she makes it clear that Catholics were aware of his plays, and some were distressed by them. Most remarkable, she discovered a Catholic play from the late 1590s called *The History of Purgatory*, which she compares with Shakespeare's treatment of Purgatory in *Hamlet* (Shell 2010, pp. 106–19). Her point is that the *History* defends Catholic belief, while Shakespeare estheticizes it: "What *Lear* does for Christianity, *Hamlet* does for Catholicism, artificially consigning it to another time, then bringing it back as a way of making his audience beautifully sad" (Shell 2010, p. 116).

The learning exhibited in Shell's book is both wide and deep, matching its attention to historical context and to particular plays. Shell cites *Measure for Measure* in support of her argument that Shakespeare shows a keen awareness of contemporary moral and religious issues without buttonholing his auditors (Shell 2010, pp. 164–74). For an audience that prizes esthetic distance, the result is not only agreeable, but admirable, yet it distinguishes Shakespeare's secular drama more clearly from its medieval predecessors than almost anything else. This play, "perhaps Shakespeare's richest venture into moralistic discourse" (Shell 2010, p. 167), scrupulously preserves its auditors' aloofness from the issues it addresses, so "the audience's voyeuristic role removes any element of reciprocity from the penitential process" (Shell 2010, p. 170). Shell cites an earlier drama, *Everyman*, for illustrative contrast (Shell 2010, pp. 170–71). Both plays emphasize a standard Christian assumption—that human beings are morally weak—but *Everyman* stages the assumption "for admonitory effect" (Shell 2010, p. 171), whereas *Measure for Measure* tips the balance heavily toward Horatian *dulce*. This way of preserving an audience, as it were, from moral suasion, is what makes Shakespeare, in Jonson's well-known phrase, not for an age but for all time yet, it is also, in Shell's view, what makes him most decidedly non-religious.

Shell offers one of the most original and groundbreaking books in this group of witnesses to keen current interest in Shakespeare and religion. The breadth of that interest is sampled in a collection of essays titled *Shakespeare and Religious Change*, edited by Kenneth Graham and Philip Collington, from papers read at a conference on Elizabethan theater sponsored by the University of Waterloo, Ontario, in June 2005 (Graham and Collington 2009). Two of the essays are not actually about Shakespeare. One, by Alexandra Johnston, is on William Cecil's role in the transition, from drama inspired by centuries of Catholic tradition to plays more compatible with Protestant assumptions. The other essay, by Mary Blackstone, deconstructs the Catholic/Protestant binary by examining three instances of it in late sixteenth-century England. Both are highly learned, and supply relevant context to Shakespeare's drama, but they are tangential to the book's stated subject.

The remaining essays in *Shakespeare and Religious Change* cover a variety of subjects, from Debora Shuger on the conflict between aristocratic and Christian values in *Richard II*, to Anthony Dawson on the secularity of Shakespeare's theater. Dawson's essay complements Shell's book in important ways. Both see Shakespeare as neither identifiably Catholic nor Protestant; both emphasize the secularity of his writing; both pay particular attention to *Measure for Measure*. But Dawson goes his own way. He cites Hamlet on God's concern about the fall of a sparrow and Bottom's paraphrase of St. Paul as examples of Shakespeare's estheticizing of religion, but Dawson's prime example is not from Shakespeare; it is from Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*, performed at the Red Bull Theatre in 1620. Though the play appeals strongly to audience emotion in imagining a faithful Christian under Roman persecution, Dawson argues that the emotion it arouses is estheticized: "religious associations and feelings are subsumed under, or transformed into, theatrical pleasure" (Dawson 2009, p. 254). Anthony Dawson's essay is in essential agreement with Alison Shell's argument in *Shakespeare and Religion*, but Shell's way of making the point gains by her contrast with medieval drama. Dawson does

[5] *Shakespeare and Religion* draws on earlier work that Alison Shell published about the Catholic response to Shakespeare.

not address the question whether any theatrical display of religion in action could avoid evaporating faith in the rarified air of esthetic pleasure. Shell makes a credible argument that it can, and once, did.

A more recent collection of essays by Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti used the same title as Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion*, though with a distinguishing subtitle, *Early Modern and Postmodern Perspectives* (Jackson and Marotti 2011). The subtitle is a little misleading, since its two principal terms are not parallel with one another. No essay on Shakespeare and religion exists from the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, which define "early modern" for Shakespeare. At the same time, postmodern strategies of interpretation can, and have, been applied to early modern texts, including Shakespeare's, beginning perhaps with Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Greenblatt 1980). "Historical and postmodern" would seem to serve the purpose better though, admittedly, the phrase lacks the euphony of the existing subtitle. The co-editors published a useful and influential essay in 2004, "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies," and the essays in their present collection are drawn from subsequent sessions on Shakespeare and religion at the Renaissance Society of America and the Shakespeare Association of America.

Measure for Measure is represented in their collection by James Knapp's essay on penitential ethics in the play. The essay announces itself as decidedly postmodern, with a sentence like the following distinctly recalling the high tide of theory in the 1980s: "Thus for Marion the method of phenomenological reduction that serves Merleau-Ponty's goal of eschewing dogmatic philosophical proscription becomes the method by which to avoid the pitfalls of traditional onto-theology" (Knapp 2011, p. 261). Knapp's excursus on theory, however, is unnecessary, because it has no bearing on the substance of his essay, which is an engaging and perceptive historically informed close reading of the play, with helpful references to the psalms, the gospels, and Augustine. To be sure, Knapp's conclusion is informed by postmodern irresolution, but the theory is implicit, and the essay's opening excursus on "Religion, Phenomenology, Ethics" seems gratuitous.

Sarah Beckwith is also interested in penitential ethics, framed in a contrast between medieval religious drama and Shakespeare. Though this approach pays rich dividends thematically in *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, taking the sacrament of penance as a starting point faces the difficulty that penitence and forgiveness long preceded sacramental theology. They are a central feature of ancient Hebrew theology, strongly reinforced in the teaching of Jesus, and elaborated in the writing of St. Paul. The Protestant reformers thought they were recovering something older than medieval theology and, if they were, then Shakespeare would seem to be recovering it, as well. He showed an interest in forgiveness as early as *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and that interest continued in several more comedies and *King Lear*. Beckwith includes chapters on *Measure for Measure*, *Pericles* (where forgiveness does not influence the denouement), *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*.

The chapter on *Measure for Measure* deals with identity and community, in keeping with the focus of the book as a whole. Like almost every other critic of the play, Beckwith abhors the Duke. By disguising himself as a friar, "the Duke can procure the secrets of the soul so that they become fully available to the sovereign state" (Beckwith 2011, p. 73). His stated reason for hiding his preservation of Claudio from Isabella is "To make her heavenly comforts of despair, /When it is least expected" but, for Beckwith, his retention of this information is "sheer viciousness", "drawn out [presumably by the playwright] to expose its inherent sadism" (Beckwith 2011, p. 74). The human costs of the way he governs "are in the terrible exposure and humiliation of his subjects" (Beckwith 2011, p. 75).[6] To be sure, the Duke as matchmaker is a good deal less likeable than Rosalind in *As You Like It*, or even than Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well*. Still, he contributes substantially to the wellbeing of Julia and her newborn child by rescuing Claudio from the law, meets the needs and even the desires of Mariana by bringing Angelo to repentance, arranges permanent material support for Kate Keepdown by forcing

[6] For what it is worth, David Beauregard, writing as a Catholic priest about *Measure for Measure*, is not offended by the Duke's disguise as a friar: "The play presents the Duke counseling or confessing four characters, actions that are appropriate expressions of the play's concern with the virtue of clemency" (Beauregard 2008, p. 69).

Lucio to marry her, and assists Isabella in moving from a self-absorbed and heartless valuation of her chastity to warmhearted charity for the man who mistakenly thinks he has raped her. The Duke's actions on behalf of women clearly distinguish him from Lucio, who exploits women ruthlessly, and the difference would seem to be important in evaluating the Duke.

The interest in Shakespeare and religion peaked in 2013–14 with the publication of no fewer than six books. Hannibal Hamlin's *The Bible in Shakespeare* is the first identifiably Protestant book on Shakespeare and religion, though Hamlin takes no stand on Shakespeare's religious identity. Hamlin refers to his study as "confessionally unbiased" (Hamlin 2013, p. 76), but Catholic historians, like Haigh (1993) and Duffy (1992), are conspicuous by their absence, and focusing on the Bible is, itself, a Protestant trait. Hamlin distinguishes his study, from those by Noble (1935) or Shaheen (1999), by his emphasis on allusion, which he describes as "any instance of a work that refers to, quotes, points to, echoes, evokes, or parallels an earlier work" (Hamlin 2013, p. 77). This definition explains the extraordinary density of Hamlin's study, whose erudition is seemingly boundless, though never heavy-handed. After three introductory chapters, dealing with the Bible in the Reformation, other critics of the Bible in Shakespeare, and the theory of allusion, Hamlin turns to the substance of his book: a chapter on Genesis 1–3, the Roman histories, Falstaff, and a chapter apiece on *Macbeth* and *Lear*. *Measure for Measure* is barely mentioned.

The chapter on Falstaff is particularly surprising and rewarding. Hamlin points out that Falstaff is the "master of diegetic allusion" (Hamlin 2013, p. 234), that is, allusions used as if the character were aware of using them. For an alcoholic old knight to be the conscious master of biblical allusion is, itself, a fine Shakespearean irony, as well as implicit evidence of Shakespeare's own familiarity with the Bible. In part, Falstaff's mastery is attributable to his origin as a stage Puritan (Hamlin 2013, p. 236), but a satiric contrast with the sober-sided Prince is an important part of his makeup. Hamlin observes that both the knight and the prince allude to the Bible, "but, whereas Falstaff is always primarily playful, Hal's play is deadly serious" (Hamlin 2013, p. 254). Most tellingly, Hamlin notes close parallels between Falstaff's biblical allusions and Shakespeare's in other plays: "in their contrastive and ironic use of biblical allusion, Falstaff and Shakespeare do have a striking amount in common" (Hamlin 2013, p. 270).

David Scott Kastan's witty title, *A Will to Believe*, suggests several possibilities: Shakespeare's credibility, the playwright's own willingness to believe (even if he did not quite get there), and the last will and testament he dictated that left many unanswered questions. Kastan agrees with Shell and Dawson: "Religion in the plays is a psychological and social reality that registers as form rather than a credal one that registers as belief" (Kastan 2014, p. 7), and he describes his procedure in four chapters after the introduction: "one on Shakespeare's own religion, one on his presentation of Catholics and Catholicism, one on Jews, Moors, and Turks in the two Venice plays, and a final chapter on Wittenberg's most famous dropout" (Kastan 2014, p. 11). In pursuing his aim, Kastan repeatedly finds *le mot juste* in an astonishing variety of obscure Tudor and Stuart texts that, in themselves, have no bearing on popular drama of the day.

Kastan approaches *Measure for Measure* as part of his consideration of how Shakespeare dealt with Catholicism or, to be more precise, how a devout Catholic dealt with Shakespeare. Kastan attends to the censorship of William Sankey, an English Jesuit who was exiled because of his faith to the English college at Vallodolid, in Spain, where he expurgated a copy of the Second Folio of 1632, so it would be less offensive to Catholic seminarians. Sankey's expurgation included the whole of *Measure for Measure*, which he literally cut out of the volume, leaving only page stubs in the gutter margin. Based on the pattern of Sankey's selective censorship of other plays, Kastan infers two possible reasons for Sankey's apparent animus toward *Measure for Measure*: "the play's inescapable sexuality" (Kastan 2014, p. 66), and the Duke's extensive performance as a Catholic priest while in disguise.[7] Kastan observes

[7] Regarding this assumption, see the previous note.

that Shakespeare's putative Catholicism seems to have been invisible to a contemporary Catholic who read the Folio carefully, while "the play itself is neither assertively anti-Catholic nor pro-Protestant" (Kastan 2014, p. 71). Even in his most Christian play, Shakespeare is interested in religion as a means to an esthetic end, and he therefore appeals to the majority of his audience, for whom religion was not defined by the extremes but by "a more expansive field of piety and social connection" (Kastan 2014, p. 76).

Peter Iver Kaufman describes his subject succinctly in the title of his book: *Religion around Shakespeare*. He aims to describe "circumstance" (Kaufman 2013, p. 1), rather than try to discern the playwright's religion from the plays. Self-identified as a historical theologian, Kaufman begins with two chapters of background that "stay far from Shakespeare's plays, and try to repossess the religion around the realm" (Kaufman 2013, p. 3), beginning with the kingdom as a whole, then focusing more particularly on Shakespeare's known habitats—Stratford-upon-Avon and London. The succeeding three chapters treat the plays as evidence for contemporary "attitudes toward religious leadership (chapter 3), religious personality (chapter 4), and religious community (chapter 5)" (Kaufman 2013, p. 88). The strength of these chapters is Kaufman's ability to bring contemporary documents—often documents in manuscripts—into conjunction with the plays he analyzes.

The chapters treating the plays have two limitations. First, taking "the plays as evidence" does not mean, for Kaufman, surveying all the plays that might bear on the point at hand; rather, he considers one or two plays in each chapter—*King John* on religious leadership, *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure* on religious personality, and *Coriolanus* on religious community. Since *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure* both centrally feature troubled persons, the analysis is skewed toward religion as a personality disorder. Interpretation of Hamlet and Angelo needs to be balanced by considering personalities like Paulina in *The Winter's Tale*, or Prospero in *The Tempest*. Where *Coriolanus* is concerned, Kaufman finds a topical parallel to the imagined mob's demands in historical Puritan demands for lay involvement in parish decision-making at the time the play was first staged. This is an innovative way to understand the play, but an appeal for religious equality is a distant parallel to a hungry urban mob's demand for food and, even if the parallel is granted, Shakespeare's acknowledgment of the Puritans' cause would be an uncharacteristic gesture of religious favoritism on his part. In contrast, Kaufman helpfully analyzes Angelo's "soule wrack" in *Measure for Measure* (Kaufman 2013, pp. 145–51) as Shakespeare's unsympathetic imagining of contemporary puritanism. Second, insofar as the plays in question are evidence of any topical concern, it would point to one playwright's understanding, not to contemporary attitudes in general. Shakespeare is famously evenhanded, but he was not infinitely prescient. An urban demand for food and the Puritans' demand for greater inclusiveness in decision-making both anticipate later developments in civic engagement and even in democracy, but Shakespeare's treatment of the mob in Corioles is hardly sympathetic to participatory government.

David Loewenstein and Michael Witmore commissioned a collection of essays because they were interested in bringing historians and literary critics together, to write about Shakespeare and religion. The collection begins with three essays that consider context, one by a literary critic (David Bevington) and two by historians (Peter Marshall and Felicity Heal). These are followed by nine essays on particular plays, including Alison Shell on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Beatrice Groves on *King John*. Michael Witmore contributes an essay on "Shakespeare and Wisdom Literature", and Matthew Dimmock writes about Shakespeare and non-Christian religion, focusing mostly on *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*.

Adrian Strete's essay on *Measure for Measure* brings the play into conjunction for the first time with Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* by way of Calvin's *Institutes*. Strete is interested in possible overlap between Lucretius' moderate determinism ("moderate" because the possibility of atomic "swerve" in Lucretius' physical system is the origin of volitional freedom) and Calvin's doctrine of predestination. In *Measure for Measure*, Strete proposes, "Shakespeare shows [that] the Christian 'graine of mustard seede' is always potentially in danger of morphing into the Lucretian atomistic seed" (Strete 2015, p. 139). He focuses on the two scenes where Angelo attempts to sway Isabella to his fleshly purpose (2.2

and 2.4), taking each of the interlocutors as representative, in a sense, of Lucretian atomistic necessity and Pauline freedom, respectively. Act Two, Scene Four, in particular, "turns on the keen tension between a Christian and a materialist understanding of sex" (Strete 2015, p. 147). It is impossible to do justice to the complexity and insightfulness of this chapter in a brief summary; it is one of the most thought-provoking interpretations of *Measure for Measure* in this group of books.

Richard McCoy chose a snappy title for his book, as David Kastan did for his.[8] *Faith in Shakespeare* would seem to refer to the religious content of the plays, but the title actually refers to the credibility that Shakespeare's writing has earned over the course of four centuries—or, in McCoy's own phrasing, "what it means to believe in Shakespeare's plays" (McCoy 2013, p. ix). McCoy makes clear that the wordplay in his title is deliberate, and he acknowledges a past interest in Shakespeare and religion, but he reports that his focus has shifted: "I now see faith in Shakespeare as more theatrical and poetic than spiritual" (McCoy 2013, p. ix). So decisive is this shift for him that his book does not even mention *Measure for Measure*, the play that, more than any other, reflects Shakespeare's awareness of Christian ethics and apparent interest in it. In short, McCoy firmly endorses the observation that other critics have made concerning Shakespeare and religion, i.e., that the playwright takes religion seriously, not as religion, but as art.

McCoy's Arnoldian stance is most evident, perhaps, in his analysis of *The Winter's Tale*, where Paulina tells Leontes, late in the play, "It is required / You do awake your faith". McCoy emphasizes that the faith in question is merely esthetic: "For all their supernatural atmospherics, Shakespeare's romances operate at a human and worldly level rather than attaining a transcendent plane" (McCoy 2013, p. 115). To be sure, the faith Leontes needs to awake is central to a relational drama—his faith in the wife he fatally mistrusted and his confidence in Paulina's ability to effect a reconciliation that his repentance has made him long for, though he thought Hermione was dead. For the romance ending to work, this relationship needs to be repaired, so Leontes' repentance is as important as Hermione's willingness to forgive him. But, the key words in this comic ending are all borrowed from a religious context: "faith", "repent", "forgive", and "reconciliation." To insist that such words have merely esthetic denotations is to ignore the connotations that give the plot much of its vitality and emotional depth. As Howard Felperin pointed out long ago, the one who demands the awakening of Leontes' faith is named "little Paul", unavoidably alluding to the apostle of faith (Felperin 1972, p. 68). Without actually operating at a transcendent level, *The Winter's Tale* deliberately borrows from that level in imagining human frailty and harmony. "Both transcendent and literal" would seem to describe this process better than McCoy's claim that it is strictly literal.

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[8] In fact, the two titles are parallel. The principal difference is that Kastan's title glances at Shakespeare's first name.

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Article

The Undiscovered Countries: Shakespeare and the Afterlife †

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† Editor's Note: This article was written before the author and I were aware of the recently published book, John S. Garrison, *Shakespeare and the Afterlife* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

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Abstract: The multiple uses of religion in Shakespeare's plays seem to counter each other at every turn. In one respect, though, I have found a surprising consistency. Moments when Shakespeare's drama imagines the afterlife are moments that lend significant insights into the play's action or characterization, even though the image of one undiscovered country may differ drastically from another. Across the canon, the afterlife may appear as a place of religious judgment, as in *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Merchant of Venice*; as a classical Elysium or Hades where the spirit or shadow removes elsewhere (*Antony and Cleopatra*, *Titus Andronicus*); as Abraham's Bosom—a place of rest between death and the Last Judgment (*Henry V*, *Richard III*, *Hamlet*); or an unidentifiable life to come (*Measure for Measure*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*).

Keywords: afterlife; *Antony and Cleopatra*; *Hamlet*; *Henry V*; *King Lear*; *Macbeth*; *Measure for Measure*, *Merchant of Venice*; *Othello*; *Richard III*; *Titus Andronicus*

In *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Stephen Greenblatt explores post-Reformation England's relationship with the afterlife once the Church of England declared Purgatory and its associated practices as "a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God" (Greenblatt 2001, p. 235).[1] A "mingling of folk beliefs, classical mythology, and Catholic doctrine"—a "whole, weird, tangled cultural inheritance"—filled the void (Greenblatt 2001, p. 199). Greenblatt explores the persistence of Purgatory in the popular imagination, but stops short of suggesting that in his plays Shakespeare theologically engages the question of Purgatory, even in *Hamlet* (Greenblatt's focus). Greenblatt proposes that the problem of the play's "network of allusions" to Purgatory might not be noticeable to *Hamlet*'s audience except that "Hamlet notices it and broods about it," and "a young man from Wittenberg, with a distinctly Protestant temperament, is haunted by a distinctly Catholic ghost" (Greenblatt 2001, pp. 237, 240). In this, the play enacts England's "tangled cultural inheritance" in complex and compelling ways which, in Protestant England's "attack on the 'middle state of souls," sustains "a cult of the dead," and transforms "the space of Purgatory" into "the space of the stage" (Greenblatt 2001, pp. 256–57).

Purgatory in both *Hamlet* and the popular imagination, then, is akin to any overt expression of religion on the stage: both transgress Tudor-Stuart religio-political hegemony. The theater, Greenblatt reminds us, "was censored," and "it would have been highly risky to represent in a favorable light any specifically Roman Catholic doctrines or practices" (Greenblatt 2001, p. 236). Shakespeare's

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1 Quoted from Edgar C.S. Gibson, *The Thirty-Nine* Articles *of the Church of England* (London, 1897) quoted in (Greenblatt 2001, p. 235). The Elizabethan articles were passed by Convocation in 1562 but not published until 1571. Its article on purgatory was taken directly from the Edwardian Articles, published in 1543, although there were other differences among the forty-one Edwardian articles and the thirty-nine Elizabethan articles.

achievement in *Hamlet* derives from "his remarkable gift for knowing exactly how far he could go without getting into serious trouble" (Greenblatt 2001, p. 237). Shakespeare's art becomes both ameliorative and transgressive, and, with regard to religion, ambiguous.

Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti find the interest in religion in Shakespeare studies less problematic. In 2004, Jackson and Marotti noted a shift in early modern English literary studies, which they referred to as a "turn to religion" (Jackson and Marotti 2004, pp. 167–90). As any Shakespearean would readily admit, religion is not new to Shakespeare studies. Generations of scholars have scoured the plays in efforts to reconstruct religion as part of the bard's intellectual milieu, to discover both spiritual meanings and authorial theological leanings, and even to repudiate altogether any and all claims for religion in Shakespeare's plays. What has changed? In their introduction to *Shakespeare and Religion: Early Modern and Postmodern Perspectives*, Jackson and Marotti observe that in a modern secular society, especially among "intellectual elites," a sufficient discomfort with religion has meant that the subject either has met with outright antagonism or has been relegated to an old historicist position of Shakespearean drama "mirroring" its cultural contexts (Jackson and Marotti 2011, p. 1). Jackson and Marotti observe that of late "Shakespeare scholars have been more sympathetically responsive to the presence of the religious in that author's work," and they have "used it to think through perennial philosophical and religious issues of which we have become more aware" (Jackson and Marotti 2011, p. 20). Such engagement with the religious in Shakespeare often points to ways in which the playwright both incorporates and resists his own religious culture: he "dismantles religious practice only to end in a position, paradoxically, that still can be termed 'religious'" (Jackson and Marotti 2011, p. 3). Matthew J. Smith's "At War 'Twixt Will and Will Not': On Shakespeare's Idea of Religious Experience in *Measure for Measure*" in this special issue offers an excellent illustration of such an approach. According to Smith, *Measure for Measure* presents multiple religious perspectives that "through their dramatic contact" with each other not only "reveal one another's limitations," but create a dialectic "Between the world and the self that many have located at the heart of religious experience" (Smith 2018, pp. 9–11).

Despite the fact, then, that studies of religion or the religious in Shakespeare have attained a new legitimacy, notions of ambiguity persist. The playwright's multiple uses of religion seem to counter each other at every turn—within a play as Greenblatt has demonstrated in his study of *Hamlet*, or across plays, as Julia Reinhard Lupton's richly allusive essay, "The Wizards of Uz: Shakespeare and the Book of Job," suggests (Lupton 2011, pp. 163–87 in Jackson and Marotti 2011). In one respect, though, I have found a surprising consistency. Moments when Shakespeare's drama imagines the afterlife are moments that lend significant insights into the play's action or characterization, even though the image of one undiscovered country may differ drastically from another. To illustrate this, I will take the liberty of returning to my work on *Othello* and Islam. (But first, it needs to be said that in this study I am considering only references to the afterlife that do not appear as ghosts, dreams, or other aspects of the supernatural considered with such nuance in *Hamlet in Purgatory*.)

By considering how Renaissance books on Africa and the Islamic world represented categories of religion, ethnicity, and national origins, I have suggested how Shakespeare's audience might have responded to the Moor of Venice as a tragic figure driven more by law than lust, and more by justice than passion.[2] In early modern accounts of Islamic and Middle-Eastern culture, accusations of adultery were grave. According to *Purchas his Pilgrimage*, a man who failed to prove by four witnesses that his accusation of his wife's adultery was true would receive eighty lashes. A "jealous husband" had to swear "four times" to the truth of his accusation, which if the case were otherwise, had to "curse himselfe" (Purchas 1613, p. 210). Shakespeare's contemporary audiences, though, would not even have needed to read books about Islam, because they learned at church of the Islamic world's contempt for adultery. The Church of England required that at any religious service where no licensed preacher was available to preach a sermon, a homily should be read from the Book of Homilies. The homilies

[2] My initial work on this appears in (Clegg 2006, 2009, 2017).

were to be read in sequence, and when the sequence was completed, they would start again at the beginning.[3] The first Book of Homilies lays out English Protestant teaching on salvation by faith and election, but also expresses the certainty that good works arise from sanctification. One homily stands out as an exception to this theological exposition: the homily against whoredome and adultery, which begins by apologizing for this departure, and then pronounces, “the greatnes of thys synne, and howe odious; hateful, and abhominable it is, and hathe alwaye bene reputed before God and all good men” (Cranmer 1547, sig. K3). The homily relates to *Othello* in two ways—first it praises the foreign laws (“godlie statutes”) that punish adultery with death; and second, it specifically mentions Islamic law, which would have been part of Othello the Moor’s experience: “Among the Turkes even at this day, they that be taken in adulterie, both men & woman are stoned straight way to death without mercie” (Cranmer 1547, sig. L4).

Othello’s tragedy looks quite different in light of such views, and the play’s denouement comes at the moment Othello envisions the afterlife. In the fifth act, just after Desdemona’s death, Emilia accuses Othello of being “rash as fire” for saying that Desdemona was false. “O,” proclaims Emilia, “she was heavenly true!” (5.2.134–35). Othello replies,

> Cassio did top her; ask thy husband else.
> O, I were damn’d beneath all depth in hell
> But that I did proceed upon just grounds
> To this extremity. (5.2.136–39)[4]

Given Othello’s Islamic origins and the “Homily Against Adultery’s” praise for the zealous punishment of adulterers, for Othello to believe that Desdemona’s death was on “just grounds” (rather than an act of self-deception or self-justification as many critics see it) lays the ground for his tragedy. Othello’s words clearly reveal that if he had not acted “upon just grounds,” he deserved damnation. This, of course, is precisely the afterlife he sees for himself when he grasps the enormity both of Iago’s lies and of his error. Looking upon Desdemona’s body, he says,

> O ill-starr’d wench,
> Pale as thy smock! When we shall meet at compt,
> This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,
> And fiends will snatch at it. Cold, cold, my girl?
> Even like thy chastity. O cursed, cursed slave!
> Whip me, ye devils,
> From the possession of this heavenly sight!
> Blow me about in winds! Roast me in sulphur!
> Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire! (5.2.272–80)

What began in Othello’s mind as an act of justice—capital punishment for a “proven” crime—is now murder, the murder of a chaste wife—a crime for which Othello understands he deserves damnation and for which he believes he must kill himself: “No way but this, / Killing myself, to die upon a kiss” (5.2.358–59).

This vivid conception of the afterlife defines both Othello’s character and his tragedy. From the Islamic perspective, Othello may be regarded as doing the right thing for the right reasons, but from the play’s perspective, Othello is damnably wrong—not because he descends to some base instincts but because he acts on false evidence, albeit evidence fed to him by a demi-devil who “ensnared” his soul and body (5.2.307–8). In destroying what he loved best, he loses his soul.

In a very different tragedy, a very different vision of the afterlife likewise amplifies the play’s tragic effect, but in their vision of the afterlife, Antony and Cleopatra transcend death. In Act 4, scene

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3 Actually there were two books, one written during the reign of Edward VI, the other Elizabethan, and both were used in sequence during Elizabeth’s reign.

4 Shakespeare (1997). All citations are from this edition.

14, learning of Cleopatra's (supposed) death, Antony commits to die as a noble Roman by his own hand—an act he will later describe as "valour" that has "triumph'd on itself" (4.15.15). For him the afterlife will be a place to reconcile with Cleopatra: "I will o'ertake thee, Cleopatra, and / Weep for my pardon" (4.14.44–45). As he calls out to his servant Eros to help him enact his suicide, he says,

I come, my queen ... Stay for me:
Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,
And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze:
Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops, And all the haunt be ours. (4.14.50–54)

This, of course, is a Roman afterlife, Elysium, where the shades of the valiant live on in honor. In the underworld of Virgil's *Aeneid*, however, Dido and Aeneas were not reconciled. Dido spends eternity with her husband, whose death preceded the epic's action, rather than her lover. Joining Dido to Aeneas, as Antony does, allows him to envision an epic afterlife in Cleopatra's favor. That they have spirits that transcend earthly life is made clear both in Cleopatra's acceptance of Antony's death in Act V and in her own suicide. After Antony has died, Cleopatra remarks on his earthly body's insignificance; it is merely a "case" for "that huge spirit." That this spirit lives on appears in Cleopatra's language before her death as she dons her royal robes:

Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have
Immortal longings in me: now no more
The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip:
Yare, yare, good Iras; quick. Methinks I hear
Antony call; I see him rouse himself
To praise my noble act; I hear him mock
The luck of Caesar, which the gods give men
To excuse their after wrath: husband, I come:
Now to that name my courage prove my title!
I am fire and air; my other elements
I give to baser life. (5.2.280–90)

As fire and air, Cleopatra is a spirit escaping the base coils of mortality where "there is nothing left remarkable / Beneath the visiting moon" (4.14.67–68). For her, as for Antony, the afterlife is a place where their great spirits will live together forever. There is tragic loss in *Antony and Cleopatra*, but the loss derives less from their deaths than from their stature that emerges in part from their epic visions of the afterlife.

Henry V uses its image of the afterlife to reflect on one of the play's central problems—Henry's character and the legitimacy of England's war in France. On the night before the battle of Agincourt, King Henry appears among his troops in disguise. Three of his soldiers come in reflecting on what happens to men who die in battle. They speculate that the king faces battles with fears like their own and that, like them, he would rather be anywhere else. Henry intervenes and says that he "could not die anywhere so contented as in the King's company, his cause being just and his quarrel being honorable" (4.1.126–28). The soldiers question the degree to which they are accountable if the cause is not just and honorable. Bates says, "If his cause be wrong, our obedience to the King wipes the crime of it out of us." Williams replies, "But if the cause be not good, the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs, and arms, and heads, chopp'd off in a battle shall join together at the latter day and cry all, 'We died at such a place'" (4.1.134–38). The afterlife envisioned here is not simply heaven or hell but the day of final judgment—the end of days—when, according to Christian dogma, the resurrection of the body will occur. The proposition that Williams makes is that "few die well that die in battle" and because they cannot disobey the king, the king that led them to battle should be accountable for the "black matter" (4.1.144–45). The disguised Henry replies that "the King is not bound to answer the particular endings of his soldiers" since "they purpose not their death when they purpose their services" (4.1.155–58). If men die in war unprepared for death, "they have not wings to fly from God" (4.1 168–69). Each man is accountable for his own soul. The soldier's remedy

described by Henry is perhaps the most direct and conventional statement of Christian religion in all of Shakespeare's plays:

> Therefore should every soldier in the wars do as every sick man in his bed, wash every mote out of his conscience; and dying so, death is to him advantage, or not dying the time was blessedly lost wherein such preparation was gain'd; and in him that escapes it were not sin to think that making God so free an offer, He let him outlive that day to see His greatness and to teach others how they should prepare. (4.1.178–85)

This statement speaks directly to Christian doctrine as presented in the first Book of Homilies. "An exhortation against the feare of death" considers that "It is not to bee marveiled, that worldlie menne dooe feare to die" (Li). The homily considers the fear of the pain arising from sickness or death and gives comfort to the faithful Christian who is truly penitent for his offenses, that "bodailie death" is "a slepe, wherein mannes senses be as it were taken from him for a season, and yet when he awaketh he is more fresh, then hee was when hee went to bedde" (Lv). According to this homily, souls are "separated from oure bodies, for a Season, yet at the generalle resurrection, we shall be more freshe, beautiful & perfecte then we be now" (Cranmer 1547, sig. Lv). The place of separation between death and the end of days, according to the homily, is "Abraham's bosome: a place of rest, pleasure and consolation" (Cranmer 1547, sig. Liii^{v}). *Henry V*'s image of the gathering of soldiers' scattered bones at the bodily Resurrection of the dead, grotesque as it is, elicits Henry's reassurance that the man prepared for death need not fear. The idea of Abraham's bosom also appears in Act II. Bardolph expresses his wish to be with Falstaff "wheresome'er he is, either in heaven or in hell," to which Mistress Quickly, the hostess, replies, "Nay sure, he's not in hell; he's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom. 'A made a finer end, and went away an it had been any christom child" (2.3.7–12). It seems, thus, that readiness in the face of death is all. The parallels between Henry's theology on the eve before the battle and the hostess's account of Falstaff's death offers some resolution to two of the play's problems: war's moral precariousness and Henry's abandonment of Falstaff. While Falstaff's good death does not fully vindicate Henry turning away from his old friend, it offers some comic consolation that is comparable to the reassurance that Henry offered his soldiers: that his cause is just and for those prepared for death, death will bring peace.

Not all visions of the afterlife in Shakespeare's plays are as fully realized as they are in *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Henry V.* Indeed, some are mere glimpses, but glimpses that help us to understand central issues in the plays. In *Richard III*, for example, Queen Elizabeth envisions her dead sons in a middle state that is very like Abraham's bosom in *Henry V*—a place between death and judgment:

> Ah, my young princes! ah, my tender babes!
> My unblown flowers, new-appearing sweets!
> If yet your gentle souls fly in the air
> And be not fix'd in doom perpetual,
> Hover about me with your airy wings
> And hear your mother's lamentation! (4.4.9–14)

Unlike the comfort of Abraham's bosom implied in *Henry V*, Elizabeth's "yet" suggests only a brief moment between life and everlasting judgment. This allusion to divine judgment occurs just moments before Queen Margaret asks how she can "thank" an "upright, just, and true-disposing God" for "A hell-hound that doth hunt us all to death" (4.4.55, 48). Elizabeth's "doom," together with Margaret's questioning, suggests a deep skepticism about moral order in the play, making the Tudor providentialism of Richmond's defeat of Richard all the more welcome.

Glimpses of divine judgment in some plays are not deferred to the end of days. Such is the case in *The Merchant of Venice.* In the trial scene, the Duke asks Shylock, "How shall you hope for mercy, rend'ring none?" (4.1.88). Shylock's reply—"What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?"(4.1.89)—merely alludes to mercy and the afterlife, while Portia's speech on the nature of

mercy explicitly speaks of judgment and heavenly reward. Here Shylock asks, "on what compulsion" must he be merciful; and Portia, after an encomium to mercy, answers, "That in the course of justice, none of us / Should see salvation" (4.1.199–200). This Christian promise of heaven (salvation) is unavailable to the Jew, whose sense of judgment and consequences is impossibly opposite. Even when he is offered three times the money he is owed, he declaims why he must insist on the bond: "An oath, an oath, I have an oath in heaven!" (4.1.228). He swore his oath in God's name. To deny his oath is to perjure himself, and implicitly, to deny God. The importance of an oath and its relationship to the afterlife is complex. The Hebrew scripture (as opposed to the King James Bible) does not actually envision hell. It refers to *sheol*, a place holding the bodily remains where the soul awaits the just man's final reconciliation with God. The Hebrew scripture's language of punishment and reward is that of separation and reconciliation. To be reconciled with God requires righteousness, and God commands the righteous person to honor his oath:

> And Moses spake unto the heads of the tribes concerning the children of Israel, saying, This is the thing which the Lord hath commanded.
>
> If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth. (Numbers 30:1–2, KJV)

From Shylock's Jewish perspective, if Shylock breaks his oath, he loses his hope of Heaven. In this courtroom scene, which began with Portia's question "Which is the merchant here? and which the Jew?" (4.1.174), Shylock's religious dilemma renders strangely cruel the mercy Antonio finally extends to him on the condition he become a Christian.

The Merchant of Venice's use of the afterlife highlights the play's moral ambiguity by creating some sympathy for Shylock as a man of conscience. Linking conscience to judgment and the afterlife in two other plays, *Richard III* and *Macbeth*, shows their protagonists' flaws. On the day of the battle with Richmond in *Richard III*, Richard awakens disconcerted after his night of troubling dreams. In shaking off his dreams' effect, he dismisses conscience even as he recognizes that hell may be his afterlife:

> Let not our babbling dreams affright our souls;
> Conscience is but a word that cowards use,
> Devis'd at first to keep the strong in awe:
> Our strong arms be our conscience, swords our law!
> March on, join bravely, let us to it pell-mell;
> If not to heaven, then hand in hand to hell. (5.3.308–13)

Richard envisions himself outside of the moral universe, but to the audience the end rhyme of "mell" and "hell" emphasizes the total unlikelihood of the "if" proposition of heaven. For Macbeth, the moral universe is far more viable.

Macbeth's conscience may be seen as one of his redeeming traits, but in his Act I soliloquy where he wrestles with judgment and the afterlife, he reveals his lack of moral compass. He is less concerned about enacting murder than about being discovered. The soliloquy opens with Macbeth imagining Duncan's successful murder as a means to his own ends. These ends are so all-consuming that he envisions himself escaping judgment in the afterlife:

> If th' assassination
> Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
> With his surcease, success; that but this blow
> Might be the be-all and end-all—here,
> But here, upon this bank and [shoal] of time,
> We'ld jump the life to come. (1.7.2–7)

While Macbeth thinks he can escape consequences in the life to come, the reality of earthly judgment is more pressing: "But in these cases / We still have judgment here" (1.7.7–8). What Macbeth

fears most is that the heavenly host, spurred by Duncan's virtue and the "deep damnation of his taking-off," "Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye" (1.7.20, 24). The glimpse of the afterlife that appears here is not Macbeth's but Duncan's. Strangely, Macbeth sees himself outside this divine economy. It is the "judgment here" that he must face. That this judgment cannot be escaped motivates *Macbeth*'s tragic action: Macbeth's ruthless and ultimately unsuccessful efforts to conceal his crimes.

In *Richard III* and *Macbeth*, then, the protagonists give little more than lip service to Christian ideas of judgment and the afterlife, which points to the nature of their characters. In many respects this is fine: the world of both plays is steeped in evil. What happens to the afterlife, though, in plays immersed in religion? Among these, images of the afterlife evoke a kind of religious skepticism. In "Decorum and the Politics of Ceremony in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*," Gary Kuchar reminds us that Tamora's cry of "irreligious piety" in response to Titus's ritual sacrifice of her son calls attention to Rome's decline into barbarity that is displayed throughout the play (Kuchar 2011, p. 50). (Human sacrifice was not part of Roman religion.) The afterlife in *Titus Andronicus* is the classical underworld, to which in both the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* souls without proper burial rites are not admitted. Titus asks himself, "Why suffer'st they sons, unburied yet, / To hover on the dreadful shore of Styx?" (1.1.87–88). Burial, not human sacrifice, was the required rite. The unravelling of Titus's (Roman) world in the play derives directly from his "irreligious piety."

Another play in which the charge of irreligious piety might be raised is *Measure for Measure*, where to save her brother, who is condemned to death for fornication, the nun Isabella meets with a moral dilemma. The only way to save her brother's life Angelo tells Isabella is for her to sleep with him. In presenting his proposition, Angelo asks, "Might there not be a charity in sin / To save this brother's life" (2.4.63–64). Isabella's refusal is resolute: "Better it were a brother died at once, / Than that a sister, by redeeming him, / Should die for ever" (2.5.106–8). The afterlife here is but a mere glimpse of heaven and hell. In the next scene where Isabella reports Antonio's proposition to her brother, Claudio, his vision of the afterlife is horrific. He tells Isabella that death is "a fearful thing," to which she answers, "And shamed life a hateful." He replies,

> Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
> To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;
> This sensible warm motion to become
> A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
> To bathe in fiery floods.... (3.1.115–21)

At the end of this account, Claudio pleads to his "sweet sister" to let him live and assures her that such mercy would not be reckoned sin. Isabella is so incensed by this that she will "pray a thousand prayers" for his death (3.1.145). What is strikingly absent is Isabella's ability to envision hell or heaven in anything but the most general terms. Furthermore, her piety is less invested in the life of the world to come than in the prospect of a "hateful" and "shamed life" in this one. *Measure for Measure's* problematic ethos is usually attributed to the Duke's manipulation of all the characters, but Isabella may have some culpability. Not only does she assent to the bed trick, but perhaps the Duke's claim of her hand in marriage is more of a meet end for her concern about her worldly fame than some readings of the play allow.

The last two images of the afterlife—in *King Lear* as a mere passing of the spirit out of this world and in *Hamlet* as place of purification between this life and heaven—receive Greenblatt's astute consideration in *Hamlet in Purgatory*. The passing of the spirit appears at the end of *King Lear* when, after realizing that Cordelia is dead, Lear loses consciousness. When Edgar tries to revive him, Kent says,

> Vex not his ghost. O, let him pass. He hates him
> That would upon the rack of this tough world
> Stretch him out longer. (5.3.287–89)

According to Greenblatt, the words "Vex not his Ghost" both "pick up the strange sense that Lear's existence is purgatorial and underscore the bleak humanism that locates his terrible suffering in

this tough world" (Greenblatt 2001, p. 187). I would add that this ending highlights Lear's profound and tragic suffering. As indicated at this study's beginning, Greenblatt says that Purgatory is one of the many alternative views of the afterlife in *Hamlet*, a play whose "pervasive pattern" is "a deliberate forcing together of radically incompatible ideas":

> What is at stake is more than a multiplicity of answers. The opposing positions challenge each other, clashing and sending shock waves throughout the play (Greenblatt 2001, p. 240).

In a play so theologically engaged, its final glimpse of the afterlife I find to be remarkably irresolute. It epitomizes the play's pattern of forcing together incompatibilities. At Hamlet's death, Horatio's words evoking Heaven—"And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest" (5.2.302)—echo the final prayers of a requiem Mass. This, however, follows Hamlet's last words, which seem to deny an afterlife: "The rest is silence" (5.2.301).

As I observed at the beginning of this study, Greenblatt suggests that *Hamlet* reflects the complex and often contradictory belief system in post-Reformation England—the "whole, weird, tangled cultural inheritance." The multiplicity of conceptions of the afterlife I have found in Shakespeare's plays would seem to substantiate his understanding—except that, as I have argued, in representing afterlives Shakespeare's religions serve their plays' particular ends. I am untroubled by the variety in the forms the afterlife takes. Yes, some uses point to a Catholic world, some to one that is Protestant, one to Judaism, some to a classical pagan world, and some to religious skepticism. What seems to me more significant than the multiplicity of representations is how consistent Shakespeare's plays are in using the undiscovered country as an aesthetic and interpretative marker.

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Paganism and Reform in Shakespeare's Plays

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Abstract: Shakespeare's plays mix references to pagan and Christian symbols and ideas in ways which are only superficially contradictory. While the sometimes uneasy juxtaposition of classical and Christian religious thought is characteristic of Renaissance literature, there is, in Shakespeare's use of paganism, a method to the madness. Shakespeare's comedies and romances associate the worship of Diana with the Catholic ideal of religious celibacy, and ultimately repudiate the Diana figure or transform her into a "Christian" spokeswoman who encourages and facilitates marriage and child-bearing. In a late romance, *The Winter's Tale*, the turn from Diana to self-sacrificial marriage is also made symbolic of a key character's turn from Catholic-like works of ritual penitence to inward transformation by faith. Thus, Shakespeare's plays represent pagan ritual in a way which supports the Calvinist religious tendencies of early-modern England.

Keywords: Diana; Calvinism; paganism; romances; *The Winter's Tale*; Catholic; marriage

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In 1606, the English Parliament passed an Act "to Restraine Abuses of Players," instituting a 10-pound fine for any "prophan[e]" utterance of "the holy name of God or of Christ Iesus, or of the Holy Ghoste or of the Trinitie." Although Hugh Gazzard has argued persuasively that this law was only laxly enforced, still, as notable a theater historian as Andrew Gurr cites the 10-pound penalty as "one reason why the pagan gods begin to be called on with more frequency in the drama" after 1606 (Gazzard 2010, p. 493; Gurr 1994, p. 76). For Shakespeare's part, seven of the nine plays he wrote or co-wrote after the Act's passage[1] are set in pre-Christian worlds where vexed characters do not, like Hamlet, exclaim, "O God, God!" (1.2.132), but instead call on the "blessed breeding sun" (*Timon of Athens* 4.3.1) or the "Thunder-master" (*Pericles* 5.4.30) in moments of emotional stress.[2] For the players, praying to Nature or Jupiter was a cost-controlling measure.

Yet Shakespeare's marked post-1606 turn to what were at least superficially pagan worlds should not obscure the fact that he expressed Christian ideas through pagan situations throughout his entire career. Maurice Hunt has written eloquently of Shakespeare's consistent "syncretistic" mode, whereby "Judeo-Christian ideas and allusions" are made to "compete with the details of pagan religion" (Hunt 2011, p. 29). Hunt's discussion ranges over more than two decades' worth of Shakespeare's work, beginning with the 1593 *The Comedy of Errors*, which may have been his first play. In that comedy, and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Julius Caesar*, *King Lear*, and many other pre-1606 plays, Shakespeare accommodates references to pagan practices and beliefs to a dominant Christian perspective which is always powerfully present, if at times, only subtly alluded to.

In what follows, I will explore how Shakespeare's career-long pattern of allusions to pre-Christian deities and devotional practices put forth, for his English audience, a nationally self-congratulatory religious argument. In many of his plays, the displacement of paganism by Christianity—whether imminent or accomplished—is likened to the banishment of Catholic thought and practices by

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1 *Timon of Athens, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Cymbeline, Pericles, The Winter's Tale*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, co-written with John Fletcher.

2 All quotations of Shakespeare come from (Shakespeare 1974).

Protestantism. To say this another way, the paganism whose deficiency the plays expose, evokes some aspects of England's Old Religion, and the Christian ideas the plays champion are of a Reformed variety. Specifically, the comedies and romances lay stress on godly marriage, the celebration of which reached "rhapsodic rhetorical heights" in early modern England, to use Catherine Belsey's phrase (Belsey 1996, pp. 5–6). Shakespeare's plays associate devotion to the goddess Diana with monastic celibacy, a Catholic ideal, and repudiate or reinterpret this devotion in order to honor fruitful matrimony. In two romances, Shakespeare also connects pre-Christian religious practices to what early-modern Protestants regarded as superstitious Catholic modes of worship, by which salvation is assisted by works. In *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*, it is not human rituals but God's grace, working through Providential time, that effects resolutions and miracles. Human participation in God's comedy requires characters to turn from "pagan" works to Christian faith.

1. From Diana to Abbess to Wife

In his *Institutes*, John Calvin justifies the choice of marriage over single life in terms of spiritual warfare. Our fight against wayward sexual desires should lead us to "set that remedy against them, which the Lord hath given us for our defense. Therefore, they do rashly which renounce matrimony: as though they had made a league with God concerning their perpetual strength" (Calvin 1599, *Institution* STC 4423, K3r). A markedly Calvinist feature of Shakespeare's comedies is their powerful and obvious argument for marriage over virginal chastity, in rejection of the Catholic monastic ideal of the renunciation of the flesh. Young women's veneration of Diana, goddess of virgins, is in Shakespeare not a permanent but a liminal condition, preparatory for their entrance into matrimony and motherhood. This is true whether Diana worship is a real religious activity, as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Pericles*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, or a mere metaphor for the virginal state, as in *Much Ado about Nothing* and *All's Well that Ends Well*, as well as in casual comparisons made throughout the plays between eligible maids and Diana. ("O, be thou Dian . . . and Dian sportful!" is the burden of Petruchio's wooing dance [*The Taming of the Shrew* 2.1.200–1].) Finally, in the romances, the figure of Diana herself is transformed from patroness of virgins to Christian matron, even dispensing advice on how to be a good wife, in Biblical terms.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Theseus presents a grim picture of celibacy as suffered by the female. If Hermia refuses an arranged marriage, she must "endure the livery of a nun" in "shady cloister mew'd," living "a barren sister all [her] life," / Chaunting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon" (1.1.70–73). Two words in Theseus' warning, "barren" and "fruitless," evoke the sterility of the monastic life, implying, by their contrary, child-bearing as a chief blessing of marriage. As the Puritan Robert Crofts would write in the 1640s, marriage, the "blessed union," may become "an occasion of sweet and lovely children, who in after times may be a great felicity and joy" (Crofts 1638). In contrast to the bliss of fruitful marriage, the condition of Diana and her followers is dark and chill. This stark view of Diana is echoed in young Emilia's appeal to the goddess in the late play *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, which begins, "O sacred, shadowy, cold, and constant queen, / Abandoner of revels, mute, contemplative, / Sweet, solitary, white as chaste, and pure / As wind-fann'd snow, who to thy female knights / Allow'st no more blood than will make a blush . . . " (5.1.137–45). Diana is here a diminished goddess, whose mythic qualities as energetic huntress and, alongside her devotees, woodland merry-maker have died into marble stillness. Rather than Hesiod's "lover of woods and the wild chase over the mountains" (Hamilton 1969), she is a static image: an enshrined saint's statue, like those forbidden in England since the mid-sixteenth century by the Church's Articles of Religion ("The Romish doctrine concerning . . . Worshipping and Adoration . . . of images . . . and also Invocation of Saints, is a fond thing vainly invented").[3] Indeed, the prayer to the "cold" goddess

[3] Article 22, p. 274. Articles of Religion of the English Church. In *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*. 3rd ed. Ed. John Leith. Atlanta: John Knox, 1982.

suggests the unhealthy attitude of the supplicant, who prefers the bloodless isolation virginal Diana is here made to symbolize, to the intimacy of marriage. Emilia's language signals, if we hadn't guessed it already, that she, a living woman, is destined not to remain, unnaturally, a bloodless "female knight."

In this she is like *Much Ado about Nothing*'s Hero, another "virgin knight" only temporarily consecrated to Diana, "goddess of the night" (5.3.13, 12). Hero's plot's comic trajectory will also maneuver her into marriage since, as her friend Benedick says, "The world must be peopled" (*Much Ado about Nothing* 2.3.242). Her situation is reflected in a later Shakespeare character, one actually called Diana, the Florentine maid of *All's Well that Ends Well*. This Diana bears the virgin goddess's name only symbolically to hint that she has not slept with the lustful Bertram—that dubious honor went to Helena, his lawful wife, who scored by means of a bed-trick—and that at play's end she, Diana, is still a decent maid eligible for a husband. "If thou beest yet a fresh uncropped flower," the French king tells her, "Choose thou thy husband, and I'll pay thy dower" (5.3.327–28). Diana's likely future is at this moment made visible in the pregnant Helena, with whom she shares a stage. Like that of the earlier Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *All's Well*'s Helena's marriage will breed "blessed . . . issue" (*Dream* 5.1.404–05), and has already begun to do so. The marriage will be, in Crofts' words, "an occasion of sweet and lovely children" (if all goes well) (Crofts, A7v-A8r). For all that Helena was played by a bewigged boy with a pillow strapped to his stomach, her manifestly pregnant condition was a reminder to Shakespeare's Jacobean audience that the good Christian couple was to "bring forth fruit, and multiply" (Gen. 1:28).[4]

Yet fruitfulness, however Biblically approved, was not the only marital blessing recognized and celebrated in these comic endings. The English Church's "Homily of the State of Matrimony," published in 1623 among other official marriage sermons, places children as only the second benefit of marriage, a state "instituted by God, to the intent that man and woman should live lawfully in a perpetual friendship, to bring forth fruit."[5] "Art thou gone so, love, lord, ay, husband, *friend*!," Juliet complains at Romeo's departure, after their wedding night (*Romeo and Juliet* 3.5.43, my emphasis). The friendship ideal was paramount, and the greater part of the famous marriage homily is devoted to the means of achieving it rather than to matters of child-bearing and child-raising. Likewise, Robert Snawsel's widely read 1610 "A Looking Glass for Married Folks" produces an argument, made in dialogue form, regarding the ways wives might be friends with their husbands while remaining in obedience to them as the Apostle Paul instructs. "Paul . . . teacheth, that wives should be in subjection to their husbands," says one wife. "But the same Paul, I trow, teacheth, that husbands should love their wives," replies a second. "Well, let him first do his duty, and then I will do mine," says a third (Snawsel 1610, p. 184).

These popular writings' intense concern with the creation of marital harmony reflects the idea expressed in Thomas Middleton's *The Changeling* (1622), that marriage is a kind of Eden, "the place blest, / And is [man's] right home back, if he achieve it" (1.1.8–9). Catherine Belsey has written of the headboards carved with images of Adam and Eve in the garden which were popular among seventeenth-century English couples who could afford them (Belsey 1996, pp. 7–9). These carvings tended to include the snake, emblem of the "Sour-ey'd disdain, and discord" that might, without prayer and humility, come to "bestrew / The union of [a couple's] bed," to quote *The Tempest*'s Prospero (4.1.19–20). Yet the Eden headboard images, like the lines from Middleton, Snawsel, and the Homily, suggest the degree to which marriage, despite its challenges, was celebrated by the early modern English as "man's" (and woman's) "right home back, if he [or she] achieve it"—a relationship promising a likelier path to godliness than Catholic sexual self-denial.

In Shakespeare, resistance to marriage is not godly self-control, but social pathology. We see this clearly in *Measure for Measure*, a play set in a Catholic Vienna, wherein the young novice Isabella

[4] All Biblical quotations come from *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1599 Edition*.
[5] *A Homily of the State of Matrimony*. In *The Second Tome of Homilies*. London, 1623. In William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Frances E. Dolan (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996), p. 172.

knows nothing about Christ's plan for salvation (at least, she says nothing about it when she bids her condemned brother to prepare for death [3.1]). Isabella seeks the religious life not for devotional purposes but in quest of "strict restraint" on her passions (1.4.4). The famous Biblical justification of a life of sexual abstinence, found in First Corinthians, makes clear that restraint is a spiritual gift, not an effect to be achieved through personal efforts, nor something to be imposed by the Church. "For I would that all men were even as I myself am, but every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that," Paul writes to the Corinthians. "Therefore I say unto the unmarried, and even unto the widows, it is good for them to abide even as I do. But if they cannot abstain, let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn" (I Cor. 7:7–9). Isabella has no spiritual gift of restraint, and seeks its imposition by institutional authority and a physical cloistering which her play's arch-plotter, Duke Vincentio, eventually tries to deny her. Of course, audiences are understandably skeptical about the marriages arranged and proposed by Vincentio. These unions, including, possibly, his own with Isabella, are mismatches, patched together against the wills of one half of each couple. Daniel Gates may be right that in Vincentio, Shakespeare mocks Calvin's argument that since the gift of restraint is so rare, "marriage should be the solution for almost everyone" (Gates 2013, p. 529). Yet resistance to marriage is not virtuous in the cold, uncharitable Isabella, any more than it is in the sanctimonious bachelor Angelo, a man "whose blood / Is very snow broth" (1.4.57–58), but who nurses hot passions on which he illicitly acts. Huston Diehl quotes Calvin to describe Isabella and Angelo, aptly noting the "isolation of their counterfeit righteousness" (Diehl 1998, p. 409).[6] The conditions of both these characters present single life as a grim, self-serving, loveless alternative even to an imperfect marriage. Even in this unhappy comedy, Shakespeare leads us to the Calvinist association of celibacy with spiritual error, and matrimony with the opportunity for spiritual growth.

In a brighter comedy, *Much Ado about Nothing*, male marriage-resister Benedick, though he lacks Angelo's treachery, is, like him, not impelled by virtue or godliness. Instead, he nurses a self-protective fear of cuckoldry that signals his immaturity, and is in fact, as R. Chris Hassel observes, a mark of his self-love (Hassel 1980, p. 91). His final declaration, on the eve of his marriage, that "There is no staff more reverent than one tipped with horn" (5.4.123–24), registers his brave advance into a realm of emotional risk and self-sacrifice. ("[S]o is the forehead of a married man more honorable than the bare brow of a bachelor," as Touchstone says in *As You Like It* [3.3.60–1].). In Shakespeare, the dangers of intimacy are to be risked. Vulnerability to a spouse is a step on the path to our necessary vulnerability to God. It's no wonder that C. S. Lewis thought of Benedick when, in his famous sermon, "The Weight of Glory," he associated the sinner's isolation with a failure to join with and be recognized by God. In such a condition, "Nobody marks us" (Lewis 1980, p. 40). ("Nobody marks you," Beatrice says of bachelor Benedick [1.1.117]—though, clearly, *she* does.) Lewis finds love's willingness to risk being wounded by a friend or lover a spiritual necessity, taking issue with St. Augustine's neo-Stoic argument that one should not give one's heart to a fallible human. "To love at all is to be vulnerable," Lewis elsewhere writes (Lewis 2012, p. 121). Benedick comes to agree, and, by play's end, not only risks the cuckold's horn, but encourages others to join the dance ("Prince, thou art sad, get thee a wife, get thee a wife" [5.4.122]).[7] This is the general early-modern view. Spiritual trials are to be met in conjugal relationships, triumphed over through humility and prayer—"Serve God, love me," Benedick tells Beatrice (5.2.93)—and crowned with friendship, in a community of married couples.[8] Paradoxically, such success is most clearly envisioned in plays which contain "pagan" scenes that directly or indirectly invoke the figure of Diana. These scenes—which

[6] Calvin's passage, quoted more fully by (Diehl 1998, p. 404) reads, "But so soon as [man] is compelled to try his life by the balance of the law, then leaving the presumption of that counterfeit righteousness, he seeth himself to be an infinite space distant from holiness."

[7] (Tiffany 1995) discusses at length Shakespeare's male comic characters' morally healthful choices to risk cuckoldry.

[8] (Cox 2007) invokes the Protestant ideal of marriage as a forum for Christian virtue in his eloquent account of Hermione's embrace of her husband at the close of *The Winter's Tale*. He writes, Hermione's "decision to move toward Leontes and embrace him enacts her forgiveness, with its root in charity" (p. 215).

include the procession to the shrine of Hero, "virgin knight," that succeeds Benedick's instruction to Beatrice in *Much Ado*—associate Diana with Catholic saints and Catholic celibacy, and ultimately rechannel her worship into marital devotion.

Shakespeare's plays' most spectacular rejections of celibate Diana involve Diana's own transformation into a virtuous wife, like the Biblical helpmeet whose price is above rubies (Prov. 31:10). In *The Comedy of Errors*, Shakespeare has changed the pagan city described in Paul's Ephesians to a Christian town, and the famous shrine of Diana at Ephesus (Baugh 1999, pp. 50–51) to a convent ruled by an abbess who, by play's end, throws off her veil to embrace a long-lost husband. Paul's challenge to the idolatrous cult of Diana is described in the Acts of the Apostles as a confrontation between Paul and the local silversmiths who made "great gains" by fashioning and selling "silver temples to Diana" (Acts 19:24). Thus, Shakespeare has comically translated Paul's religious attack on those supporting the commercially profitable rites of Diana, to a Protestant attack on the celibate religious life, using Paul's comments on marriage in Ephesians as his Biblical justification.

Ephesus is, of course, no accidental choice of setting for a play which deals substantially with the trials of marriage, and with the husband's and wife's mutual obligations. Elizabethans were familiar with Paul's instructions to the married couples of that town in Ephesians five:

> Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord.
> For the husband is the wive's head, even as Christ is the head of the
> Church, and the same is the Saviour of his body.
> Therefore as the church is in subjection to Christ, even so let the
> wives be to their husbands in every thing.
> Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church . . .
> So ought men to love their wives, as their own bodies; he that
> loveth his wife, loveth himself . . .
> For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall
> cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh.
>
> Ephesians 5:22–31

Antipholus of Ephesus's estranged wife Adriana's aggrieved complaint against her husband[9] refers to the obligations and the relation described in Paul's letter.

> How comes it now, my husband, O, how comes it,
> That thou are then estranged from thyself?
> Thyself I call it, being strange to me,
> That, undividable incorporate,
> Am better than thy dear self's better part.
> Ah, do not tear thyself away from me;
> For know, my love, as easy mayst thou fall
> A drop of water in the breaking gulf,
> And take unmingled thence that drop again,
> Without addition or diminishing,
> As take from me thyself and not me too.
>
> 2.2.119–129

[9] More accurately, her husband's twin brother, who she thinks is her husband in this scene.

Yet in the play's fifth act, the town abbess turns Paul's words against Adriana, admonishing her for her failure to submit to her husband in allowing her unruly, jealous outbursts to disturb his peace. The Abbess chides, "The venom clamors of a jealous woman / Poisons more deadly than a mad dog's tooth. / It seems his sleeps were hindered by thy railing" (5.1.69–71). Adriana herself, it seems, has driven her husband away. Adriana—who humbly agrees with the Abbess' criticism ("She did betray me to my own reproof" [5.1.90])—has failed to live up to the ideal of the Christian helpmeet described in the *Homily of the State of Matrimony*, which counsels women to "seek [their husbands'] contentation," and warns that men "are compelled ... to abhor and flee from their own houses" when wives are "forward."[10] Here the Abbess plays an authoritative Pauline role in chastening and counseling these modern-day Ephesians in marital wisdom and virtue, refusing to release Antipholus (who is hiding in the abbey, and is the wrong twin anyway) to his wife until her lessons have sunk in.

Yet, the Abbess herself is made subject, or is self-subjected, to the Calvinist preference for marriage over Paul's celibacy. Later in the scene, revealing herself as the long-lost wife of the long-lost Egeon, she re-embraces her identity as mother (of the two Antipholi) and wife. She speaks "to gain a husband," identifying herself as the lost "wife, once call'd Aemilia," who "bore [Egeon] ... two fair sons" (5.1.343–4). Her joyful disclosure, by which she abandons the religious life, makes possible the comic revelations of mistaken identity that restore harmony to Adriana's and Antipholus E.'s marriage, and facilitates another marriage, that of his twin and Adriana's sister. Paul's ancient displacement of Diana's Ephesian shrine by the (re)united Christian family is completed in Aemilia's rejection of religious vows for a renewed conjugal relation.

Shakespeare's romances furnish us with two more versions of Diana transformed to a wife or, at least, a spokeswoman for marriage.[11] In *Pericles*, set in a pre-Christian Mediterranean world, the goddess Diana appears to the storm-tossed Pericles in a dream (which is visible to the audience) and directs him to visit her shrine at Ephesus. That location will be the setting of his revelation, to the "maiden priests," of how he "at sea did lose [his] wife." (5.2.239–44). In fact, the shrine visit results in the restoration to Pericles of Thaisa, his lost wife, who has been serving as Diana's priestess since she washed up on shore two decades before. "Noble sir, if you have told Diana's altar true, this is your wife," says Cerimon, her protector (5.3.16–18). Like the Abbess in *The Comedy of Errors*, Diana, traditional protector of virginity, is thus made an agent and Pauline priestess of marriage. As in the earlier comedy, a wife's celibate devotions give way to reverent marriage, this time at a divine behest. As for the pagan sacrifice Diana requested, it never happens—or, rather, becomes, retrospectively, simply a metaphorical reference to Pericles' confessional testimony in Diana's temple. "Hail, Dian!" he begins, and launches into his tale, only to be interrupted by priestess Thaisa's naming of him as her husband (after she faints and revives, as is her custom [5.3.21ff]). The temple of the sainted virgin goddess becomes, in quick succession, the place of marital reunion and then the site of marriage banns. To "Pure Dian" and his wife, Pericles announces, "This prince, the fair-betrothed of your daughter, / shall marry her." He concludes by barbering himself (in the temple!) "[t]o grace thy marriage-day" (5.3.70–6). The scene uses a pagan religious setting to turn from the celibate ideal to a celebration of Christian marriage and the expanded family, achieved by the workings of "grace."

The Winter's Tale's pagan shrine is that of Apollo, not Diana. Yet its scenes of Apollo's shrine and his oracle's declaration belong to the old, bad time of the first three acts. Although act five sees the fulfillment of Apollo's prophecy that King Leontes will die heirless if "that which is lost"—his daughter Perdita—"be not found" (3.2.135–6), still, this final act ushers in a new religious dispensation, and delivers us into the hands of a fresh authoritative voice: one that speaks and acts in the service of marriage. That is the voice of Paulina, named, not accidentally, for the apostle Paul. Paulina is

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[10] *A Homily of the State of Matrimony*, p. 175.

[11] (Bicks 2000, pp. 211–12) has argued that even the original Diana was worshipped, paradoxically, both as a protector of virgins and a mother goddess, both at Ephesus and elsewhere in the ancient world. She was likewise known to some as "goddess of hunting and childbirth" (Wilson 2018, p. 538).

indeed Pauline in her bracing admonitions to Leontes to remain virtuous, repentant, and chaste after the death of Hermione.[12] Additionally, in the play's last scene we see reiterated through her the Apostle Paul's resistance to the cult of Diana. In an episode reminiscent of the shrine scene in *Pericles* (written shortly before *The Winter's Tale*), Paulina officiates at a quasi-religious ceremony in which what is either Hermione's statue or Hermione herself is brought down from her pedestal, to be rejoined with Leontes, her wonder-struck husband, after sixteen years of separation. The cold, still statue associated, like the Diana of *Two Noble Kinsmen*, with abstinence and contemplation becomes a living woman, enfolding her husband in an embrace. "She's warm," Leontes says, amazed (5.3.109). The shrine is empty, the family circle full. Like Aemilia, and like the Diana of *Pericles*, Paulina has replaced austere celibacy with marriage, proving the agent not only of Leontes' and Hermione's restored union, but of Florizel's now-permitted marriage to Perdita, and of her own remarriage to the servant Camillo. In their joy, Polixenes and Leontes approve all these matches.

2. From Works to Faith

In *The Winter's Tale*, harmonious marriage is the product of providential time rather than human effort. Hermione frequently speaks of God's grace (e.g., "Grace to boot!" [1.2.80]; "You gods . . . pour your graces / Upon my daughter's head!" [5.3.121–2]). She is also the spokesman for gracious, God-fearing patience. "I must be patient, till the heavens look / With an aspect more favorable," she says, when arrested on false charges by her jealous husband (2.1.106–7). Calvin writes that God gives grace to our fallen souls through "the secret energy of the Spirit" (Calvin 1960, vol. 1, p. 537), and he affirms that the Creator, working through time, fulfills a mysterious plan and "sustains, nourishes, and cares for, everything he has made" (Calvin 1960, vol. 1, pp. 197–98). Calvin's description of God's grace in his *Institutes* reads like the plots of Shakespeare's "shipwreck" comedies and romances. "Suppose a man falls among thieves, or wild beasts; [or] is shipwrecked at sea by a sudden gale," he writes. "Suppose another man . . . [,] having been tossed by the waves, reaches harbor; [and] miraculously escapes death by a finger's breadth . . . anyone who has been taught . . . that all the hairs of his head are numbered [Matt. 10:30] . . . will consider that all events are governed by God's secret plan" (Calvin 1960, vol. 1, pp. 198–99). This description also applies well to *The Winter's Tale*, where the vast, slow work of God's grace is the powerful backdrop to Leontes' puny and finally vain efforts to effect quick cures for the injuries he's done himself and others.

It may sharpen our perception of Leontes' religious error if we note that in several earlier plays, Shakespeare likens the haste and impatience seen in characters' desires for instant cures and miracles to the Old Religious penchant for amulets, holy water, and efficacious prayer-formulae. Shakespeare had already (anachronistically) mocked such trinkets and rituals in two "pagan" plays of the 1590s, *Titus Andronicus* and *Julius Caesar*. In the first, Aaron the Moor speaks scornfully to Titus's son Lucius of the Romans' "popish tricks and ceremonies," and notes that "An idiot holds his bauble for a god" (*Titus Andronicus* 5.1.76–9). In Aaron's insult, the Ancient Roman worship of the Olympian gods is explicitly associated with contemporary "Romish" practices.[13] In *Julius Caesar*, that connection is made similarly plain. There the conspirator Decius strategically misinterprets Caesar's nightmare of his own assassination in terms which suggest popular reverence for relics and vials of sacred blood, staple items of show and profit in the Catholic shrines of the continent and pre-Reformation England—as well, of course, as in late-sixteenth-century Rome.[14] "Your statue spouting blood in many pipes, / In which so many smiling Romans bath'd, / Signified that from you great Rome shall

[12] See (Tiffany 2000), where this observation first appears. See also the argument of (Lewalski 1978, pp. 131–44) regarding the Protestant vision of *The Winter's Tale*.

[13] Robert Miola thinks the fact that Aaron, a wicked fellow, is the one uttering this sneering insult invalidates the insult. He sees Aaron representing a "Tudor magistrate" who misunderstands the Christian religion (Miola 2001, p. 34). However, I see little resemblance between Aaron and a Tudor magistrate. Wicked he may be, yet Aaron functions as the play's satirist, skewering the hypocrisies of various Roman and Gothic characters.

[14] For a discussion of late-medieval English church reliquaries, see chapter 1 of (Tiffany 2006).

suck, / Reviving blood, and that great men shall press / For tinctures, stains, relics, and cognizance" (2.2.85–90). Caesar-worship is here recognizably associated with the "popish" idolatrous practices of the Old Faith. Of course, Caesar's death is caught up in a Providential scheme that none of its characters understands, one that makes saints' relics look superstitious and trivial, and turns readers and audiences instead toward the complete transformation of nature effected by Christ's awe-inspiring birth, death, and resurrection. *Julius Caesar* and, especially, its sequel, *Antony and Cleopatra*, are permeated with references to the coming "time of universal peace" (*Antony and Cleopatra* 4.6.4), the *pax romana* ushered in by the final victory of Caesar's heir, Octavius, in the wars pursuant to Caesar's death. This *pax romana* is the precursor to Christ's coming. Octavius will become Augustus, under whose reign the Christ will be born, an event that will lead, in the fullness of Providential time, to the "new heaven and new earth" (Rev. 21:1) which Antony falsely identifies with his erotic (and bigamous) love for Cleopatra (1.1.17).[15]

Thus, Shakespeare's earlier pagan plays prepare us for *The Winter's Tale*'s dismissal of instant, humanly wrought solutions to the evil caused by flawed human natures. Tinctures, tricks, and relics, thought by some to impart healing, are the products of magical thinking and haste. They are superficial. Leontes longs for such easy solutions at the end of act three of his play, when, confronted with the death of his son and the Delphic oracle's pronouncement of his wife's innocence and his own tyranny, he vows to put things to rights immediately by his own actions. As Stephen Orgel writes, for Leontes, "heaven is to be squared with an apology, and all past errors are assumed to be easily rectifiable" (Orgel 2005, p. 263). "Beseech you tenderly apply to her / Some remedies for life," Leontes directs his servants, believing his dying wife has merely fainted. He adds, "I'll reconcile me to Polixenes, / New woo my queen," and "recall the good Camillo," his maligned servant, as though these actions could speedily mend the breaches he's made in both the marriage friendship and the other friendships (3.2.152–6). He cannot, of course, perform these miracles – Hermione either dies or removes herself, and Polixenes and Camillo remain out of reach for sixteen years across an ocean. Yet equally unhelpful is Leontes' subsequent commitment to perpetual acts of devotion at a shrine he'll erect for Hermione and his son, Mamillius (also dead, of grief at his father's actions). "Once a day I'll visit / The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there / Shall be my recreation" (3.2.238–41). Though he performs his pledge, these acts of ritual penitence do not mitigate his grief and guilt. Indeed, his actions display what Sarah Beckwith calls the "abandoned sacrament of penance" (Beckwith 2011, p. 1). Like the prayers for Richard II's soul instituted by Henry V, son of Richard's slayer, and sung by "sad and solemn priests" in "chauntries," Leontes' prayers are "nothing worth" (*Henry V* 4.1.301). Sixteen years of them do not serve to restore his kingdom, which lacks an heir, and leave him smarting as sharply as ever at Paulina's reminder of the wife he "killed." "Kill'd? / She I kill'd? I did so; but thou strik'st me / Sorely, to say I did. It is as bitter / Upon thy tongue as in my thought" (5.1.15–19).

This interchange between Paulina and Leontes shows the insufficiency of pious works to restore him to God (whom Leontes has called Apollo), or his kingdom to political health. Early-modern Protestants associated works with the outward sacrifices of the Old Covenant which "could not make holy, concerning the conscience, him that did the service," according to Hebrews, a letter then attributed to Paul. Time dispenses with this Old Covenant, which, "disannulled and waxed old, is ready to vanish away." In its place comes a new promise, wrought from Christ's sacrifice and the Holy Spirit, which acts upon the penitent to achieve an inward purification (Heb. 9:9, 8:10–13). The view that only infusing spirit, not performed works, could rehabilitate sinners was strongly emphasized by Calvin, who writes, "All those things in [man] which are said to have pleased God he received from God's grace—so far is he from preparing himself to receive grace . . . through his own effort" (Calvin 1960, vol. 1, p. 806). What Adrian Streete calls the "profoundly anti-volitional" character

[15] Two excellent discussions of references to Christian Providence in these Roman plays are found in (Hunt 2011), mentioned above, and in (Danby 1994).

of Protestant Christianity, and finds broadly expressed in early modern drama (Streete 2009, p. 15), was influenced by these words of Calvin, which expand upon Paul's statement in Ephesians: "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of your selves; it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). Thus, Paulina's affirmation of Leontes' inability to atone for his own sins echoes both Calvin and Paul.

It is indeed significant that despite Paulina's grief and anger at Leontes, his wife's tormentor, it is not she who imposes on him ritual penitent acts for destroying his family. Leontes devises these for himself. Leontes also uses a Catholic vocabulary to describe the dead Hermione, referring, when he speaks of her, to saints and incense. Were he to marry again, he says, "her sainted spirit" would appear and—in an odd replacement for "incite me"—"incense me" (5.1.57, 61). Leontes seeks peace from his pain, and imagines Hermione, his victim, as a saint with the power to give or withhold his cure depending on whether his actions are virtuous or treacherous. However, Paulina does not want Leontes healed by anything less than an intervening, Providential miracle. Rather than urging him to find reconciliation through rote acts of veneration at Hermione's chapel shrine, she strives to keep him ever mindful of his unassuaged guilt. In this, she expresses the same distrust of penitent works seen in Calvin, who writes that "men having made confession to a priest, think that they may wipe their mouth and say, I did it not. And not only they are made all the year long the bolder to sin: but all the rest of the year bearing themselves bold upon confession, they never sigh unto God, they never return to themselves" (Qtd. in [Diehl 1998, p. 408]). Companioned by Paulina, Leontes cannot "wipe [his] mouth and say, I did it not." She keeps his wife's death bitter in his thought and on both of their tongues (5.1.17–19). He runs no danger of not "return[ing] to [himself": of failing to revisit his own sin. Her reminders of "she you kill'd" (5.1.15) guard him against any presumption of what Calvin called "counterfeit righteousness," keeping him aware that, as Calvin writes of sinners, he is an "infinite space distant from holiness" (Qtd. in [Diehl 1998, p. 408]). Paulina is Pauline in her vigorous exhortations to virtuous behavior (preached almost exclusively to the longsuffering Leontes); and she is both Pauline and Calvinist in her implicit repudiation of penitent works—and, finally, in her explicit call for faith.

To prepare for the miracle made possible by faith, after the reunion of Leontes and Perdita and his reconciliation with Polixenes and Camillo, Paulina removes them all to a new "chapel," where stands the statue which will shortly become a wife. There she requires all participants in the imminent ceremony to "awake [their] faith" (5.3.94). Certainly, Leontes' penitence, deepened over time, enables him to receive the graceful gift here made available by Paulina, namely the resurrection of his marriage partner. But the miracle is accomplished through his humble acceptance of the resurrection—his faith that it will happen—as it could not have been through his pious acts. This surrender to faith is as important for Leontes as it is difficult. His sin in the play's first three acts has stemmed directly from his lack of faith, first in his wife's loyalty ("She's an adult'ress" [2.1.88]); second, in the virtue of his lifelong friend ("I have said with whom" [2.1.88]); third, in the honesty and judgment of his counselors ("You're liars all" [2.3.146]); and fourth in the Delphic oracle, which—characteristically for a Renaissance romance set in the classical world—is a mask of Providence.[16] Leontes has claimed, "There is no truth at all in the oracle" (3.2.140). Now, his profession of faith in the miracle Paulina offers, completes the healing begun by his statement, after his son's death, "I have too much believ'd mine own suspicion" (3.2.151). Yet nowhere does Leontes, or anyone else in the play's last scene, suggest that Paulina is the author of the miracle. She is "assisted," though not by "wicked powers" (5.3.90–91). She presides, but her language attributes the life-restoring power to a being outside herself. She tells Hermione, "Bequeath to death your numbness; for from him / Dear life redeems you" [5.3.103–04]). Paulina's "dear life," like Hermione's "grace," suggests the salvific power of God's unearned love and forgiveness.

[16] In Clifford Davidson's words, Apollo's oracle is here "a pagan source of truth which may be interpreted as a source of divine revelation" (Davidson 2006, p. 121). The oracle may be interpreted this way because the play proves its prophecies accurate in every detail.

The suggestion is, again, eminently Calvinist, and characteristic of official early modern English religious thought and discourse. We might consider, for example, *Certain Sermons*, a book of state-prescribed homilies read in churches throughout England after its 1547 publication, which lays a Calvinist stress on man's inability to act freely without the impetus of grace. "We cannot think a good thought of our selves, much less can we say well, or do well of our selves ... There is none good but God, and ... we can do nothing that is good without him" (Bond 1987, pp. 72–74). So in *The Winter's Tale.* Leontes' awakening of his faith leads to a secular redemption for himself and his kingdom, emblematic of the larger redemption available to sinners through grace. In the final scene of this play, Shakespeare affirms both the spiritual value of human marriage and the superiority of simple belief to ritual acts.

I have elsewhere written extensively of how Shakespeare's use of "Catholic" miracles like moving "saint" statues shows the confidence with which an early-modern English Protestant playwright could claim Catholic practices and iconography for imaginative play, relegating them to the fairytale world of the playhouse.[17] Yet, Shakespeare could also "play" with Catholicism in ways which made serious suggestions about the practical yet mysterious operations of marital and divine love. The scene of Hermione changing—of her being changed—from a stone statue to a woman embracing her husband joins a pattern of similar Shakespearean championings of marriage against the celibacy prized and practiced in Catholic tradition. Other cold, celibate, and finally healthfully rejected or enlivened statues include not only the sterile Diana of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, but the enshrined "dear saint" whom Juliet refuses to be when she returns Romeo's kiss (*Romeo and Juliet* 1.1.95-110). Tragically, they also include Othello's false image of Desdemona, the wife he kills for not being as pure as "Dian's visage" (*Othello* 3.3.387) and as motionless as "monumental alabaster" (5.2.5). In Leontes, it might be said, Othello gets a second chance at loving a wife, and that second chance is thematically associated with salvation. In *The Winter's Tale*, by means of its paradoxically pagan setting, Shakespeare deepens his celebration of Christian marriage by linking its trials and joys to the larger issue of the sinner's reconciliation to God through faith.

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[17] See (Tiffany 2006), chapter 4.

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religions

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“At War ’Twixt Will and Will Not”: On Shakespeare’s Idea of Religious Experience in *Measure for Measure*

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Abstract: “Religions in Shakespeare’s Writings,” the title of this special issue, can prompt consideration not only of singular exceptions to the normative religious landscape but also of the ideas that support the banner under which a plurality of examples together may be described as “religious.” In recent years, readers of Shakespeare have devoted attention to exploring Shakespeare’s engagement with specific theological and sectarian movements in early modern Europe. Such work has changed how we view the relation between theater and its religious landscapes, but it may be that in focusing on the topical we overlook Shakespeare’s place among such sociologists and philosophers of religion as Montaigne, Hobbes, James, Weber, and Berger. To this end, I argue that in *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare uses law to synthesize certain aspects of religious experience from divergent corners. And drawing on descriptions of religion from anthropology and phenomenology, I suggest that Shakespeare unites his characters through patterns of action within this deadly exigency that demonstrate a shared experience of religion as a desire for salvation beyond the law.

Keywords: Shakespeare; *Measure for Measure*; religion; law; guilt; phenomenology; anthropology; morality; Calvinism; Catholicism; agnosticism; atheism; Puritanism

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I look to *Measure for Measure* for an example of religious experience conceived across denominations and expressions. That this play explores problems created by the enforcement of a Christian ethic is suggested in its title, and many have considered how individual theological perspectives such as Calvinism and Catholicism may help to explain its discomfiting combination of the abuse of legal authority, sexual aggression, religious doubt, and a denouement that alleges to resolve them all in the stratagem of the Duke. Yet my interest is less in the individual *kinds* of religion that are represented in the process than in how the play conveys religion as a generic *kind* of human experience. In this way, “*Religions* in Shakespeare’s Writings,” the title of this special issue, can prompt consideration not only of singular exceptions to the normative religious landscape but also of the ideas that support the banner under which a plurality of examples together may be described as religious. In recent years, readers of Shakespeare have devoted attention predominantly to the former endeavor, exploring Shakespeare’s engagement with specific theological and sectarian movements in early modern Europe. Such work has changed how we view the relation between theater and its religious landscapes, but it may be that in focusing on the topical we overlook Shakespeare’s place among such sociologists and philosophers of religion as Montaigne, Hobbes, James, Weber, Berger, and others. In addition to his manifest interest in examples of English encounters with other world religions, heresy, toleration, and agnosticism, does Shakespeare offer any accounts of religion (just shy of a capital “R”) as a world-making or socializing institution?

Still, I aim not to universalize religion as an ahistorical mode of behavior that transcends social circumstance, and so I turn to the play’s representation of law, for which scholars have provided many detailed synchronic and topical descriptions, as an expression of institutional religion and as a sounding board for characters’ unique struggles with guilt and salvation. I will argue that in *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare uses law to synthesize certain aspects of religious experience from divergent corners. As a confessional crucible of sorts, law establishes a dialectic of morality and guilt in which characters’

attempts to pursue justice ironically lead to condemnation and moral loss. Religion is involved both as a cause of this loss and as a recourse for it; religion is a psychological and interpersonal force that, like law, appears as both the problem and the solution. This essay begins by carving out space for Shakespeare's idea of religion among literature on Shakespeare's drama in religious contexts. It then addresses the pluralistic implications of its parable-like premise of the disappearing ruler. Next, I offer a reading of law as representing the experience of religion in *Measure for Measure*. Finally, drawing on descriptions of religion from anthropology and phenomenology, I conclude that Shakespeare unites his characters through patterns of action within the deadly exigency of guilt that demonstrate a shared experience of religion as a desire for salvation beyond the law.

1. Shakespeare, World Religion, and the Irreligious

The general question that motivates my reading of *Measure for Measure* asks whether Shakespeare's plays exhibit anything like an anthropology or phenomenology of religious experience. The potential anachronism of this effort is clearly visible. It is one thing to ask from the perspective of modern sociological developments if any overarching notions of religion as a psychological, legitimating, or noumenal force are to be found in the commercial plays of early modern England; yet it is another thing to consider whether writers like Shakespeare were aware of them. An interesting analog to this problem is the question of whether early modern writers entertained a worldview of atheism. For instance, did they transform Pyrrhonian skepticism or Lucretian materialism into a perspective on the universe as godless? On this topic, Eric Mallin recalls a lecture and accompanying dinner conversation between Stephen Greenblatt and his hosts in which the question of an atheist Shakespeare was posed. After "some polite hesitation," Greenblatt, himself convinced of widespread Lucretianism in the Renaissance, replies that atheism as we know it is beyond the scope of the issue: "But doesn't every gesture of unbelief articulate itself within the frame of a sectarian structure that determined it" (Mallin 2007, p. 2)?[1] Mallin's parenthetical response in his book, *Godless Shakespeare*, is equally thought-provoking: "(He really did say this, or something like it.)" The shock recorded in this statement is not informed by the opinion that the sectarian structures to which Greenblatt refers are irrelevant; rather, it expresses a desire to find a fuller and less contained explanation for the many loose ends in Shakespeare's plays that do not fit neatly into these structures—loose ends that, when interwoven, may appear to resemble something like an inchoate form of modern conceptions of godlessness.

The question of Shakespeare's potential atheism is perhaps more polarizing than the proposition that he had a higher-elevation view of the comparative social and epistemological structures of religion, but in some ways the latter are more difficult to describe. For while a term like "religion" in the early modern period referred primarily to devotion in a particular tradition or to whichever sect or theology someone was defending against the claims of alternative sects, terms like "irreligion" and "atheism" often carried negative or subtractive connotations—for instance, as non-white, heretical, or Muslim.[2] And with so many examples of professed piety available to Shakespeare and with the myriad reciprocal accusations of heterodoxy that flood polemical discourses of interreligious clash, the seeds of what we now think of as secular atheism may have emerged within such debates in latent forms of deism or spiritualism, for instance.[3] In other words, an ideology of doubt leading to later systems of atheism may have been part of the swath of Christian explanations of the world from which we might extract an idea of religion—but such doubt nonetheless exists within religious experience. Wayne Proudfoot writes about the distance between modern explanations of religion and historical experience: "Members of the cultures whose myths and practices were now being interpreted as expressions of the religious dimension of human experience did not understand what was happening to them or what they were

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1 See (Greenblatt 2011).

2 Examples of the atheism as a range of religious and irreligious viewpoints can be found in (Hunter 1985) and (Robichaud 2013).

3 Such is the broad argument of (Gregory 2012).

doing in these terms. Both *religious* and *experience* are relatively recent concepts, whose provenance is in the modern West" (Proudfoot 1985, p. xii). Moreover, because self-understandings of religious experience present moving targets even within a given historical setting, attempting to settle on any one moment when religion as such became a self-conscious phenomenon unlimited by but represented in various specific religious examples is an unrealistic and largely fruitless endeavor. One often cited work on the origin of religion in Europe as a moving target is Tomoko Masuzawa's (2005) *The Invention of World Religions*, which discovers an idea of religion in seventeenth-century writings on the diversity of religions. In these historical texts religion appears in a common orthodoxy that rests at the center of various rhizomes of unorthodoxy and secularism.

Pluralism is one lens with which to examine historical conceptions of religious experience, and recent work has focused on the history of toleration as an attitude toward religion in the early modern period. "Toleration entails at a minimum the willingness to recognize and accept a degree of coexistence and pluralism," writes Perez Zagorin (2003, p. 18). According to Zagorin, there are two predominant explanations for why toleration emerged in Europe: actual increase in unbelief on the one hand, and institutional activity motivated by political expediency and the retention of power on the other. He contends that neither explanation accounts for the rise of literature on toleration within Christian belief itself, that is, not as a compromise or solution to a problem but as a position advocated because toleration itself is a religious value. Zagorin is not alone in championing in this regard the writings of Sebastian Castellio—the Reformed theologian who famously opposed Calvin over the execution of the humanist, Michael Servetus, in 1553. Benjamin Kaplan criticizes such intellectual histories of early modern tolerance that focus on the writings of individuals like Castellio. Instead, he argues that "tolerance had a very concrete, mundane dimension. It was not just a concept or policy but a form of behavior, peaceful coexistence with others who adhered to a different religion" (Kaplan 2007, p. 8). Among Kaplan's several examples of toleration are instances of opposing Christian denominations sharing church spaces for worship. Such scenarios lend themselves to phenomenological analyses of religion as surfacing in the sometimes unintended overlaps between different and even competing confessions.

Shakespeare scholars largely fall within the boundaries of these two views on early modern toleration—intellectual history and practical coexistence. Maurice Hunt argues that, whereas many have contended that Shakespeare exposes the social deterioration that results from intolerance because he himself lacked a passionate investment in any single confession, Shakespeare in fact held several strong beliefs within the spectrum of Protestantisms. Yet he articulates, or mediates, these beliefs by pointing to a centrist Reformational theology represented by theologians like Richard Hooker—and expressed, for example, in *Twelfth Night*'s Malvolio, a foil that points to Viola as an illustration of a more patient approach to religious reform (Hunt 2004, pp. 73–96). B. J. Sokol presents a more historicist perspective by situating Shakespeare among early modern writings that address a growing awareness about the varieties of religious practice, including Jean Bodin's *Colloquium of the Seven about Secrets of the Sublime* (1588–93), Edwin Sandys's *A Relation of the State of Religion* (1605), and Leonard Busher's *Religions Peace or A reconciliation, between princes & People, and Nations* (1614). Sokol concludes, for example, that Busher's views "on religious diversity" best characterize Shakespeare's: "For these exhibit bitter impatience with exclusive religious contentions or extremist demands, and thus imply that non-persecutory tolerance should trump all narrow sectarian aims" (Sokol 2009, p. 112).

Such writing on Shakespeare's tolerance is roughly in line with recent years' work on Shakespeare and religion in general. Critical opinion has moved predominantly away from the Catholic vs. Protestant problem and has also eschewed efforts to locate Shakespeare's own confessionalism, preferring instead a less denominationally defined sense of Shakespeare's interest in religion as a dramatic and social motive. In this vein, Shakespeare's topical engagement of religion is sometimes viewed as an implicit critique of religiously inspired cruelty and persecution, a criticism mounted

through Shakespeare's celebration of the artistic and theatrical power of religion.[4] "How do Shakespeare's plays give dramatic, imaginative, and provocative expression to diverse early modern religious perspectives and faiths—some of them contradictory, paradoxical, and dissonant—without resolving them?," ask David Loewenstein and Michael Witmore in their introduction to *Shakespeare and Early Modern Religion* (Loewenstein and Witmore 2015, p. 2). Scholars today generally find less promise in cohesive accounts of Shakespeare's representation of religion across works and characters and prefer instead to imagine his plays as "more granular" experiments with religion in context, "more likely to recognize eddies and cross-currents in early modern religious debates that cannot be captured in contrasts between 'Protestant' or 'Catholic' perspectives" (Loewenstein and Witmore 2015, p. 11). Still, as Arthur Marotti and Ken Jackson suggest, there may be some trace of religious experience itself that survives Shakespeare's mixings and subtractions: "The lines between secular and sacred, transcendent and immanent blur so continuously that we begin to doubt our own vocabulary and historical paradigms in our attempts to describe the strange otherness of Shakespeare's religion, the ways which he can, again, deliberately and systematically strip away the layers of religion until nothing is left—nothing except the desire for something more or better that cannot be fully disentangled from religion" (Jackson and Marotti 2011, p. 9).

2. The Parable of the Unjust Steward

Turning now to *Measure for Measure*, I follow up on this suggestion of a desire for something "more or better" that is the product of Shakespeare's representations of religion's failings and yet also remains a desire of and within religious experience itself. Is religion(s) in Shakespeare's writings really as strangely other as has been represented? As John Cox (2018) has observed in his review essay for this special issue, *Measure for Measure* features perhaps more than any other play in recent scholarship on Shakespeare and religion. This is partly because the play is rife with competing expressions of religion, especially those of Christian traditions and sects. For many, Angelo resembles a fervent, reforming Puritan. And Isabella stands in opposition to him as a novice in the Franciscan Order of St. Clare. Huston Diehl argues that Calvinism appears in the person of the Duke and that it emerges as an intermediary between the extremes of Catholicism and Puritanism, just as it did for James I and for the antitheatricalism debates in the Elizabethan period (Diehl 1998). Debora Shuger likewise notes that Shakespeare's respective representations of Puritanism in Angelo and of Calvinism in the Duke are far from straightforward as both characters exploit the tenets of their theologies to control others. They "map, as it were, the English political landscape in the years immediately before the antithetic pairings of Whig history—crown versus Parliament, absolute monarchy versus the ancient constitution, and so forth—come into play" (Shuger 2001, p. 68).[5] Adding more theological perspectives to the collection, Adrian Streete and Jonathan Pollock detect the presence of Lucretian and Epicurean philosophies in the play, respectively. Streete argues, for instance, that "*Measure for Measure* dramatizes a Calvinistic world becoming Lucretian" (Streete 2015, p. 133).[6] William Hamlin, moreover, observes that the crises of conscience that Angelo, Isabella, and Claudio undergo show affinity with Montaigne's views of the conscience as a "God-surrogate" and thus as a moral locus that opens to both humanistic and theological explanations (Hamlin 2014). Viewed together, such readings suggest Shakespeare's interest in comparative religious experiences as these characters' theologically and morally motivated actions overlap and contradict at moments that point to a common desire to

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[4] See (McCoy 2013).

[5] Shuger views Angelo's Puritanism as representing a political theology that contrasts with the Duke's. "But in addition, while angelo's hypocrisy is consistant [sic] with his (stage) Puritanism, his punishing of others for self-offenses means that he also stands for unjust or tyrannous authority—Luther's big thief—in contrast to the Duke as bearer of heaven's sword" (Shuger 2001, p. 68).

[6] See also (Pollock 2013).

found and refound social interaction in worlds beyond the merely local.[7] Through their dramatic contact with one another, Catholicism, Puritanism, Calvinism, Lucretianism, agonisticism, and other "religious" perspectives reveal one another's limitations.

While the political authority of the Duke and his role as both judge and spiritual father in the final scene have led some to infer Shakespeare's preference for Calvinism at least as a unifying or mediating theological and political middle, Shakespeare's dramatic reflections on religious experience as such in *Measure for Measure* go further. Even in the trope of the disappearing ruler we can hear the echoes of a tendentious history of religious conflict that implicates Calvinism among other theological traditions in a desire for spiritual freedom that cuts across sectarian divisions. The Duke's strategic retreat from Vienna draws on numerous biblical parables wherein workers and citizens are tasked with an act of collective stewardship and then finally revisited by the owner and either rewarded or chastised for their actions. The parable of the talents in the Gospel of Matthew begins by comparing the kingdom of heaven to "a man that going into a strange countrey, called his servants, and delivered to them his goods"; the man returns and praises the slave who was "failthfull in litle" (Matthew 25:14–21).[8] Likewise the parable of the wicked tenants speaks of "a certaien householder, which planted a vineyarde, and hedged it round about, and made a winepresse therein, and built a towre, and let it out to husbandmen, & went into a strange countrey" (Matthew 21:33). The landlord sent his servants and his son to the property, but the husbandmen beat and killed them. Such parables regularly served for illustrations of the church's stewardship of the gifts of God (and were sometimes deployed in colonial contexts to underwrite logics of European stewardship). In early modern interpretations, the master's servants took many forms; they were variously cast as members the true church, martyrs on both sides of the Protestant-Catholic divide, missionaries in hostile nations, or luminaries of reform.

Perhaps most directly reflecting the character of Angelo, the parable of the unjust steward tells of a rich man who calls his manager to account for his affairs after a period of absence or neglect (Luke 16:1–13). The manager quickly settles the debts of those who owe money to the rich man by accepting less than what is owed, and he is praised for his shrewdness. In his early polemical work, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, William Tyndale follows Luther's lead in rejecting Roman Catholic commentaries that commend the steward's positive work. The medieval *Glossa ordinaria*, for instance, downplays the underhandedness of the steward's scheme, instead emphasizing God's mercy for those who demonstrate such desire to be reconciled (*Glossa ordinaria*). Tyndale, however, differentiates between the steward's actions and his inner motives, between his works and his faith in the Word of God: "That precious thing which must be in the heart, ere a man can work any good work, is the word of God, which in the gospel preacheth, proffereth, and bringeth unto all that repent and believe, the favor of God in Christ" (Tyndale 1831, pp. 88–89).

Shakespeare's use of the disappearing ruler frames the play within this rhetorically malleable inter-ecclesial setting, but it is not a straightforward Calvinist illustration of God's absolute power over history. Consider, for example, an overlooked but remarkable appearance of the disappearing ruler from the writings of Sebastian Castellio. Castellio sustained a debate with Calvin in print, instigated by Calvin's execution of Michael Servetus in Geneva in 1553. In February of 1554 Calvin published *Defensio orthodoxae fidei de sacra Trinitate*, *contra prodigiosos errores Michaelis Serveti Hispani*, in which he defended his condemnation of Servetus by exposing his heterodox Trinitarian positions. Later that year, Castellio wrote the anonymous *De haereticis* in response to Calvin. *Concerning Heretics* is an anthology of excerpted writings of theological authorities from numerous historical and contemporary contexts, such as the writings of Augustine, Erasmus, and Luther. Castellio also included quotations from Calvin's own writings as well as from two pseudonymous entries written by himself. Each excerpt espouses relative leniency in handling Christians who are deemed to have errant theological views.

[7] Writing about the turn to religion in literary criticism, Julia Lupton describes religion as "a testing ground for the struggles between the universal and the particular" (Lupton 2006, p. 146).

[8] All biblical quotations are from the Geneva Bible.

Concerning Heretics is a seminal work of intra-denominational tolerance. He writes: "I can discover no more than this, that we regard those as heretics with whom we disagree. This is evident from the fact that today there is scarcely one of our innumerable sects that does not look upon the rest as heretics, so that if you are orthodox in one city or region, you are held for a heretic in the next" (Castellio 1935, p. 129).[9] Castellio's mixture of fictional authorial personas and excerpts assumed to be his own amounts to a rhetorical strategy that frames his arguments as universal, as if they emerge naturally from the very history of religious conflict itself. At the heart of its argument for non-violent regulation of doctrine is a description of Christian revelation as incomplete and inchoate, and his use of quotations from disparate sources gives the impression of the revelation of tolerance throughout the history of theological writing. Castellio's tack is reminiscent of Montaigne's arguments in essays like "That a Man ought soberly to meddle with judging of Divine Lawes" and "Of the Caniballes."[10] Montaigne, in fact, only once mentions Castellio by name in his essays in a somewhat esoteric reference to his poverty and hunger.[11]

That Shakespeare, who we know was receptive to Montaigne's ideas, may have been familiar with the French translation of *Concerning Heretics* is suggested by an uncanny use of the disappearing ruler in Castellio's dedicatory epistle. Addressed to Duke Christoph of Württemberg, the epistle begins much like the steward parables: "suppose you had told your subjects that you would come to them at some uncertain time and had commanded them to make ready to go forth clad in white garments to meet you whenever you might appear. What would you do if, on your return, you discovered that they had taken no thought for the white robes but instead were disputing among themselves concerning your person" (Castellio 1935, p. 121)? Castellio translates the scenario with relevant severity by adding violence to the equation: "Suppose further that the controversy was being conducted not merely by words but by blows and swords, and that one group wounded and killed the others who did not agree with them." And even more, each agent of violent religious conflict claims divine authority: "But what if these homicides claimed to have done all this in your name and in accord with your command, even though you had previously expressly forbidden it?" Castellio accuses those who punish Christian heretics with violence of pharisaical hypocrisy: "If anyone judge without mercy, with that same measure shall it be meted to him again" (p. 129). Shakespeare, of course, foregrounds this same maxim of reciprocal judgment, as the returned Duke sentences the wicked steward, Angelo:

> "Like doth quit like, and measure still for measure."
>
> Then, Angelo, thy fault's thus manifested,
>
> Which, though thou wouldst deny, denies thee vantage. (5.1.414–16)[12]

The prominence of the disappearing duke parable in Castellio's work prompts us to reconsider this titular phrase in Shakespeare's play. Ultimately the Duke reverses his sentence—"Well, Angelo, your evil quits you well" (500). Significantly, Angelo's evil is "quit" only because of the intervention of the Duke, because Claudio was not, in fact, executed as planned, and because the woman with whom he slept was Mariana and not Isabella. In short, his evil was "quit" *for him*, on his behalf, by the same legal authority by which he was condemned. Angelo is acquitted by returning his borrowed authority back to its home in the Duke.

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[9] On Castellio's influence on religious tolerance in Europe, see (Zagorin 2003).

[10] I've used the titles from John Florio's 1603 English translation of Montaigne's *Essayes*.

[11] "And it seemeth that this meanes of enter-warning one another would bring no small commoditie into common commerce and societie; for there are ever conditions that enter-seeke one another, and because they understand not one another, they leave men in great necessities. I understand, to the infamous reproach of our age, that even in our sight two most excellent men in knowledge having miserably perished for want of food and other necessaries: *Lilius Gregorius Giraldus* in *Italy*, and *Sebastianus Castalio* in *Germanie*. And I verily beleeve there are many thousands who, had they knowne or understood their wants, would sither have sent for them, and with large stipends entertained them, or would have convaid them succour, where ever they had beene." From "Of a Defect in Our Policies" (Montaigne 1904, p. 267).

[12] All references to *Measure for Measure* are from (Shakespeare 2016).

Measure for Measure is certainly about the interrelatedness of religious conviction, state authority, and religious persecution, but one challenge with thinking about the play as a criticism of politico-religious violence is the fact of the Duke's agency on both sides of judgment, creating and resolving the circumstances that lead to Angelo's corruption. Still, the combination of the disappearing ruler trope and the specific conflict between the ascetic Catholicism of Isabella and Angelo's legalism, perhaps insinuating a representation of Puritanism, suggests that the notion of religious experience Shakespeare represents is always—like the Duke's agency—both the condition and the consequence of violence.

The notion that Shakespeare may be thinking dialectically about a common religious experience of violence is supported by a possible topical influence on Shakespeare's writing of the play. James Ellison has argued that Shakespeare was motivated in writing *Measure for Measure* by the state execution of two Catholics in York in 1604 (Ellison 2003). Queen Elizabeth had become more lenient toward Catholic observance in the last years of her reign, and presumably these executions signaled James's desire to reinforce regulation of religious conformity in his second year as king. A priest named John Sugar and his companion Robert Grissold were tortured and hung according to the familiar rituals used to make gruesome examples of heretics. Indeed, Shakespeare may be summoning the eruption of violence that resulted from James's attempt to reestablish the teeth of old laws when the Duke explains to Friar Thomas the reason for his departure:

> We have strict statutes and most biting laws,
> The needful bits and curbs to headstrong jades,
> Which for this fourteen years we have let slip,
> Even like an o'ergrown lion in a cave
> That goes not out to prey. Now, as fond fathers,
> Having bound up the threatening twigs of birch
> Only to stick it in their children's sight
> For terror, not to use, in time the rod
> More mocked than feared becomes; so our decrees,
> Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead,
> And liberty plucks justice by the nose,
> The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart
> Goes all decorum. (1.3.19-31)

Ellison suggests that Shakespeare was influenced by the anti-Catholic drama of Bale and Lindsay from the middle of the sixteenth century. In these plays, would-be nuns are exposed and thereby rescued from the seduction of the Catholic Church. Yet one distinctive of *Measure for Measure* is that nobody converts. Angelo remains a Puritan; Claudio is not represented as resolving his besetting doubts; and while Isabella has an opportunity to leave her Franciscan order to marry the Duke, her silence suggests what Lupton has described as her "consent in reserve," where Isabella creates a negative space for "radical singularity" in the face not only of sexual coercion but also of religious compromise (Lupton 2005, p. 140). In *Measure for Measure*, executions are ordered but not conducted, and a possible conversion from convent life is not made. If the Duke reflects the omniscience and soteriological control of Reformed theology, then Shakespeare arguably does not represent such theology as a simple answer but instead pushes it into the fray.

3. The Spiritual Tyranny of Law

Law is the complicating factor that interweaves characters' Puritan, Catholic, Calvinist, and agnostic perspectives in *Measure for Measure*. The critical literature on law and Shakespeare

is too extensive to account for in this essay, but any consideration of religious experience in the play implies a correlation between religion and law, confession and judgment. We've seen how the arbitration of "measure for measure" gained new meaning in early modern intrareligious persecution, but the biblical precedent for the maxim in the Torah reminds us of its potential to invoke the universal or categorical. "Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; such a blemish as he hath made in any, such shall be repaid to him" (Leviticus 24:20). This portion of the book of Leviticus describes the laws given in response to the grave sin of blasphemy, and for this reason the reciprocal logic of "eye for eye" reaches beyond the immediate conditions of citizenship: "Ye shall have one law; it shall be as well for the stranger as for one born in the country, for I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 24:22). One of the connections between law and religion summoned in *Measure for Measure* is the effort both institutions make to conjure an experience beyond the local and circumstantial. The Duke's disappearance troubles this desire for the universal, since the play's opening situation makes much of the merely representative nature of Angelo's authority. Angelo's power is absolute precisely because the Duke is absent, because there is nobody to which the citizens can appeal and nobody to whom Angelo regularly reports. Claudio acknowledges as much:

> Thus can the demigod Authority
>
> Make us pay down for our offense by weight.
>
> The words of heaven; on whom it will, it will,
>
> On whom it will not, so; yet still 'tis just (1.2.109-12)

Characters are confused about "Whether the tyranny" of Angelo's enforcement of fornication laws "be in his place/Or in his eminence that fills it up" (152). The Duke explains that he creates this distance between his person and the law on purpose:

> I have on Angelo imposed the office,
>
> Who may in th'ambush of my name strike home,
>
> And yet my nature never in the fight
>
> To do in slander. (1.3.40-43)

Implied in the Duke's desire to keep his own "nature" unscathed is an acknowledgment of the "tyranny" of this strategy, and according to Lucio, the plan has worked: "His givings out were of an infinite distance/From his true-meant design" (1.4.55-56). All the more emphasis, therefore, is placed on the Duke's return. The final recognition scene discloses the identities of the Duke, of Mariana, and in a way also of Claudio who returns from presumed death. Yet where *The Winter's Tale*'s Paulina and *The Tempest*'s Prospero conduct their reunions through the guise of magic, recognition in *Measure for Measure* is circumstantial through and through. In fact, that is the point. Everyone, even the most pious, is guilty, if not for sexual sin or outright slander then for the crime of misrecognizing the Duke in disguise. "O, give me pardon," Isabella says to the Duke when he is revealed, "That I, your vassal, have employed and pained/Your unknown sovereignty" (5.1.388-89).

That his sovereignty is "unknown" creates both the need and the possibility for forgiveness. Such a representation of judgment as self-fulfilling obtains most clearly in Angelo's fall. He is the sinner described in Paul's Epistle to the Romans. It is through the covenant of law that Angelo is tasked with enforcing that he himself is condemned to die. "For the Lawe causeth wrath: for where no Lawe is, there is no transgression" (Romans 4:15). Angelo's assumption of authority creates the temptation by which he falls. Law is thus a rich metaphor for religion in *Measure for Measure*, not necessarily for a specific theological expression that Shakespeare commends but for religion as a field of meaning making systems through which one experiences obligation to something universal. Shakespeare invokes the situatedness of law and its comprehensive judgment to express a universal desire for an authority beyond law, and the play gives voice to this desire in the language of religion. Judgment, in the forms of Angelo and the Duke, is thus transformed into theater by becoming self-consciousness

of its own self-fulfilling action. In body and appearance, the condemned person constitutes "a deictic component of judgment, an action-object whose verbal and nominal capacities transform judgment into theater by orienting it in time and space." Like legal judgment, writes Kevin Curran, *Measure for Measure* generates "a choreography of adjudication grounded in the physical and ethical dynamics of mutual recognition and the corresponding possibility of new social formations" (Curran 2019, p. 165).

A temptation arises to identify a specific religious or secular viewpoint that accounts for the correlation between law and religion, not only the destruction they cause but also their combined capacity for improving the lives of Shakespeare's characters—re-enfranchising women, bastards, and bawds. I've discussed one popular explanation that looks to the Duke's supreme authority as reorienting characters toward a common admission of guilt and a dependency on his—and thus, God's—mercy. Another might be to pit judgment and religion in opposition as a representation of Luther's exposition of the relation between law and gospel. While the latter explanation provides a theological reference for the universal guilt of the characters, it struggles to account for the heavy-handed theatricality that ties judgment and forgiveness alike "to the creative process itself"—that is, the Duke's willing, often torturous, and ultimately redeeming duplicity (Haskin 1977, p. 360).

But *Measure for Measure* offers a fuller view of religious experience than any single "corrective" theological stance can represent. Specifically, Shakespeare shows that the play's various religious positions have something in common: each is caught up in a dialectic of morality and guilt that over the course of the play creates a shared desire for salvation across religious expressions. The instrumental role of law in propelling this dialectic is epitomized in Angelo's fall where Shakespeare uses a Pauline logic of guilt to entrap Angelo through his own pursuit of righteousness. But the reciprocity between morality and guilt appears in other characters as well. From the outset, even Lucio, the expressive and baroque bachelor, is attuned to the nuances of law as an institution that makes people common in their lack of innocence. Joking with the First Gentlemen, he quips, "Grace is grace, despite of all controversy. As, for example, thou thyself art wicked villain, despite of all grace" (1.2.23-25). To someone who is without grace, he suggests, any technical definition of grace is neither here nor there, echoing Claudio's comment about the Duke's authority in absentia: "on whom it will, it will" (111). With Angelo closing brothels in the city and arresting sex offenders, the subjects of Vienna feel as if they have been deceived by the law. The fruits of the very liberty that they exercised under the law has been turned into evidence against them. When Lucio asks Claudio where his "restraint" comes from, Claudio replies:

> From too much liberty, my Lucio, liberty.
>
> As surfeit is the father of much fast,
>
> So every scope by the immoderate use
>
> Turns to restraint. Our natures do pursue,
>
> Like rats that raven down their proper bane,
>
> A thirsty evil, and when we drink, we die. (1.2.114-19)

The thirsty rat becomes the unruly infant in the Duke's account of the problem:

> so our decrees,
>
> Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead,
>
> And liberty plucks justice by the nose,
>
> The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart
>
> Goes all decorum. (1.4.27-31)

The Duke seems to understand that his challenge as a ruler results from the reciprocal enablement of liberty and condemnation. What should a ruler do when "liberty plucks justice by the nose"? He knows that he cannot simply and suddenly begin enforcing the law, but he is also leery of the kind of privative liberty that his subjects have begun to accept. The problem is one that long concerned

theologians in discussions of purgatory and sanctification. Theological justifications for the doctrine of purgatory observed that people need actually to become righteous volitionally and not only to be counted as righteous forensically. Likewise, in Vienna people need somehow to come under the law without being destroyed by it.

> Sith 'twas my fault to give the people scope,
>
> 'Twould be my tyranny to strike and gall them
>
> For what I bid them do. For we bid this be done
>
> When evil deeds have their permissive pass
>
> And not the punishment. (1.4.37-39)

How does one reinstate liberty in moderation without usurping the end of liberty in the process? The Duke's solution is to lie, to create a fiction of authority in Angelo—or more accurately, to make law into a fiction, a self-inflicting condition that leads its victims to desire something more.

The central situation of the Duke's deputizing and exploiting of Angelo is thus parable-like, and it affects nearly every major character and structural event in the play. For example, the notion that liberty creates guilt frames the opening of the play, when we learn of Juliet's pregnancy. Upon hearing Claudio's sentence, Juliet draws a correlation between her unborn child and the fate of its father: "Must die tomorrow? O injurious love, That respites me a life whose very comfort/Is still a dying horror" (2.3.40-42). Life leads to death, as liberty leads to judgment. Likewise, the bed trick that the Duke devises between Mariana and Angelo makes literal the decadent logic of liberty under the law. The Duke assures Isabella that "the doubleness of the benefit defends the deceit from reproof" (3.1.245-46). In other words, Angelo will be guilty of the same crime for which he convicts Claudio. Morality (or liberty) and guilt stand in opposition but also in mutual influence toward one another. As the play progresses, morality and guilt move closer to one another to the point of virtual interchangeability when Angelo's temptation of Isabella consummates in his legal obligation to Mariana. The Duke expresses this chiasmic relation. Fornication "is too general a vice, and severity must cure it," he says on one occasion (3.1.246). Then, on another, he conspicuously substitutes a fevered "goodness" for "vice": "there is so great a fever on goodness that the dissolution of it must cure it" (3.1.354-55).

Law and liberty, guilt and morality, vice and goodness—such dialectical oppositions prove to be consumptive in the play. The two sides corrode one another. Moreover, if we consider the nature of their interrelatedness to represent religious experience across denominations in *Measure for Measure*, then we're left with something more like a spiritual need than a path to salvation. Shakespeare represents religious experience from the point of view of the wicked steward and his victims. Whether Catholic, agnostic, or Puritan, all are subject to the law as a self-fulfilling prophecy of guilt.

4. Shakespeare and Phenomenologies of Religious Crisis

What emerges as the destructive reciprocal relation between morality and guilt in *Measure for Measure* can be understood as an instance of the dialectic between the self and the world that informs explanations of religious experience. Sociological and phenomenological writing on religion often observes the self-reflexive nature of religious experience as a dialectic between belief and action, each through the other. Émile Durkheim writes that "Religious beliefs are the representations which express the nature of sacred things and the relations which they sustain," while "rites are the rules of conduct [or action] which prescribe how a man should comport himself in the presence of these sacred objects" (Durkheim 1965, p. 56). Faith, then, is not only in the tenets expressed in a creed but in the efficacy of the creed itself, in the behaviors through which we "place ourselves within their sphere of action, and that we set ourselves where we may best feel their influence" (Durkheim 1965, p. 464). The strength of a religion, in other words, can be measured by how well its belief tenets motivate and justify its actions, and, conversely, how well its actions bear out the plausibility of its belief tenets.

We've seen how Shakespeare makes something like this dialectic explicit in the Pauline logic that underwrites the events of *Measure for Measure*. Max Weber has famously highlighted the influence of Pauline soteriological thought on the growth of secularism in the Renaissance. Weber's theses about secularism notwithstanding, in *The Sociology of Religion* he outlines a connection between the Pauline dialectic and the anti-intellectualism to which Weber ascribes early Christianity's growth in lower social groups. In this dialectic, "spirit is accommodated to the facts of the everyday world," while at the same time, spirit is also sought for the promise of salvation (Weber 1963, p. 130). Paul mitigates the risk of Christianity appearing too mystical by presenting a theology that not only is accessible by those who are not religious elites or intellectuals but that also can be reinforced by the working lifestyles of most people in the Mediterranean world of his day. Weber observes that Christianity derived much of its evangelistic power from its coupling of an anti-intellectualist ethos with a consistent central emphasis on salvation (Weber 1963, p. 131). Thus formidable religion, as Weber describes it, involves a dialectic between faith and action whose animus (salvation) is so strong as to make the interchange between faith and action imperceptible.

Peter Berger builds on these earlier descriptions by suggesting that the dialectic between faith and action occurs not only on the social level but also at that of individual consciousness. He describes the interdependency of belief tenets and their corresponding real world actions as consisting of a symbiotic exchange between internalization and objectivation: "The individual encounters the [social] institutions as *data* of the objective world outside himself, but they are now *data* of his own consciousness as well" (Berger 1967, p. 17). The continuity between these two processes of world-making and self-consciousness is key, and the best way to protect it, to legitimate the relation between the self and the world, is to *forget* about it by creating institutions that help to cover up the traces of such contingencies. The more we are aware of the socialization of the self in religion, the less safe and real we experience ourselves. "Religious legitimations arise from human activity, but once crystallized into complexes of meaning that becomes part of a religious tradition they can attain a measure of autonomy as against this activity. Indeed, they may then *act back upon* actions in everyday life, transforming the latter, sometimes radically" (Berger 1967, p. 41). In particular, strong beliefs are made stronger when the actions they inspire are undertaken as if they were moral responsibilities that transcend the circumstances of any given scenario. Individuals ground a higher sense of duty and morality in roles that are alienated from the self, such as the duty of a mother toward a child. And religion, Berger avers, is the most effective institution for assuring these alienated roles wherein the "individual 'forgets' that his world was and continues to be co-produced by him" (Berger 1967, p. 85). In the world of the play, this may have been possible, we might imagine, in a past time when the Duke personally enforced laws with both justice and liberty, but his abrupt departure has made his subjects cognizant of the potential dissonance between justice and liberty. The socialization of the self has begun to work in reverse in *Measure for Measure*. Life in society, as religious life, has ceased to "act back upon" the past, providing ethical grounds for human interaction in the future; instead, the past is catching up with the present, as old liberties become new sins.

I suggest that Shakespeare is attuned to this very dialectic between the world and the self that many have located at the heart of religious experience, and I've argued that in *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare uses law as a way of exposing this dialectic. When it is made known to, or remembered by, the characters themselves, they undergo a crisis of faith. Another way to say this is that characters reach the limit of the dialectic of morality and guilt and thus find themselves in need of a stronger world and world-making capability in which to locate themselves as moral subjects. This phenomenon is perhaps clearest in Claudio's crisis of faith. His sudden reflection on the unknowability of life after death resembles a dialectical exchange between faith tenets and experience that has become endless and wayward. He captures the feeling in imagery of wind, uncontrollable movement, and anarchy:

> To be imprisoned in the viewless winds
>
> And blown with restless violence round about

The pendent world, or to be worse than worst

Of those that lawless and incertain thought

Imagine howling—'tis too horrible. (3.1.124-28)

He regrets asking Isabella to acquiesce to Angelo's demand for sex as he recognizes that such an act of exchange would, in fact, not allow him effectively to forget the reasons for which he loses faith in the hope of heaven. "I am so out of love with life that I will sue to be rid of it," he confesses to the disguised Duke (3.1.170–71). He knows now that the law is only a sign of his greater guilt and of the ultimately eventuality of his death.

Stated in brief, in *Measure for Measure* the self-fulling nature of law represents the experience of religion. I say this as a way of expanding rather than reducing the complexity of the correlation. As Angelo's hypocritical power (itself a fiction created by the Duke) infects other characters, the dialectic of morality and guilt devolves into various instances of exchange—this for that, sex for life, mine for yours. Such exchanges miscarry, and the comedy undergoes its structural *peripeteiae* through the corresponding collapses of mutual recognition between characters. Law fails to accommodate religion because it sabotages the call to a higher form of liberty by reducing the "other" to a currency for exchange. Paul Ricoeur describes the dialectic between morality and guilt in terms that reflect the decreasing aptitude of law to represent morality in Shakespeare's play. In his essay, "Guilt, Ethics, and Religion," Ricoeur differentiates between evil as it appears in paradigms respectively of guilt and of ethics. Experienced as guilt, the knowledge of evil promotes legalism. And with it, the sinner "enter[s] into the hell of guilt, such as St. Paul described it: the law itself becomes a source of sin. In giving a knowledge of evil, it excites the desire of transgression, and incites the endless movements of condemnation and punishment" (Ricoeur 1968, p. 106). Experienced ethically, the knowledge of evil becomes conscious of this "mortal circle," and the sinner discovers himself not only as guilty of evil but as both its cause and effect—a reversal of fortune related to *anagnorisis*, or dramatic recognition.

Angelo provides a pointed illustration of this movement from legalism to ethical self-condemnation. His pursuit of justice shows "a consciousness anxious to observe all the commandments, to satisfy the law in all things, without making an exception of any sector of existence, without taking into account exterior obstacles" (Ricoeur 1968, p. 105). Angelo's legalism outpaces his own moral uprightness and leads him to sin and condemnation. Having been exposed, he pronounces his own sentence:

I should be guiltier than my guiltiness

To think I can be undiscernible

When I perceive your Grace like power divine

Hath looked upon my passes. Then, good prince,

No longer session hold upon my shame,

But let my trial be mine own confession.

Immediate sentence then and sequent death

Is all the grace I beg. (5.1.369-76)

Notice that Angelo imagines an existential guilt beyond his specific crimes—"guiltier than my guiltiness"—were he to continue to lie. He fears entering a state of guilt, as it were, as if having been fated to it from the beginning by the duplicity with which he exercised his newfound authority. Hence, he views his actions as utterly discernable; his pursuit of moral uprightness was a mere smokescreen for his guilt. Yet there is also a measure of freedom in Angelo's confession. "Such is the first stage of reflection in the experience of evil: the reciprocal constitution of the signification of *free* and the signification of *evil* is a specific performative: confession" (Ricoeur 1968, p. 108). It's thus important to note that, despite his condemnation, the dialectic—the mortal circle—of morality and

guilt through which Angelo falls is preempted, in a way, by his confession. The confession makes his guilt postdictably *avoidable*. Ricoeur writes, "It is because I recognise my 'ought' that I recognise my 'could.' A being who is obligated is a being who presumes that he can do what he should do" (Ricoeur 1968, p. 108). Angelo's assumption of responsibility for his action imagines a world in which his guiltiness is not predetermined—as we imagine a world in which the Duke does not depart.

And yet in reality, until the Duke forgives him, Angelo is still condemned to die. In Ricoeur's explanation, the existence of evil as a component of religious experience consigns the individual to this merely negative form of freedom, the freedom to confess, "to take upon oneself the origin of evil" (Ricoeur 1968, p. 107). But as demonstrated in the example of Angelo, to do so is to relinquish any claim to forgiveness under the law. He is now cognizant of the world-making function that law served for him, and since, as deputy, he embodied that law, he is no longer able to see goodness as alien to him, as obligating him from the outside. The dialectic has been exposed. His confession does not remove him from the sphere of guilt, but it enacts his recognition of the need to be outside of it. And it is in this proclamation of need that Angelo glimpses a new freedom, a new identity for himself which he experiences as alienated from his current position, something that can obligate him from without. It only exists here as a desire, a form of contrition, but it differentiates itself from a merely ethical attitude and brings him into the company of Isabella, Claudio, the city's pimps and bawds, in a common experience of religion.

5. Recognition and the Desire for Salvation

Religious experience for characters like Angelo and Claudio becomes self-conscious for them as their appeals to morality come full circle back to their guilt, as they become aware of their complicity in making the world that condemns them. Furthermore, the privative nature of ethics created by the dialectic of morality and guilt that is operative in *Measure for Measure* manifests dramatically in the failure of mutual recognition between characters. That is, a symptom of the need for salvation in the play manifests when we see a character refusing to be acknowledged by another. As Stanley Cavell has described it, breakdowns in mutual acknowledgment result not from the fact that one lacks sufficient knowledge of the other but that, despite having relatively little knowledge of the other, one claims to know too much.[14] One claims certain knowledge of the other, turning the other into a form of currency or equivalency, disallowing the other from being anything besides an alter ego.

Transposed onto the dialectic of guilt in *Measure for Measure*, we see this effect in Angelo's blackmailing of Isabella, where a false equivalency is drawn between a life and a sexual act. In effect, Angelo makes too much of his authority and stretches the limited moral reach of the law into the realm of metaphysics—claiming that Isabella's sin will atone for that of Claudio. At the outset of Isabella's petition to Angelo, she distinguishes herself by acknowledging the psychology that besets the Pauline dialectic of law and guilt:

> There is a vice that most I do abhor
>
> And most desire should meet the blow of justice;
>
> For which I would not plead, but that I must;
>
> For which I must not plead, but that I am
>
> At war 'twixt will and will not. (2.2.30-34)

Angelo's judgment on Claudio pulls Isabella out from her cloister and into a cycle of *woulds* and *musts*. Isabella references Paul. "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I" (Romans 7:15). The subsequent verse in the Epistle to the Romans, however, foreshadows Angelo's abuse of this universal position: "If then I do that which I would not, I consent

[14] See (Cavell 2003).

unto the law that it is good," in other words, consenting to the law's condemnation. Moments later Angelo rejects this internal conflict by equating will with necessity, viewing his desires as determining his actions: "Look, what I will not, that I cannot do" (53). Isabella's response is to implore reciprocal recognition: "If he had been as you, and you as he,/You would have slipped like him, but he like you/Would not have been so stern" (65–67).

Isabella then intensifies this call for mutual recognition by substituting herself for Angelo. "I would to heaven I had your potency/And you were Isabel" (68–69). It is now the position of the intermediary for the condemned that Isabella asks Angelo to imagine. Put yourself in the position not of the accused, she says, but of the third-party who also sees the accused as an other but instead asks for forgiveness. If this is a subtle reference to the Mosaic role of Christ as intermediary, then it becomes explicit in Isabella's appeal to God not only as the absolute judge but as the ultimate other:

> Why, all the souls that were, were forfeit once,
>
> And He that might the vantage best have took
>
> Found out the remedy. How would you be
>
> If He, which is the top of judgment, should
>
> But judge you as you are? Oh, think on that,
>
> And mercy then will breathe within your lips
>
> Like man new-made. (2.2.74-79)

Isabella's desperate petition resembles Castellio's writings against Calvin. "O Creator and King of the world, dost Thou see these things," writes Castellio in the final paragraph of his dedicatory epistle (Castellio 1935, p. 134). Isabella represents herself as God's intermediary—God's spy, if you will—not singularly but universally, as an example of "all the souls" who are in need of mercy. In this light, Angelo's sexual aggression toward Isabella does not arise from an isolated desire but evolves from Isabella's call for reciprocal recognition, as a corruption of it. In the soliloquy that divides the two phases of Isabella's petition, Angelo appears to entertain her appeal to God as the absolute other:

> When I would pray and think, I think and pray
>
> To several subjects. Heaven hath my empty words,
>
> Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue,
>
> Anchors on Isabel. Heaven in my mouth,
>
> As if I did but only chew His name,
>
> And in my heart the strong and swelling evil
>
> Of my conception. (2.4.1-7)

Here the consumptive dialectic of morality and guilt is exposed—"Heaven in my mouth." Angelo's image of eating God is provocative. It is both eucharistic and blasphemous—"I did but only chew His name." The image of eating God enacts the very dialectic that haunts religious experience in *Measure for Measure*. David Goldstein has described how Shakespeare's imagery of eating reflects a Levinasian stance on the need for mutual recognition through the ultimate demand of the other as vulnerable to destruction, starvation, and domination: "What brings together also tears apart. Eating with is also eating of" (Goldstein 2018, p. 238). In this way, Angelo depicts his desire for Isabella as blasphemy. When Angelo finally succumbs to the desire for domination, he proffers his bargain in a dialogue that explicitly reverses Isabella's terms of mutual recognition, offering one "stain" for another:

ANGELO

'Tis all as easy

Falsely to take away a life true made

As to put metal in restrainèd means

To make a false one.

ISABELLA

'Tis set down so in heaven, but not in Earth.

ANGELO

Say you so? Then I shall pose you quickly.

Which had you rather, that the most just law

Now took your brother's life, or, to redeem him,

Give up your body to such sweet uncleanness

As she that he hath stained? (2.4.45-54)

Concepts such as piety or mercy lose purchase in the asymmetrical relation of domination that Angelo proposes. In this exchange, he says, "Were equal poise of sin and charity" (67).

It is no coincidence that the two scenes that lead to Angelo's statement of blackmail build through subtle undertones of seduction, as if toward sexual climax. It may be that the dramatic mode of intercession involves an inherent vulnerability, even sensuality, that legal relations cannot accommodate on their own. Intercession appeals to a kind of human intimacy beyond the law; it asks for one person to imagine himself alongside or even within the other. "Because intercession is the act of taking on another self," writes Devin Byker, "giving voice to the desires of another, it imbues a keen awareness of the world and a sensitivity to worldly circumstances—circumstances that crucially define the manner in which speech and action can be understood and, consequently, judged and evaluated" (Byker 2016, p. 427). Shakespeare asks his audience to imagine how intercession before the law suggests forms of sexual submission and seduction. Lucio implores Isabella to press, "touch," Angelo further: "Ay, touch him: there's the vein," and Isabella responds with the unintentionally titillating reference to her argument breathing through the "lips" of Angelo, "Like man new-made" (2.2.71, 78–79). "Go to your bosom," she continues, "Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know" (137–38). The recurring imagery of moral anatomization forces Angelo to recompose himself in an aside, straightening his jacket, wiping his sweat: "She speaks, and 'tis such sense/That my sense breeds with it" (142–43). He experiences Isabella's intercession as unreproachable and, thus, irresistible, capturing the broad and suggestive meanings of rhetoric that breeds with sense as so many figurative, physiological, cognitive, and sexual *conceivings*. Indeed, sex is a common denominator that traverses the dialectic between law and condemnation.

Measure for Measure ends with a final reversal of action that reestablishes the world-making facility of religion outside the law. Alongside Claudio's surprising request that Isabella acquiesce to Angelo's proposal, one of the most shocking acts in the play is Isabella's intercession for the life of Angelo. At this point Isabella still believes her brother to be dead, and the Duke perpetuates the fiction by offering a consolation of an afterlife without sin: "That life is better life past fearing death/Than that which lives to fear" (5.1.400-01). Isabella kneels with Mariana and asks the Duke for clemency:

My brother had but justice,

In that he did the thing for which he died.

For Angelo, his act did not o'ertake his bad intent,

And must be buried but as an intent

That perished by the way. Thoughts are no subjects,

Intents but merely thoughts. (5.1.451-56)

There is nothing uniquely Catholic in Isabella's act. Instead, her appeal lifts itself to a register above the fiction that the Duke has created, namely, by acknowledging and then rejecting the sexual *quid pro quo* for which Angelo is condemned. His intention did not materialize in coerced sex with her; yet she dismisses the fact that Angelo went beyond the stated intentions of the bargain by nevertheless ordering Claudio's execution. One way to explain this is that Isabella leaves the enforcement of justice upon Angelo's "intent" to God, and this deferral of justice was commonly accepted for rulers.[15] Yet taking into account Shakespeare's attention to the overlapping, often conflicting, yet universal desire for freedom that characterizes anthropologies of religious experience, Isabella's plea for mercy on Angelo can be read also as an expression of her own desire for a moral identity beyond the law. She seeks to appease the law—Claudio had "*but* justice"—but also to discover a point of view that takes its cues from a higher obligation, a duty that imposes itself from beyond the mortal circle of morality and guilt (my emphasis). Entreating the Duke side by side with Mariana, her argument "requires that we think of freedom under the sign of hope," under the sign of some desire to which all of the play's theologies and confessions lead (Ricoeur 1968, p. 113).

6. Conclusions

In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare uses theater as a forum for testing the capacities of judgment for representing religious experience. The play presents characters from a variety of religious perspectives, but all of them find themselves bound by the law—including the Duke whose very fiction of withdrawing from Vienna is a solution to a problem that exploits the scapegoat of his deputy, Angelo. The drama begins with guilt, and despite their sometimes contradicting interpretations of the law as a moral denominator, Isabella, Claudio, Angelo, and the Duke all lose faith in their respective grounds for moral obligation. I've suggested that the dialectic of morality and guilt that characterizes this failure of the law reflects a common religious experience: the desire for salvation characterized by the need to forget one's complicity in making the law by which one is judged. Shakespeare represents this crisis of religious experience within the constraints of theater and namely through the corrosion of reciprocal recognition under the influence of the legal fiction that the Duke devises. Religion is both within and beyond the law. It is a world-making tool that turns against the characters of *Measure for Measure* when they become too conscious of their connivance in its workings. What the characters need is to forget again. And this is the main intention, at least, of the Duke's legal fiction.

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[15] See (Gless 2016, p. 206).

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Bondage of the Will: The Limitations of Political Theology in *Measure for Measure*

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Abstract: Although Peter Lake and Debora Shuger have argued that *Measure for Measure* is hostile to Calvinist theology, I argue that the play's world presents a Reformed theo-political sensibility, not in order to criticize Calvinism, but to reveal limitations in dominant political theories. Reformed theology informs the world of the play, especially with regards to the corruption of the human will through original sin. Politically, the sinfulness of the human will raises concerns about governments—despite Biblical commands to obey leaders, how can they be trusted if subject to the same corruption of will as citizens? Close analysis of key passages reveals that while individual characters in *Measure* suggest solutions that account in part for the corruption of the will, none of their political theories manage to contain the radical effects of sin in Angelo's will. Despite this failure, restorative justice occurs in Act 5, indicating forces outside of human authority and will account for the comedic ending. This gestures towards the dependence of governments in a post-Reformation world on providential protection and reveals why the Reformed belief in the limitations of the human will point towards the collapse of the theory of the King's two bodies.

Keywords: original sin; political theology; human will

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1. Introduction

Measure for Measure has generated layers of scholarship exploring the complex relationship between religion and politics represented in the play. The play depicts a morally unstable city, a ruler who absconds with an unsatisfactory explanation, a deputy zealous in punishing sexual immorality, and a strict novice who pleads for leniency. As such, the play is rich in political and theological tensions, central to most of which is the question of justice and mercy—when a ruler can and should use each. Many scholars have noted that this textual tension alludes to actual religious tensions present during the early years of James I's reign, when this play was first performed in 1604. Some scholars identify the different characters within the play as aligned with particular political theologies represented by either Puritan, Catholic, or Conformist positions in Jacobean society. Peter Lake and Deborah Shuger notably argue that Angelo represents a critique of Puritanism and Calvinist theology more generally (Lake and Questier 2002, p. 666; Shuger 2001). Shuger also claims that the Duke fits a more broadly Anglican or conformist profile as a stand-in for James I (Shuger 2001).

However, considering what divides the characters theologically and politically may prove less productive than looking at how they align. Recently, Matthew Smith has argued that what unites the characters is the need for "a common religious experience" which transcends the law and their failure under it (Smith 2018, p. 16). This is a unifying desire, to be sure, but are there unifying theological principles which contextualize that desire, or do the characters truly stand as representatives of separate religious positions? In response to Shuger and Lake, Jonathan Goossen argues that the Duke and Angelo represent equally dangerous versions of Puritan theology that threatened to "conflate spiritual and temporal power" (Goossen 2012, p. 217). Goossen claims that both Angelo and the Duke, because they want to regulate morality with civic law, represent radical Puritan reformers who

blurred the lines between church and state (Goossen 2012, p. 218). However, given that both James and Elizabeth I before him declared themselves head of the church and had been overtly making and enforcing laws that governed spirituality, Goossen seems not to understand that such conflation was not, in fact, radical. Even if this conflation is not radical, Goossen is right that much of the conflict of the play comes from the breakdown between spheres of rule, specifically between the King's two bodies. As explained by Ernst Kantorowicz in his influential study of early modern political theology, the theory of the king's two bodies posits that the medieval and early modern monarch had the ability to suspend his identity between his natural, physical body and a spiritual, public body. The natural was subject to the laws of nature and died; the public body lived on (Kantorowicz 1957). While some have offered untroubled readings of the King's two bodies in *Measure*, claiming the play is a coherent working out of a ruler's public versus private actions (Rose 1966), Barbara Groves argues that the play is a criticism of the conflation of the "person and role" of the ruler (Groves 2007, p. 155). However, I would argue that this conflation is not merely problematic in the play, but inevitable. Anna Muenchrath shows that the play reveals both the difficulties of separating the King's public body from his private body and the inevitable collapse of that distinction (Muenchrath 2018, p. 2). I agree with Muenchrath that the play does reveal both the collapse of the King's two bodies and point towards its inevitability. However, it is not enough to understand the problem of the ruler's public and private actions as political in this densely theological play; rather, the political and the theological must be considered together as interrelated. Absent from Muenchrath's argument is the central theological principle that puts the theory of the King's two bodies in jeopardy and contributes to the resulting complications of its collapse: original sin.

The doctrine of original sin posits that everyone has been born into a state of sin rather than a state of innocence and therefore is inclined towards further sin. Although the doctrinal positions extrapolated from this principle differed between recusant, puritan, and conformist positions at the time the play was performed, all would have agreed with the basic theological tenet that every person must wrestle in some way with an inherent taint, unavoidable in our human condition. This theological belief becomes political when applied to sovereign rulers. All the characters in *Measure* who implicitly or explicitly express political theories of governing, do so while trying to account for the ruler's "infected will," as Sidney described it (Sidney 1973, p. 86). The question the play asks is not merely, how does a ruler exercise justice and mercy, but how does he do so while he himself is infected by sin?

Although united in their acknowledgement of the problem of sin, the play's central characters arrive at different political and theological solutions. The two dominant solutions are that either rulers should adjust their judgment to their own sin to avoid hypocrisy, or they should submit themselves to the same law by which they judge to avoid subjectivity in judgment. In terms of the political theology of the King's two bodies, the first position seeks to align the body natural with the body politic, and the second seeks to subject the body natural to the body politic. However, neither of these proposed theories successfully manages the thoroughly corrupting influence of sin in the world of the play; neither accounts for total depravity.

Total depravity is the Calvinist extension of the more widely accepted doctrine of original sin. It would be a misleading leap, however, to say that because total depravity is apparently at work in the play, the play presents a Puritan theological and political reality. Even conformist English doctrine was still broadly Reformed. In the 39 articles, article nine which examines original sin refers to it in similar language to Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*:

> Original Sin standeth not in the following of Adam, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is ingendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation. (The Thirty-Nine Articles 2005, pp. 71–72)

> Original sin, therefore, seems to be a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which first makes us liable to God's wrath, and then also brings forth in us those works which Scripture calls "works of the flesh" [Gal. 5:19]. And that is properly what Paul often calls sin ... we are vitiated and perverted in every part of our nature that by this great corruption we stand justly condemned and convicted before God, to whom nothing is acceptable but righteousness, innocence, and purity. (Calvin 1960, p. 251)

In both texts the word "corruption" is used to refer to the effects of sin on the individual, a word avoided in Catholic theology which prefers to discuss the effects of original sin as concupiscence—an inclination towards evil and the clouding of the will and reason by sin. Reformed doctrine tends towards a more radical, thorough taint of sin, a taint infiltrating the whole of the human person.

In this article, I will demonstrate that in *Measure for Measure,* the ruler's will and reason are not subject merely to concupiscence but rather to corruption. I will first show that Escalus, Isabella, and the Duke all present a political theory which would have a ruler judge according to his own weakness so as to avoid hypocrisy, while Angelo prefers to avoid such subjectivity by claiming a ruler should instead judge according to the law, but subject himself to that same law. Both theories account for the presence of sin in the ruler's life, but fail in the world of the play to prevent the total corruption of justice following the corruption of Angelo. Given this failure, the play asks us to consider the extent to which divine intervention is necessary to allow justice to prevail as it does in Act 5.

2. Will, Sin, and Judgment

Of the two political theologies, the one more widely held is expressed by Escalus, Isabella, and the Duke. They claim that should rulers sin or be inclined towards a particular sin, such sin should naturally move them to mercy in their judgments of others guilty of that same sin; thus, rulers may avoid hypocrisy. David Thatcher calls this the "'natural guiltiness' plea" as it asks the executor of justice to consider his own natural state of guilt before pronouncing judgment (Thatcher 1995, p. 264). Moreover, Thatcher points out that this position recalls passages in the Gospels when Jesus reigned in legalistic tendencies as in the Sermon on the Mount ("Ivdge not, that ye be not iudged. For with what iudgement ye iudge, ye shal be iudged" [Matt 7:1]) and the instance of the woman caught in adultery ("Let him that is among you without sinne, cast the first stone at her." [John 8:7b]) (Thatcher 1995, p. 268).[1] Thus, the "natural guiltiness" position asks that the ruler conform the judgments of his public body to the sins of his private body, and asks that he apply the New Testament rule of mercy to those judgements as well. Escalus is the first character in *Measure* to express this political theology. When debating with Angelo about Claudio's fate, he argues for leniency based on the possibility of Angelo struggling with a similar sin as Claudio:

> Let but your honour know—
> Whom I believe to be most strait in virtue—
> That in the working of your own affections,
> Had time coher'd with place, or place with wishing,
> Or that the resolute acting of your blood
> Could have attain'd th'effect of your own purpose,
> Whether you had not sometime in your life
> Err'd in this point, which now you censure him,
> And pull'd the law upon you. (2.1.8–16)[2]

---

[1] All references to scripture come from (Bible 1969).
[2] All references to *Measure for Measure* come from (Shakespeare 1965).

Escalus suggests that Angelo could have, given the right circumstances, been in the same situation as Claudio. His suggestion implies that Angelo's virtue has as much to do with fortunate circumstances as Angelo's will—his virtue is providential. Thus, Angelo's will is not without the possibility of corruption, and that should color his judgment of Claudio.

Isabella makes a similar assertion when she pleads for Claudio's life in the next scene. She begins by presenting a series of arguments for mercy, many of which, if applied as consistent political theologies, would result in the absence of justice in favor of blind mercy; most of these Angelo refutes with ease, but her final argument begins by reminding Angelo of the discrepancy between earthly and heavenly authority, claiming that human authority is both less than heaven's and paradoxically used more harshly than heaven's is, and ends by asking Angelo to consider his own weakness and use that as a measure by which to judge Claudio:

> Go to your bosom,
>
> Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know
>
> That's like my brother's fault. If it confess
>
> A natural guiltiness, such as is his,
>
> Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue
>
> Against my brother's life. (2.2.137–42)

While Escalus had asked Angelo to consider the possibility of past sin, Isabella suggests that within Angelo's heart, at the moment of her speech—notice her verbs are all present tense, whereas Escalus's had been past tense—is the very evil for which he is condemning Claudio. Moreover, she suggests that his guilt is "natural," as in part of his nature, not something planted or grafted there, but a part of him. This echoes the language quoted above in Article nine: "man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil." According to Isabella, the presence of this "natural guiltiness," the taint of original sin, should prohibit Angelo from judging another who shares that guiltiness. The unspoken difference is that Claudio has acted upon his nature while, so far, Angelo has not.

The Duke, like Isabella and Escalus, asserts that a ruler should judge based on his own state of virtue. Although he does not assert that the mere presence of original sin in its form as a temptation or inclination is enough to warrant a ruler to show mercy, he does suggest that once such a sin has been committed, the ruler should and, indeed, would naturally withhold any judgment from a like sin. In a soliloquy after learning of Angelo's advances to Isabella, the Duke proclaims:

> He who the sword of heaven will bear
>
> Should be as holy as severe: . . .
>
> More nor less to others paying
>
> Than by self-offences weighing. (3.2.254–55, 258–59)

While it had served Escalus and Isabella's purposes to remind Angelo of his natural sin, the Duke first asserts the virtue a ruler should exhibit. However, he quickly transitions to the claim that "self offences" should determine how others are judged: if a ruler does sin, those sins should influence their judgment. He proceeds in the following lines to denounce Angelo for his fall from virtue and the difference between his appearance and his reality. Yet, acknowledging Angelo's hypocrisy does not stop the Duke from believing that Angelo's sin will lead him to mercy, just as Isabella and Escalus had suggested it should. He believes that after the bed trick, Angelo will follow through on his promise to pardon Claudio because Angelo's own guilt should lead to mercy:

> This is his pardon, purchas'd by such sin
>
> For which the pardoner himself is in . . .

When vice makes mercy, mercy's so extended

That for the fault's love is th'offender friended. (4.2.120–21, 124–25)

According to the Duke, Claudio's pardon paradoxically is "purchas'd" by sin rather than the more traditional theological idea that pardon is purchased by the sinlessness of Jesus (in Acts 20:28 Paul says the church has been "purchased" by Jesus' blood). The Duke believes that Angelo's sin will make him sympathetic towards others in the same sin, and, therefore, he will pardon Claudio. However, he mistakes just how thoroughly corrupt Angelo's sin has made him. After this confident assertion that the necessary effect of vice is mercy, he learns that Angelo plans to withhold mercy despite his own vice.

In the end, Escalus, Isabella, and the Duke's political theology, which would have a ruler use his own sins to determine the harshness of his justice, fails because the ruler must have an internal consistency in his nature—he must both recognize his own flaws and apply them in a consistent way to his judging. Although their position confronts the likelihood that the ruler will struggle with sin, they nevertheless presume that the ruler is above hypocrisy—that, despite sin, there remains a unity in Angelo's nature which will prevent him from judging another for the sin with which he struggles. In fact, Angelo's sin disables his unity: he becomes other than he appears, and it is his appearance that his sinful nature desires to keep rather than his unity. In this, Angelo mirrors the actions of the very first sinners who, after sinning, hid, disguised, and when that failed, deflected blame for their sin. Such proliferation of sin is to be expected in a world in which the doctrine of total depravity is at work. Calvin asserted that "this perversity never ceases in us, but continually bears new fruits" (Calvin 1960, p. 251). Despite the Duke's hope that Angelo's sin would lead to mercy, it instead propagates in Angelo more sin, making it clear the Duke had not understood the full, corrupting influence of sin.

There is a further flaw to Escalus, Isabella, and the Duke's theory. In their proposed system, the law becomes subject to the ruler, the public body subject to the private body, as the ruler's sins determine which laws are applied. Thatcher discusses several legal objections to this subjectivity, calling the "natural guiltiness" position "absurd, invidious, impractical, and without historical and legal precedent or validity" (Thatcher 1995, p. 278). Some of these concerns are anticipated by Angelo; in his response to Escalus, Angelo points out the danger of ruling without a fixed law. While he also acknowledges the possibility of a ruler's corrupt will, his solution is not to change the ruler's judging, but rather to make the ruler subject to the same law he applies to others. When Escalus first suggests that Angelo judge Claudio according to Angelo's potential sin, Angelo responds by claiming that his own sins should not affect the application of the law:

You may not so extenuate his offence

For I have had such faults; but rather tell me,

When I that censure him do so offend,

Let mine own judgement pattern out my death,

And nothing come in partial. (2.1.27–31)

Angelo claims that Escalus's hypothetical suggestions about Angelo's sinful nature should not determine which laws are enforced in Vienna; rather, he encourages Escalus to hold him to the same standard he applies to others. His position avoids the problems of the subjective nature of the political theory proposed by the Duke, Isabella, and Escalus, because the law remains constant despite the ruler's own flaws. However, Angelo's theory, like theirs, is not foolproof against a radically corrupting sin. Just as the Duke supposes the ruler will maintain unity between his private sins and his public actions, Angelo assumes he will maintain unity in judging others' sins and his own. Both assumptions misunderstand the effects of the penetration of sin into the human will. The entrance of sin into Angelo's life does not merely alter, but reorders his will entirely.

In addition to misunderstanding the radically corrupting effects of sin, Angelo also fails to recognize that the law, in which he places so much trust, is itself a predictor of sin, as Paul explains in

Romans: “I knewe not sinne, but by the Law: . . . But sinne toke an occasion by the commandement, and wroght in me all maner of cõcupiscence: for without the Law sinne is dead” (Rom. 6: 7b-8). Considering the law’s close connection to sin, Angelo’s fall should not come as a surprise. Indeed, when Angelo first encounters Isabella, he is perplexed because Isabella, herself a figure of strict morality, creates in Angelo the temptation which causes his fall: “What’s this? What’s this? Is this her fault or mine?” (2.2.163). Angelo does not understand why he is tempted by “virtue;” it runs counter to his logic that he should “sin in loving virtue” (2.2.183). However, this encounter makes perfect sense within Pauline logic: the law has created in Angelo “all maner of cõcupiscence.” Thus, Angelo’s political theology is ultimately flawed: reliance on law will never lead to a sufficient system of government, but rather will always point towards, as Smith explains, a “universal desire for an authority beyond law” (Smith 2018, p. 8). As expected, this political theology which places the law above the ruler, soon deteriorates in the face of Angelo’s sin.

This is first signaled at the end of Act 2, Scene 2, when Angelo realizes the first signs of weakness in himself after his initial encounter with Isabella. He suggests that his weakness makes Claudio’s execution more problematic: “O, let her brother live./Thieves for their robbery have authority/When judges steal themselves” (2.2.175–77). Angelo realizes that the law itself is undermined by a ruler’s sin. When he experiences temptation, he immediately collapses the distinction he had made between the authority of the law and the authority of the judge, initially recognizing the hypocrisy of his position. His realization comes too late, however, and his resolution to free Claudio soon dissolves, as does his desire to be held accountable to the law. By Act 2, Scene 4, Angelo’s taint is complete; while he appears to be wrestling with his conscience, he nevertheless recognizes the futility of the struggle:

> Heaven [is] in my mouth,
>
> As if I did but only chew His name,
>
> And in my heart the strong and swelling evil
>
> Of my conception. (2.4.4–7)

Before he sees Isabella the second time, he is considering the growing discrepancy between his apparent virtue and his true evil. His outward actions of prayer do not match his inward desire for Isabella, and “strong” and “swelling” indicate both the force of the evil and its growing nature. By the end of the scene with Isabella, he is no longer fighting the taint of sin: “I have begun,/And now I give my sensual race the rein” (2.4.158–59). Once he has given in to his impulse and his sin, he no longer bemoans the discrepancy between his inward and outward states but rather sees them as an advantage that will allow him to escape the law to which he had claimed he would submit. He explains as much to Isabella when she threatens to expose him:

> Who will believe thee, Isabel?
>
> My unsoiled name, th’ austereness of my life,
>
> My vouch against you, and my place i’ th’ state
>
> Will so your accusation overweigh
>
> That you shall stifle in your own report
>
> And smell of calumny. (2.4.154–59)

His reputation, about which the Duke and Escalus have spoken highly (1.3.54–58; 1.1.23–25) and which even Lucio acknowledges (1.4.60–65), remains the same despite the penetration of sin into his will. The gap between appearance and reality serves Angelo’s interests in this case, and the presence of sin in his will means he will take advantage of the resulting hypocrisy. After the bed trick, he sinks further into his hypocrisy by ordering Claudio’s execution rather than his release. Reflecting on both of these deeds, he sees himself within the cycle of sin: “Alack, when once our grace we have forgot,/Nothing goes right. We would, and we would not” (4.4.31–32). Angelo’s reference here is to Romans 7:19 “For I do

not the good thing, which I wolde, but the euil, which I wolde not, that do I." Angelo's self-awareness suggests that he not only recognizes the trap of sin into which he has fallen, but he is helpless to escape it. Angelo having fallen from a state of innocence, like the original Adam, is now trapped in a state of sin, enslaved, as Paul notes, to the law of sin: "But I se another law in my membres, rebelling against the law of my minde, & leading me captive vnto the law of sinne" (Rom. 7:23). This enslavement makes him unable, despite all his desires, to do good. This enslavement explains his unwillingness to either conform to the law or reveal his sin and face the judgment of the law.

3. Implications and Conclusions

So where does that leave the play's political theology? It appears to be in trouble if neither of the political theories—either the belief that a ruler will judge subjectively based on his own sins, or that a ruler will subject himself to the law he applies to others—is able to contain the spread of Angelo's sin. The Duke, Escalus, and Isabella are proven wrong in their dependence on Angelo's desire to maintain unity between the public and private bodies of the ruler. Angelo's belief that he would maintain unity between judgments of others and himself falls apart as his will for justice deteriorates in the face of his desire for Isabella. And yet, in the end of the play, justice prevails. The Duke returns to his role, uncovers what had been hidden, reveals his own machinations and arranges marriages.[3] However, the Duke's political theology, as shown, has been proven flawed, incapable both in its theory and in its execution of carrying out justice. So how is justice possible?

The answer lies in part in the difficulty many scholars have with the Duke as the agent of justice. As John Cox summed up in his review on "Shakespeare and Religion," the Duke is generally "abhor[red]" by scholars (Cox 2018, p. 7). Louise Schleiner points out that the Duke is represented in some ways as an *imitatio dei* or a "little god," just as James had portrayed himself in *Basilikon Doron*, his treatise on kingship which had been widely distributed in England in 1603 (Schleiner 1982). However, she along with Groves note ways in which this god-likeness is ironically undermined throughout the play (Groves 2007, pp. 162–80). Schleiner concludes that the Duke is at best a comedic example of a well-intentioned ruler attempting to imitate God in a corrupt society (Schleiner 1982, p. 236). Others have been less benevolent in their assessment of the Duke. Harriet Hawkins has argued that he is a troubling executor of justice and mercy because he was a poor ruler to begin with and seems to learn very little by the end of the play (Hawkins 1972, p. 73). Some point to the Duke's strange self-limitations: if he is meant to be "like power divine," why does he fail to anticipate Angelo's refusal to pardon Claudio? (Lewis 1983).[4] Although they do not put it in the same terms I have, all of these scholars grapple with the problem which the play reveals: no ruler can escape the total corruption of the will and the fallibility of human nature. Even the Duke, the rightful ruler, comes to his moment of ruling scathed and tainted by the events of the play. And yet, miraculously, wrongs are righted, evil punished, corruption exposed, and harmony in society restored. This discrepancy forces us to acknowledge a gap in the play between the way things should have worked out, and the way they actually do: an additional disunity in the world of the play.

In order for justice and mercy to prevail, another political theology must be in effect. Arguably, the source of the justice for which Isabella cries out at the end (5.1.26) is not possible if the only forces at work in the play are human ones. While earthly authorities are aligned in Renaissance political theology with heavenly ones, this play makes clear that the "demigod authority" operates differently from the way the true God would. At the beginning of the play, Claudio resigns himself to both authorities, earthly and heavenly, as he is being led away to prison:

Thus can the demigod Authority

[3] (Meilaender 2012) discusses more fully how marriage figures both politically and theologically in this play.
[4] (Lewis 1983) answers this question mostly by asserting he is not meant to be like power divine; rather Shakespeare's goal was to reveal the ruler as human and flawed rather than as godlike.

> Make us pay down for our offense, by weight,
>
> The words of heaven: on whom it will, it will;
>
> On whom it will not, so; yet still 'tis just. (1.2.112–15)

The "demigod" has the power of the law, making individuals "pay down" for their sins, an earthly imitation of heaven's authority. Interestingly, however, the verse alluded to by Claudio refers not only to God's willing punishment, but also mercy: "He hathe mercie on whome he wil, & whom he wil, he hardeneth" (Rom. 9:18). This verse comes out of a discussion about God's sovereignty and is used by Calvin and other Reformed theologians to inform doctrines of man's sinfulness and of God's irresistible grace. Paul in this chapter speaks of the limitations of man's will in the face of God, including the limitations of earthly authorities, specifically mentioning Pharaoh as an earthly ruler whom God's sovereignty hardened. This allusion early in the play is the key to understanding why justice is able to prevail in the end of the play. The demigods, Angelo and the Duke, would be unable, through their tainted wills alone, to ensure the city's return to a state of justice and the characters' return to a state of internal and external harmony. It is only through "power divine" that justice is possible.

In many readings of the text, the Duke represents this "power divine," as Angelo calls him (5.1.416–17).[5] Most recently, Benedict Whalen has argued that the Duke brings together political and spiritual justice in Act 5, making him the "allegorical figure of God" (Whalen 2014, p. 89). However, as mentioned above, for most scholars, the Duke is an unsatisfactory executor of justice, given his own flaws and flawed thinking. I would argue "power divine" is not figured in the Duke, but rather represented by the necessary but improbable events and coincidences outside of either the Duke's or Angelo's control. One comedic example of this is the unmasking of the Duke by Lucio. Ironically, the man against whom the Duke has the most hostility is also the one who reveals the Duke in his friar's robes and ends Angelo's deception. Against his will, the Duke is "mad'st a duke" (5.1.354). It is especially striking that this is done by Lucio, who in both words and actions aligns himself throughout the play with deception, sexual immorality, and injustice. His will is utterly corrupt, and yet he is providentially a part of the movement away from injustice and towards restoration. Undoubtedly, the Duke had intended to reveal himself, but it is notable that the timing is not of his choice and is physically out of his control. It is this unwilled unmasking which allows justice to proceed. However, another earlier providential event allows both mercy and justice to be balanced in that final act.

That event is the death of Ragozine, the "most notorious pirate," whose unintended substitutionary death makes possible Claudio's reprieve (4.3.76).[6] Unlike the Duke's attempt to substitute Barnadine, who is resistant to death, Ragozine dies off stage, without the Duke's authority, and outside of the willed actions of any of the characters. It is further providential that he happens to look like Claudio, making the head swap all the more plausible. Were it not for Claudio being spared, the Duke makes it clear Angelo's life would have been forfeit at the end of the play and 'measure still for measure' would have been enforced: "The very mercy of the law cries out/Most audible, even from his proper tongue,/An Angelo for Claudio, death for death" (5.1.463–65). Thus, while an Old Testament justice may have prevailed without the salvation of Claudio or the unmasking of the Duke, the restorative justice of the comedy would not have been possible without providential coincidence. As Grace Tiffany has argued, another distinctly Calvinist feature of Shakespeare's plays is that "it is not human rituals, but God's grace, working through providential time, that effects resolutions and miracles" (Tiffany 2018, p. 2).

This reading of the ending does not and perhaps should not satisfy many readers of the play. A play which exerts a great deal of effort to understand how rulers can and should execute justice within

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5 (Kirsch 1975; Gless 1979; Brad-Brook 1941) all hold variations on this position.

6 (Leggatt 1988; Byker 2016) both address the importance of the theological implications of substitution in *Measure for Measure*.

the limitations of sin ends with no human solution or earthly political theology intact. However, our lack of satisfaction is not, therefore, a fault in the play's construction. As Schleiner has mentioned, there is a useful "doubleness" to this play (Schleiner 1982, p. 236); it can be read as the triumph of a human ruler over corruption despite his fallibility, but I would suggest that if anything it gestures towards the limitations of human government within a corrupt world. Continentally, the Reformed movement, especially as it took hold in Geneva, recognized the likelihood of abuse in any system of human-run government; thus, the leaders of Geneva enacted a church government structure that, rather than being hierarchical, was democratic, ensuring a rotation and a sharing of power within the consistory (Witte 2007, pp. 4–5). *Measure for Measure* certainly does not overtly suggest democracy as a viable alternative to monarchy, but it does reveal a theo-political crack in a monarchical post-Reformation society which gestures towards why Reformed theology, even apart from the politically radical Puritan movement, would eventually lead to the collapse of the King's two bodies as a viable political theory. If all humans, including those with power, are radically corrupt and inclined towards evil, and if the inner state of the soul can only be judged and known by God, we either rely on God's providence to intervene and ensure justice, or we disperse power more widely to lessen the impact of a potentially corrupt ruler.

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Curse, Interrupted: *Richard III*, Jacob and Esau, and the Elizabethan Succession Crisis

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Abstract: A previously unexplored reference to the biblical story of Jacob and Esau in Shakespeare's *Richard III* underlines connections to the early modern dramatic preoccupation with the question of succession in the late Elizabethan era.

Keywords: Shakespeare; *Richard III*; Jacob; Esau; Bible; Genesis; Tudor; Elizabeth I; Early Modern; succession

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One of the greatest interruptions in English literature occurs in Act 1, scene 3, of *Richard III* (c. 1592–3) when Queen Margaret, the widow of Henry VI, attempts to curse Richard, but is interrupted and thwarted in the process. The subversion of the curse is a highly dramatic and linguistically rich moment in a play that has been marked, from its unique beginning,[1] as a play with a strong interest in dramatic reversals and verbal games. It is also a subversion that is entirely in character for Richard who has already shown, in the earlier *Henry VI* plays, a certain lack of respect for what a successful speech-act does. W.H. Auden observed that Richard is a character who:

> ... discovers the power of words when his father decides not to seize the crown from Henry because of an oath he had sworn to him "that he should quietly reign." Richard playfully makes up a specious verbal justification for him to violate his oath:
>
> > An oath is of no moment, being not took
> > Before a true and lawful magistrate
> > That has authority over him that swears.
> > Henry had none, but did usurp the place.
> > Then, seeing 'twas he that made you to depose,
> > Your oath, my lord, is vain and frivolous.
> > Therefore to arms! (3HVI, I.ii.15, 22–28)
>
> (Auden 2000, p. 18)

Richard's quibbles against the legitimacy of a prior speech-act in *3 Henry VI* lead inexorably to his interruption and sabotage of an emerging speech-act in *Richard III*.

But the interrupted curse in *Richard III* is far more than a tidy example of a linguistic theory or an example of Shakespeare mastery of the drama and consistent characterization over time. The interrupted curse scene in *Richard III* is a reference to the biblical story of Jacob and Esau, and is further evidence of the Elizabethan preoccupation—particularly prevalent in drama (Axton 1977; Kewes 2016, 2017, 2018; Doran and Kewes 2014)—over the problems of succession as the aging Elizabeth continued to decline to name a successor to the throne.

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[1] The famous "Now is the winter of our discontent" speech sets *Richard III* apart as the only Shakespearean play to open with a soliloquy.

1. "A Wicked Stratagem": The Interrupted Curse and the Jacob Story

Richard III is not a play that has received previous critical attention for referencing Jacob and Esau. The most famous and explicit reference to the biblical Jacob story in Shakespeare, instead, is in *The Merchant of Venice*. Here, Shylock retells the story of Jacob's breeding mottled sheep as an analogy to his own ability to make money "breed (Shakespeare 2010, 1:3:67–92)." Shylock's account of the story is accurate and highly detailed, indicating Shakespeare's exact knowledge of even this most obscure part of a biblical life story that includes far more famous cultural touchstones such as Jacob's ladder, his wrestling with an angel, and his struggles with Esau. Briefer references to other parts of Jacob's life also appear in *Comedy of Errors*, *A Winter's Tale*, *I Henry VI*, *2 Henry VI*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello* (Shaheen 1999, pp. 771–72).

Shakespeare's references to the Jacob story in *Richard III* are less explicit, and more allusive and elusive than in *Merchant*. Naseeb Shaheen, the author of the encyclopedic *Biblical References in Shakespeare's Plays*, has detailed the challenges of working with this kind of occluded reference in Shakespeare's work. He notes that while there are "undoubted references" to the bible that use the words from the bible directly, the plays are also full of harder to wrangle examples that "consist mainly of striking words and phrases that seem to be borrowed from Scripture, or else contain figures or ideas that are particularly biblical" (Shaheen 1999, p. 69). This is the nature of the Jacob references in *Richard III*. "The borrowing from Scripture is not so much verbal as it is the borrowing of an idea (Shaheen 1999, p. 70)."

The first of the borrowed ideas and striking phrases occurs when, after listening to Richard argue with Queen Elizabeth about recent political events, Margaret demands her right to give an account of Richard's ill deeds.

> Richard: Foul wrinkled witch, what mak'st thou in my sight?
>
> Queen Margaret: But repetition of what thou has marred;
>
> That will I make before I let thee go.
>
> (Shakespeare 2009, 1.3.163–5)

Reversing Jacob's challenge to his angelic wrestling partner that: "I will not let thee go except thou bless me" (Gen. 32:26),[2] Margaret warns Richard that she will not let him go and then proceeds to curse him. With that warning, the scene's inversion of the central theme of the biblical Jacob story begins.

Margaret curses those assembled on stage, shifting her attention among them. One by one she addresses Queen Elizabeth, Lord Hastings, Lord Rivers, and the Marquess of Dorset, cursing each of them in turn for the evil they have done her. Turning, at last, to Richard, she levels upon him a full eighteen lines of relentless invective:

> . . . [S]tay, dog, for thou shalt hear me.
>
> If heaven have any grievous plague in store
>
> Exceeding those that I can wish upon thee,
>
> O, let them keep it till thy sins be ripe,
>
> And then hurl down their indignation
>
> On thee, the troubler of the poor world's peace!
>
> The worm of conscience still begnaw thy soul!
>
> Thy friends suspect for traitors while thou livest,

[2] All biblical references are to *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*. 2007. Introduction by Lloyd E. Berry. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Bibles.

And take deep traitors for thy dearest friends!
No sleep close up that deadly eye of thine,
Unless it be whilst some tormenting dream
Affrights thee with a hell of ugly devils!
Thou elvish-mark'd, abortive, rooting hog!
Thou that wast seal'd in thy nativity
The slave of nature and the son of hell!
Thou slander of thy mother's heavy womb!
Thou loathed issue of thy father's loins!
Thou rag of honour! thou detested—

(1.3.215–232)

Before Margaret can cap off her curse by adding Richard's name as the object of all her cursing and derision, he interrupts her and finishes the curse with her name, thus turning all her vitriol back upon her. Margaret's error is to leave the object of her curse too long unnamed. Though her tactic increases dramatic tension, it also opens a Swiftian "blank space" into which, dangerously, any name can be inserted (Swift 2014). Never one to miss an opportunity, Richard steals her curse.

Margaret's earlier refusal to let Richard go has primed us to have Jacob in mind. With his story as context, this stolen curse takes us to the heart of the Jacob story and the stolen blessings therein. Famously, Jacob first buys his older brother Esau's birthright for some pottage, then disguises himself as Esau in order to secure a paternal blessing from their father, Isaac. In *Richard III*, Shakespeare transforms the stolen blessing into an interrupted and redirected curse. The substitution of Jacob's body and name for Esau's parallels the replacement of Margaret's name for Richard's.

We can say with some confidence that this "interrupted curse" scene that inverts the Jacob story is Shakespeare's invention. It does not appear in Holinshed, in Thomas More's *The History of King Richard the Third* (More 1513), in Thomas Legge's *Richardus Tertius* (Legge [1579] 1993), or in the anonymous play *The True Tragedie of Richard the Third* (Anonymous 1594). It is here, in other words, not because it is a commonly told story about Richard (akin to George Washington and the cherry tree, for example), but because it is something Shakespeare invented and found intriguing.

Brian Britt's *Biblical Curses and the Displacement of Tradition* argues that early moderns like Shakespeare were fascinated by the potential power and danger of curses as "religiously charged and diverse forms of powerful speech that could threaten the shaky authority of post-Reformation institutions" (Britt 2011, p. 112). Particularly intriguing was the long tradition of seeing curses as a last resort between unequals:

> For people who are victimized or deprived of self-determination and sufficient means of material existence, power can still be exercised in symbolic form, through curses. Defined for present purposes as the use of words to invoke harm upon another through supernatural means, curses by weak parties upon stronger ones can counteract the imbalance of power in such relationships. (Britt 2011, p. 59)

Curses were seen as a way to respond when "the legal system fails to ensure justice and as a deterrent to those who might wish to harm the poor and needy" (Britt 2011, p. 60). Surely, the enacting of just such a symbolic justice and influence was the disempowered Margaret's intent when she set out to curse Richard. Odd though it may seem to think of a dowager queen as disempowered, she has certainly fallen from her height of influence through her widowhood. Jane Howard and Phyllis Rackin observe as well that:

> *Richard III* is accompanied by a remarkable transformation in the representation and placement of female characters. Paradoxically, even as the female character are ennobled, they

> are also disempowered. . . . They lose the vividly individualized voices and the dangerous theatrical power that made characters like Joan and Margaret [in the *Henry VI* plays] potent threats to the masculine project of English history-making. . . . Assuming their tragic roles as pitiable victims, female characters are no longer represented as dangerous, demonic Others. Instead they conforms to the stereotypical representation of female characters, especially bereaved mothers . . . Margaret, the adulterous wife and blood thirsty warrior of the *Henry VI* plays, is transformed into a bereaved and suffering prophet of divine vengeance for the crimes of the past. (Howard and Rackin 1997, pp. 105–6)

It is in keeping with early modern preoccupations to see curses used as they are here. And Shakespeare's plays are filled with moments where the weak use the power of language to seek justice from the strong. One thinks of the Fool in *King Lear*, for example, or the scene between Lady Macduff and Ross in the fourth act of *Macbeth*. Even the unsettled quality of the scene—where a curse finds a target, but not its intended one—is particularly Shakespearean, according to Britt:

> Shakespeare's plays embody several contradictory views of curses and swearing: some are efficacious, such as the curses in *Richard III*, and others are profane and insulting . . . Shakespeare thus dramatizes the question [of] whether curses are efficacious. . . . Shakespeare has turned [drama] into a tool of justice capable of drawing out hidden motives, enforcing the genuine curse of divine judgement where human curses fail. (Britt 2011, pp. 119–20)

But a general early modern and specifically Shakespearean interest in the Jacob story and in curses may not be enough to make the case. As Shaheen suggests, allusions that are not direct quotations but merely borrowings of an idea are much harder to prove definitively. If we think the Jacob story does run beneath the interrupted curse in *Richard III*, then we must ask why Shakespeare might have had the Jacob and Esau tale on his mind when writing the play.

We know, for example, that the Jacob and Esau story was a problem for early modern sermonizers and biblical commenters. As Mark Sheridan has noted, "The deception practiced by Rebekah and Jacob posed a considerable problem for interpreters since it could hardly be accepted at face value in the light of New Testament teaching" (Sheridan 2002, p. 168). Jacob and Rebekah's trickery had to be allegorized, metaphorized, and reinterpreted to solve the problem of rooting the perfection of the lineage of Christ in the deceptions of humanity.

Henry Ainsworth (1571–1622), the dissenting English clergyman and biblical commenter, provides an example of one early modern take on the "stolen blessing" story. Addressing Gen. 27:13, "And his [Jacob's] mother said unto him, Upon me be thy curse, my son; only obey my voice, and go . . . ," he argues that it is:

> A speech of her faith, to encourage him, though it may be mixed with infirmity of carriage, for it seemeth she relied on the oracle of God, in Gen. xxv.23 "the greater shall serve the less:" which oracle Isaac might understand not of the persons of Esau and Jacob, but of the *nations* and *peoples*, their posterity; and therefore thought it his duty to give the blessing of the first birthright unto Esau, to whom by nature it belonged, and which might not be changed for affection . . . But Rebekah understood it of these very persons also, and therefore attempted this strange and perilous way, to procure the blessing unto Jacob. (Ainsworth [1616] 1843, p. 141)

In other words, Rebekah's "stage managing" of the blessing is a way to ensure that God's plan for the "greater to serve the less" is fulfilled. According to Ainsworth, it should be thought of as a preservation of God's intent rather than a circumvention of Isaac's intent and Esau's rights as the eldest son.

John Calvin, who wrote extensively about the challenges presented by this part of the Jacob story in both his *Commentaries* and in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, is decidedly less certain that Rebekah's actions are as praiseworthy. He argues:

> It truly appears ridiculous, that an old man, deceived by the cunning of his wife, should, through ignorance and error, have given utterance to what was contrary to his wish. And surely the stratagem of Rebekah was not without fault; for although she could not guide her husband by salutary counsel, yet it was not a legitimate method of acting, to circumvent him by such deceit. For, as a lie is in itself culpable, she sinned more grievously still in this, that she desired to sport in a sacred matter with such wiles. She knew that the decree by which Jacob had been elected and adopted was immutable; why then does she not patiently wait till God shall confirm it in fact, and shall show that what he had once pronounced from heaven is certain? Therefore, she darkens the celestial oracle by her lie, and abolishes, as far as she was able, the grace promised to her son. Now, if we consider farther, whence arose this great desire to bestir herself; her extraordinary faith will on the other hand appear. For, as she did not hesitate to provoke her husband against herself, to light up implacable enmity between the brothers, to expose her beloved son Jacob to the danger of immediate death, and to disturb the whole family; this certainly flowed from no other source than her faith. (Calvin n.d., Commentaries)

In Calvin's reading of the stolen blessing, Rebekah and Jacob's actions are definitely a circumvention of Isaac's wishes. More than that, Rebekah's actions, in particular, are specified as a lie, a sin, and a deceit. They demonstrate a distressing willingness on her part to force divine promises to fulfillment rather than to trust in their gradual unfolding. Just when it appears, however, that Rebekah's actions are an inexcusable presumption, Calvin provides a small defense. He cannot simply dismiss Rebekah's actions as wicked, given the future of Jacob's line, but his remark that her "certainty flowed from no other source than her faith" seems a weak response to the immediately preceding list of offenses: "she did not hesitate to provoke her husband against herself, to light up implacable enmity between the brothers, to expose her beloved son Jacob to the danger of immediate death, and to disturb the whole family."

Calvin is even more severe toward Rebekah in his discussion of her in the *Institutes*. In his presentation of her there, she reminds readers more of one of Shakespeare's Machiavellian managing characters than of a biblical matriarch. Calvin writes:

> Rebekah, again, divinely informed of the election of her son Jacob, procures the blessing for him by a wicked stratagem; deceives her husband, who was a witness and minister of divine graces, forces her son to lie; by various frauds and impostures corrupts divine truth, in fine, by exposing his promise to scorn, does what in her lies to make it of no effect. And yet, this conduct, however vicious and reprehensible, was not devoid of faith. . . . In the same way, we cannot say that the holy patriarch Isaac was altogether void of faith, I that, after he had been similarly informed of the honour transferred to the younger son, he still continues his predilection in favour of his first-born, Esau. (Calvin 1989, p. 497)

Rebekah is here transformed from a merely overly enthusiastic forwarder of God's concerns to an intentionally wicked, corrupting influence whose actions work as hard as they can to subvert a divine promise by forcing it to come true. Calvin still gives a nod toward the excuse of a mother moved by too much faith, but his characterization of her actions as "vicious and reprehensible" is much stronger and more condemnatory than in the *Commentaries*.

This focus on Rebekah as the mastermind behind the plan to finalize the theft that began with a mess of pottage appears as well in the early Tudor dramatic interlude *Jacob and Esau* (Anonymous [1568] 2017), which stages the story of the brothers' struggles for primacy. The interlude explicitly shows Jacob resisting Rebekah's urging him to take Esau's birthright and then deciding that her plan must be God's will. Later, Rebekah refers to the theft of the blessing as a matter of "policy," or politics, as distinct from theology:

> Rebecca: Old Isaac is blind, and can not see,

So that by policie he maye beguileth bee,

I shall devise howe, for no yll intent ne thought

But to bring to passe that I know god will have wrought.

(Anonymous [1568] 2017, 2.4.63–66)

These negative readings of Rebekah may have been intended to remove some of the responsibility for the stolen blessing from Jacob in order to cleanse his character. If Rebekah is the schemer and the deviser, then Jacob may be gullible, but he is at least not fully culpable.

Calvin does not seem content to let the blame rest with Rebekah, however. A little later in his *Commentaries*, he turns his attention to Jacob, whose transgressions he had initially been gentle with. Analyzing the moment in Gen. 27:19 when Jacob directly lies to his father by claiming to be Esau rather than just allowing Isaac to remain mistaken, Calvin is much harsher:

> At first Jacob was timid and anxious; now, having dismissed his fear, he confidently and audaciously lies. By which example we are taught, that when any one has transgressed the proper bounds of duty, he soon allows himself unmeasured license. Wherefore there is nothing better than for each to keep himself within the limits divinely prescribed to him, lest by attempting more than is lawful, he should open the door to Satan. I have before shown how far his seeking the blessing by fraud, and insinuating himself into the possession of it by falsehood, was contrary to faith. Yet this particular fault and divergence from the right path did not prevent the faith which had been produced by the oracle from holding on, in some way, its course. In excusing the quickness of his return by saying that the venison was brought to him by God, he speaks in accordance with the rule of piety: he sins, however, in mixing the sacred name of God with his own falsehoods. Thus, when there is a departure from truth, the reverence which is apparently shown to God is nothing else than a profanation of his glory. (Calvin n.d., Commentaries)

By this point in the Jacob story, Calvin characterizes Jacob as an audacious liar rather than as something of a dupe for his mother's persuasive tactics. Calvin cautions his readers here about the dangers of exceeding the bounds of duty, which serves as a doorway into "unmeasured license," and about the Satanic temptation of moving beyond our divinely prescribed limits. Cautions about that kind of presumptuous management of one's fate, that kind of overriding ambition regardless of consequence, should sound familiar to readers of many of Shakespeare's histories and tragedies, and suggest why Jacob and Esau seem to have been on Shakespeare's mind as he wrote about Richard III's lies and murderous ambition. Similarly, Jacob's "mixing the sacred name of God with his own falsehoods" calls to mind Richard's frequent self-conscious and false presentation of himself as an honest, modest man of faith.[3]

The Jacob and Esau story is not just a family drama. It is a drama about primogeniture, succession to a divinely ordained title, and the danger of an uncertain heir to an aged and unreliable leader. It is a political drama as well as a domestic one. It is this connection that takes us to the heart of why Jacob and Esau hide behind the scenes of *Richard III*: the Elizabethan succession crisis.

2. Who Will Be Named? The Interrupted Curse and Fears of an Interrupted Succession

As Shakespeare was writing *Richard III*, England was facing the peak of a crisis over the succession that had been brewing for decades. Indeed, Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes suggest that perhaps it would be best to think of the Elizabethan era as a long series of succession crises running from 1558 all the way through the accession of James I and VI in 1603 (Doran and Kewes 2014, p. 20). One of the major drivers of all the crises was Elizabeth I's famed equivocation on the subject of

[3] See, for example, 3.7.44ff.

marriage. Though at least 15 separate suits were pursued on behalf of a wide range of suitors, the queen seemed determined to remain undetermined. In speech after speech and diplomatic interaction after diplomatic interaction, she insisted that while naturally inclined to the single life, she understood that her duties as a queen required her to marry and produce an heir, and that she fully intended to do so, eventually. As she put it in 1566, when urged by petition to marry or at least to name a successor:

> . . . [T]heir petition, as I am informed, consisteth in two points: in my marriage and in the limitation of the succession of the crown . . . I did sent them answer by my Council I would marry, although of mine own disposition I was not inclined thereunto. . . . And were it not now I had spoken those words, I would never speak them again. I will never break the word of a prince spoken in public place for my honor sake. And therefore I say again I will marry as soon as I can conveniently, if God take not him away with whom I mind to marry, or myself, or else some other great let happen. . . . And I hope to have children; otherwise I would never marry. (Elizabeth I 2000, p. 95)

With regard to the same petition's request to deal with the succession, Elizabeth writes, "At this present, it is not convenient, nor never shall be without some peril unto you and certain danger unto me [to name a successor]" (Elizabeth I 2000, p. 95). So, not only did Elizabeth equivocate on marriage and the production of an heir, she even declined to name a successor to the Crown, on the grounds that a named successor might become the focal point for a rebellion and uprising against her. It is easy to see how, even when Elizabeth was still a reasonably young queen—only thirty-three at the time of this speech to Parliament—such equivocation would have unsettled and worried a Parliament and a people who had just experienced the rapid political and religious reversals of Edward VI and Mary Tudor. As Elizabeth aged and continued to insist that she planned to wed and provide an heir at any time, these claims became increasingly implausible. By the time Shakespeare wrote *Richard III*, Elizabeth was sixty, well past childbearing, and clearly planned to remain unmarried, no matter how she might have insisted otherwise. And, like Margaret leaving the object of her curse dangerously unnamed until the last possible moment, Elizabeth had still named no successor.

Howard Nenner and other critics have argued that the queen's equivocation and delay was a subtle power play. Nenner observes that "the queen's temporizing could be meaningful and effective only as long as there was no known and certain rule of succession. Only in this circumstance of constitutional confusion would it be possible for Elizabeth to exercise her individual preference and secure the crown for the contender of her choice" (Nenner 1995, p. 18). While that is quite likely to be the case, it would be difficult to overstate how preoccupied and worried the late Elizabethans were by the seemingly unending and possibly unsolvable succession question.

Although from a twenty-first–century perspective, James I and VI seems the obvious successor to Elizabeth; Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes provide a helpful explanation of why it is important not to let the smooth accession of James I and VI to the throne trick one into overlooking the complications of getting him there:

> First of all, James was not the only potential claimant; on the contrary, he had a disturbingly large number of rivals. By the mid-1590s, Persons named some sixteen possible airs to Elizabeth. In 1601, the civil lawyer Thomas Wilson identified twelve competitors who "gape for" the death of the Queen. "Thus you see," he declared, "this crown is not like to fall to the ground for want of heads that claim to wear it, but upon whose head it will fall is by many doubted." Alongside James, the main contenders were Edward and Thomas Seymour, the sons of Katherine Grey of the Suffolk line; Arbella, the English Stuart from a cadet line; and the Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia of Spain whose claim dated back to her fourteenth-century Lancastrian ancestor. (Doran and Kewes 2014, p. 4)

To a nation that had suffered the marriage vagaries of Henry VIII, followed by the fraught successions of Edward, Lady Jane Grey, and Mary Tudor, this list—distressingly long and filled with a troubling mixture of Protestants and Catholics—must have been a most worrying prospect.

The problem was only made worse by a lack of constitutional clarity on the subject. While many tend to assume that, although deviations had been made from time to time, the rules of succession to the English crown were clear and well understood, historians argue that this was not at all the case. Nenner observes that "historical precedent was unhelpful because it afforded justification for every hypothesis that had been advanced" (Nenner 1995, p. 26). Legal precedent was equally murky:

> As a political matter, James may have been the likely successor to Elizabeth, but as a constitutional matter it was far from certain whether he had the only right, or even the best right, to follow Elizabeth to the throne. There was simply no contemporary agreement as to whether the crown ought to be pass automatically at the death of Elizabeth to the next in the hereditary line; whether the next in the hereditary line might be passed over because of a 'legal incapacity to rule' whether the next monarch ought to be determined in parliament; or whether the queen should be exhorted in the waning days of her life to nominate and determine her own successor. (Nenner 1995, p. 13)

And Doran and Kewes emphasize that this lack of clarity was of long standing, though it had been brought into high relief by the legal complications caused by the marriages of Henry VIII, his tendency to legitimize and delegitimize his children, and his successors' attempts to settle future successions according to their own preferences:

> Disagreements about the relative merits of hereditary right, royal nomination, election by parliament (with or without the monarch at the helm) or statutory limitations of the succession were confined neither to the Elizabethan era nor even to the "long" sixteenth century . . . but they were revitalized and more fully articulated from the 1530s onward due to Henry VIII's inability to sire a son by his first wife and his failure to produce a male sibling for his heir. Henry created a legal quagmire with his three Succession Acts (1534, 1536, and 1544) and his extraordinary will of 1546 that ignored the progeny of his elder sister. Soon afterwards, Edward VI's attempts to change the succession by letters patent and Mary's toying with the idea of excluding her heretical and bastard half-sister from the crown raised further questions about what was legally and politically possible. (Doran and Kewes 2014, p. 13)

Not only did the Parliament and the people not know who would be named to the throne after the queen died, they did not even know how to know. Historical hindsight might suggest they were worried about what turned out to be a peaceful transition of power, but in the moment, people were truly afraid. Nenner reminds us that, as the queen lay dying, the navy was readied to defend England against foreign invasion, every county was told to be on high alert for civic unrest, and people brought their valuables into the city from less secure surrounding areas. "[C]ontemporaries were in no way confident that the transition to the next reign would be effected quite as effortlessly as it proved to be. There were, in fact, few who were anything but anxious over the dangers attending upon an uncertain succession." (Nenner 1995, p. 17).

As a result, it is no surprise that playwrights like Shakespeare, so attuned to the political and social concerns of their time, were also preoccupied with the problem of the succession, and had been for quite some time. Marie Axton's *The Queen's Two Bodies* provides a comprehensive look at references to succession crises in scores of dramatic works composed in England between *Gorboduc* (1566) and *King Lear* (ca. 1603), plays that are famously focused on the topic. She begins her survey by recounting an anecdote that suggests that even in 1566, Elizabeth's subjects were not just quietly worried about her unmarried state and lack of a named heir or an heir of the body; they were critical and vocal about it:

> Queen Elizabeth's presence at a marriage masque on 1 July 1566 transformed a traditional epithalamion into fine-edged criticism. . . . The young lawyers who danced before the Queen . . . were impatient with their Queen whose disinclination for matrimony and childbearing

> was becoming notorious. . . . These masquers entered the Hall to bestow Venus's golden apple, the prize for beauty. The presenter . . . took upon himself the task of Paris. Surveying the distinguished audience, he pronounced cool judgement: the bride is the most beautiful lady in the Hall because she has fulfilled her destiny in marriage. (Axton 1977, p. 1)

Axton goes on to note that this was a "blandly indirect snub to the queen," (Axton 1977, p. 1), but while it must have been indirect enough to avoid permanent offense, it is hard to see the criticism as bland. Marriage and securing the succession should be the queen's primary concerns as both a monarch and a woman, yet they are not, say the masquers. When Elizabeth attempted to banter away this kind of concern and critique, claiming to be married to the English people and also to be their mother, and thus to have no need for a literal marriage or child, " . . . the dramatists went much further. Gentlemen [dramatists] of Gray's Inn, impatient for a real child born of their Queen, pointed out the disastrous implication of her claim to be both spouse and mother of her realm by presenting the tragedy of state consequent on the unnatural marriage of Jocasta." (Axton 1977, p. 39).

Using the drama to criticize the unsettled state of the Elizabethan succession began, then, early in Elizabeth I's reign and continued until her death. Dramatic concerns about issues of succession appear nearly everywhere in Shakespeare's histories and tragedies, as various recent studies have discussed at length. John Cox devotes a chapter primarily to issues of succession in Shakespeare's histories (Cox 2007, pp. 131–60); Peter Lake provides a thorough look at questions of succession in the history plays (Lake 2017); and Lisa Hopkins considers the same questions in a broader range of Shakespeare's writings within her study about the enduring nature of such concerns (Hopkins [2011] 2016). Questions about inheritance and succession trouble such tragedies as *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. And it is not just these gravely serious plays that are haunted by succession crises. Richard Dutton argues that as the likelihood of a marriage became increasingly remote, dramatists began to focus their attentions less on urging the queen to marry and more on wishing that she had. He writes:

> Shakespeare's romantic comedies replay with ever-greater urgency a wish-fulfillment that Elizabeth had married. The spinsterly Beatrice in *Much Ado* (ca. 1598) is belatedly tricked into marrying Benedick, which helps seal the discord within Messina, a city at war without. Rosalind's "holiday" exile in Arden in *As You Like it* (ca. 1599) is inextricably linked with the process of restoring her father to his throne and thereby becoming once more its legitimate heir (but not before marrying a tried-and-tested husband). Illyria in *Twelfth Night* (ca. 1601) is trapped in a loveless, childless stasis, ruled over by a mooning duke and a mourning "Madonna"; plucky Viola injects fresh life, but the marriages this generates (including her own) are so perfunctory as to be literally incredible. (Dutton 2014, pp. 174–75)

In the middle of all this is Shakespeare's *Richard III*. Here, Shakespeare pulls together the concerns of the Elizabethan succession crises, the Jacob and Esau story, and *Richard III*. As he does so, he twists threads that entwine further the longer one looks at them. The aging woman using equivocation, rhetoric, and delay to attempt to exercise political influence—is that Elizabeth I arguing in front of Parliament? Queen Margaret cursing Richard? Or Rebekah persuading Jacob to trick his father? That family fraught with divisions and a dangerously uncertain sense of who should lead—is that the House of Tudor? The House of York? The House of Israel? That dangerous trickster who could at any moment slip an unexpected name into the line of succession—could that be Elizabeth I, or Richard III, or Jacob? And that blank space at the end of a curse or a blessing or a line of succession: What name will go there? What good or ill will result? And how will it affect the future of a great nation? The interwoven themes of all three of these histories—Jacob and Esau, *Richard III*, and Shakespeare's own historical context—peak in the moment of Margaret's interrupted curse.

As Mark Twain probably did not say, "History does not repeat itself, but it rhymes."

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Article

Raison d'état, Religion, and the Body in *The Rape of Lucrece* †

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Abstract: With an emphasis on the religious figuration of its heroine's chaste body, the present essay explores the political dynamics of *The Rape of Lucrece*. The poem draws on Roman religion and Christianity: Lucrece is an emblem of purity, with echoes of the *flaminica* or Vestal virgins, and her spotlessness anticipates Christ's. Seeing these qualities allows us to engage the poem's gender dynamics and its politics, with both of these being centered on issues of property. While *The Rape of Lucrece* has been enlisted as an artifact of late Elizabethan republican culture, its depiction of the expulsion of the Tarquins need not lead us to that conclusion. It is nonetheless a product of the political anxieties of Elizabeth's final years.

Keywords: Shakespeare; *The Rape of Lucrece*; republicanism; *raison d'état*; religion; property; body

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By the measures of the Shakespeare industry, *The Rape of Lucrece* is a work rarely noticed, though the poem's gender dynamics, centered on the rape of its fascinating heroine, have sparked some discussion. Setting the stage for that discussion some forty years ago, Coppélia Kahn perceptively associated Lucrece's suicide with "primitive, nonmoral standards of pollution and uncleanness" characteristic of "the attitudes toward female sexuality underlying Roman marriage".[1] The poem's Roman values have suggested to some that it is a cultural contribution to a late Elizabethan "monarchical republic".[2] In this vein, it has recently been described as favorably imagining a politics where patriarchal power is "not lodged in the body of a single individual but diffused throughout the male citizen body".[3] Andrew Hadfield's excellent book-length study of Shakespeare and republicanism takes the poem's dedication to Southampton, a member of the Essex circle, as a sign of its anti-absolutist spirit, in stride with George Buchanan's account of Tarquin in *De jure regni apud Scotos*.[4] Resistance theory, in Hadfield's telling, is in Shakespeare's moment ineluctably twined with republican thought. Thus the poem's narration of events leading to the establishment of the Roman republic signals an affinity for republican limits on monarchical power.

At first glance that reading makes perfect sense, but one must wonder if it really holds up to scrutiny—it is something like determining *Hamlet* to be a play smiling upon Norwegian expansionism.

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1 Kahn (1976, p. 49). On gender issues in the poem, see also see Vickers (1985); MacDonald (1994); and Quay (1995). Placing these issues in broader context of the period's various versions of the Lucretia story are MacDonald (1994, esp. 87–89), and Carter (2011, chp. 3), which explores connections between Lucrectia and Philomela. On renditions of Lucretia more generally, see Donaldson (1982); on the rape of Lucretia as figuring humanist enterprise in the period, see Jed (1989).

2 This influential phrase originates with Collinson (1987).

3 Kunat (2015, p. 3).

4 Hadfield (2005, p. 139). Also arguing for the republicanism of the poem is Patterson (1993, pp. 297–311). Colin Burrow persuasively emphasizes the importance of Paulus Marsus' edition of Ovid's *Fasti*, which includes extensive commentary drawing parallels to Livy and other classical sources; see his introduction in Shakespeare (2002, pp. 48–49). Marsus' influence is also noted in Baldwin (1950).

Is a prequel to the advent of the Roman republic necessarily republican in spirit? Certainly the story we get in *The Rape of Lucrece* should make us pause before answering in the affirmative. Though we see the evils of a tyrant's son acting on criminal desires, the expulsion of the Tarquins does not necessarily strike us as leading inexorably to harmonious order. We see, rather, that the republic is built on the ambitions of nobles and relies on the whims of the plebs. And we never see it founded. The poem ends with two perfunctory lines on public assent to the banishment of the Tarquins: "The Romans plausibly did give consent/To Tarquin's everlasting banishment".[5] Colin Burrow remarks that "consent" in the final lines is more complicated than in the poem's argument, coming closer to William Fulbecke's view that the transfer of power from kings to consuls excluded "the people from all right and interest in public affairs".[6] Prepared as Shakespeare was by Livy's and Ovid's versions of the Lucretia story, every early modern reader knows what comes after the expulsion of the Tarquins, but it is striking that the poem does not care to draw our gaze to the breaking dawn of a new order. Livy, by contrast, does not miss the opportunity. In his account, Brutus' vow of revenge is explicitly a vow to end Roman kingship: "I take you, gods, to witness, that I will pursue Lucius Tarquinius Superbus and his wicked wife and all his children, with sword, with fire, aye with whatsoever violence I may; and that I will suffer neither them nor any other to be king in Rome!"[7] Ovid, too, finishes the story on a republican note, with an emphatic statement on the end of kingship: "That day was the last of kingly rule [*dies regnis illa suprema fuit*]".[8] If we want an early modern example, we might look to Thomas Heywood's *The Rape of Lucrece: A True Roman Tragedie*, which ends with Brutus as a consul waging war against the Tarquins.[9] Shakespeare's conclusion is decidedly less republican than that of his main classical sources and that of his contemporary Heywood—for explicit association of the poem's action with constitutional change, we must turn to its argument, which Shakespeare may or may not have written.[10] One furthermore searches in vain for citizens embodying Ciceronian *magnanimitas* in this "republican" poem. The best candidate is Lucrece, who of course does not live to see the end of Roman kingship. Much closer to the surface are the values of *raison d'état*: political prudence and the pursuit of interest. These are certainly the preeminent qualities of Shakespeare's Brutus, who casts aside his disguise and seizes the political opportunity of Lucrece's death: "Brutus who plucked the knife from Lucrece' side ... Began to clothe his wit in state and pride" (1807–9). Not for the only time in the poem, "state" has multiple registers, here suggesting not only dignity, but a dignity befitting affairs of state. In addition, we soon learn that Brutus had allowed himself to be taken for a fool out of "deep policy" (1815), placing him very explicitly in *raison d'état* thought, in which it is a commonplace that a potential rival keep a low profile during the reign of a tyrant. *Prudentia* comes to have a very prominent place in the poem's narrative development: Brutus' political prudence at poem's end rights the imbalance created by Collatinus' imprudent boasting at its beginning.

Indeed we should expect *The Rape of Lucrece* to be influenced by *raison d'état*, which was very much in vogue at the time of its writing. In studies of English literature, cynical and pragmatic politics are often associated with Machiavelli, but this tends to overlook the broad influence of such writers as Francesco Guicciardini and Giovanni Botero, the latter of whom especially was responding to the broad

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5 Shakespeare (2002, p. 10). Further, parenthetical references to *The Rape of Lucrece* are to this edition, available in Oxford Scholarly Editions online.

6 Burrow introduction to Shakespeare (2002, pp. 46, 73); see also Belsey (2001, p. 334). Burrow and Belsey point to Fulbecke (1601, p. 1): "When vainglorious Tarquine the last of the Romaine kings for the shamefull rape of Lucrece committed by one of his sonnes, was banished from Rome & Consuls succeeded ... the Romaines changed gold for brasse, and loathing one king suffered manie tyrants". Burrow describes this view as "Tacitean"; though it has debts to the kind of political analysis associated with Renaissance Tacitism, Tacitus himself did look so negatively upon the end of Roman kingship, as is shown below.

7 Livy (1919, pp. 204–05) [1.59.1].

8 Ovid (1931) 2.852.

9 Heywood (1608) sig. K1r. For a recent reading of this play, see Howard (2016).

10 Platt (1975) also notes that the final stanza is "silent about the change in regime," and that the poem's "main and constant theme" is tyranny (64), but nonetheless describes *The Rape of Lucrece* as "republican in sentiment and focus" (p. 76).

appetite for *raison d'état* by seeking to clarify and assemble its core principles in a sort of handbook. Guicciardini's history of Italy first appears in English translation in 1579, and Botero's *Della ragion di stato* is first published in Venice in 1589, quickly to become something of a sensation, with further editions in 1590, 1596, and 1598.[11] In addition are the many interpreters of Tacitus, including, most famously, Justus Lipsius, whose *Politicorum* first appeared on the Continent in 1589, was published in London in 1590, and translated into English by William Jones in 1594.[12] This is the same year as the first publication of *The Rape of Lucrece* and both texts were printed by Richard Field, though one wonders how much to make of these coincidences. Maurizio Viroli and Richard Tuck have made clear that *raison d'état* was very much at the center of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century political discourse.[13] And while Hadfield's Essex circle is a hub of republican activity, Tuck just as plausibly frames their politics in terms of revived interest in Tacitus, in which light he views the famous performance of *Richard II* on the eve of Essex's ill-fated rebellion.[14]

The Rape of Lucrece speaks directly to the concerns animating *raison d'état*, and its particular brand of Tacitism. In the poem's political world *potestas* is divorced from *auctoritas*, leaving us with a skeptical, if not cynical, perspective on the republican politics to emerge from the wreckage of Tarquin's reign.[15] Seeing the poem in this way allows us to bring together conversations on its gender dynamics and its politics: its presentation of a crisis in authority is achieved in no small part through the over-determined figuring of Lucrece's body. The relationship between property and political power is central to that figuring. And religion is fundamental to that figuring, too. We will explore religion as the poem itself demands, in a way that spans Roman religion and Christianity, summoning the resources of both to lend its heroine an aura of purity accentuating the profanity of the political. In this light *The Rape of Lucrece* does not embody a republican spirit so much as it reflects late Elizabethan skepticism on sacred kingship and fears of self-seeking factions awaiting to seize power after the death of the heirless queen.[16]

Tarquin the Proud, father of the poem's Tarquin, represents the last in a line of Roman priest-kings, who were not only supreme magistrates but also held the title *rex sacrorum*. Romulus inaugurates this tradition with what Georges Dumézil calls the "trifunctional" nature of ancient kingship, as sovereign, general, and high priest—with formidable learning, Dumézil traces commonality in this respect with Yayati, the "first king" of the Vedic texts, and thence to Iranian and Irish analogues.[17] The religious function of Roman kingship is thought to have become more fully institutionalized with Romulus' successor, Numa, who in his fabled reign of peace and plenty established the temples and rites of Roman religion.[18] Tacitus takes a dim view of Numa's innovations as a form of absolutism, with laws protecting the liberties of the commons becoming possible after the expulsion of Tarquin: "after the absolute sway of Romulus, Numa imposed on his people the bonds of religion and a code dictated by Heaven . . . . Upon the expulsion of Tarquin, the commons, to check senatorial factions, framed a large number of regulations for the protection of their liberties or the establishment of concord".[19] The negotiation between self-interested senators and self-interested commoners is certainly relevant to the picture of Shakespeare's poem that we will paint.

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[11] Guicciardini (1579); Botero (2017, pp. xxxv–xxxvi).
[12] Lipsius (1590, 1594).
[13] See Viroli (1992) esp. chp. 6; Tuck (1993) esp. chp. 2. For an illumining overview of *raison d'état* in the period, see Burke (1991).
[14] Tuck (1993, pp. 105–60).
[15] The reading of *The Rape of Lucrece* here offered grows out of the engagement of *raison d'état* and questions of authority in my *Sovereignty: Seventeenth-Century England and the Making of the Modern Political Imaginary*, (OUP, 2020).
[16] On sacred kingship in the reign of Elizabeth and its relevance to Shakespeare, and *Hamlet* in particular, see McCoy (2002) esp. chp. 1 and 3.
[17] Dumézil (1973, pp. 108–10, 119).
[18] See Forsythe (2005, pp. 97–101).
[19] Tacitus (1931, pp. 562–67) [*Annals*, 3.26–7].

The nature of Roman kingship ought to color how we read the poem's beginning, in which Collatine "unwisely" boasts of his wife's chastity (10). In the poem's terms, the boast is a property claim, and as such carries an inherent challenge to absolute rule: Collatine is not only pointing to his possession of a rare jewel, but also to his confidence in the integrity of his legacy and therefore his possession of Collatium beyond his natural years. Samuel Johnson has such things in mind when declaring the "chastity of women" to be that upon which "all the property in the world depends".[20] Tarquin's "lust-breathèd" flight is described in a way subtly situating Lucrece within these property relationships, first mentioning "Collatium," then "Collatine," and finally "Lucrece the chaste" (3–7). Lucrece's chastity may be the target Tarquin is pursuing, but that target from the very outset is tightly associated with her husband's demesne, an association to be borne in mind when in the next stanza we hear of Collatine's brag: "he, the night before in Tarquin's tent, / Unlocked the treasure of his happy state" (15–16). "State" here takes on multiple meanings, referring to Collatine's general condition, to his marriage, and to his dominion, all of which hinge upon Lucrece's chastity.[21] The last, political sense of the term was one that Shakespeare had used before, in Northumberland's accusation of Richard II: "No more: but that you reade / These accusations, and these grieuous Crymes ... Against the State, and Profit of this Land".[22] Collatium is a commonwealth in miniature, and, given that in this text's frame story all other Roman lords' claims of their wives' chastity have proven to be dubious, it has distinguished itself as a commonwealth of unique integrity. Or, as we will explore more fully, it is a commonwealth that makes present at the site of Lucrece's body the overlapping and tightly associated meanings of integrity: political, moral, and physical.

References to Lucrece as property and polity certainly recur in the text. In a long digression, Tarquin's desire for Lucrece is cast as covetousness (134), and we learn that human striving for "honour, wealth, and ease" can often lead to the kind of "thwarting strife" where one of these is sacrificed for the sake of the other: "As life for honour in fell battle's rage, / Honour for wealth, and oft that wealth doth cost / The death of all" (145–47). As the digression ends and we turn our attention back to Tarquin, covetousness and lust are elided: "Such hazard now must doting Tarquin make, / Pawning his honour to obtain his lust" (155–56). In later casting away his doubts, he likens himself to a merchant worrying about the fate of valuable goods at sea: "Pain pays the income of each precious thing: / Huge rocks, high winds, strong pirates, shelves, and sands / The merchant fears, ere rich at home he lands" (334–36). If Lucrece is figured as valuable property, she is equally figured as a realm vulnerable to conquest. In contemplating his attack on her, Tarquin imagines Collatine rushing home to prevent a "siege that hath engirt his marriage" (221), a language of conquest most pronounced, and given strong erotic charge, as he later gazes on Lucrece's sleeping body:

> Her breasts, like ivory globes circled with blue,
>
> A pair of maiden worlds unconquered:
>
> Save of their lord no bearing yoke they knew,
>
> And him by oath they truly honourèd.
>
> These worlds in Tarquin new ambition bred,
>
> Who like a foul usurper went about
>
> From this fair throne to heave the owner out. (407–13)

A rightful claim, with its fully solemnified founding moment of a marriage vow, is opposed to conquest by force, here styled usurpation motivated by base ambition.

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[20] Boswell (1964, p. 209). This remark, so apposite to *The Rape of Lucrece*, is noted in Kahn (1976, p. 60).
[21] See *OED*, 'state,' *sb.* 2, 15.c, 27.
[22] Shakespeare, *Richard II*, 4.1.A68-71. All references to Shakespeare's plays are to Shakespeare (2017).

Tarquin's crime is thus cast as both theft and usurpation. But the poem also plays up the fact that Collatine's boasts on Lucrece's chastity do in fact place limits on the power of the house of Tarquin. Early modern questions of absolute and limited monarchy often revolve around the subject's right to hold property. In the absolutist view, the subject cannot make a property claim against the sovereign; such a right obtains only between subjects. "Unto Majestie, or Soveraigntie," declares Jean Bodin, "belongeth an absolute power, not subject to any law," and that absolute power can "dispose of the goods and lives, and of all the state at his pleasure".[23] Though the prince is not bound by human law, he is bound by "the lawes of God and nature".[24] Tarquin, of course, does not feel so bound. Arguments for limited monarchy chip away at this absolute right to dispose of subjects' property. Even Bodin provides a soft form of this limit in stating that a sovereign may not be bound by the law, but is bound by contract, the latter being a matter of private agreement: "the law dependeth of the will and pleasure of him that hath the soveraigntie . . . but the contract betwixt the prince and his subjects is mutual, which reciprocally bindeth both parties".[25] Much more radical is the view of the Monarchomachs, which places considerable weight on subjects' property rights in a broader effort to place *lex* above *rex*. François Hotman distinguishes between the king's patrimony and the king's domain: the former "belongs to the king himself" and the king can "alienate it by his own will," whereas "simple ownership of the latter is that of the body of the people as a whole, or of the commonwealth, while the usufruct is the king's [*usufructus autem penes Regem*]".[26] As usufructuary, the king not only cannot alienate the property of his dominion from its rightful owners, the people, but is also obliged to maintain its value. In the *Vindiciae, contra tyrannos*, Brutus goes one step further: since the king does not have absolute title to the fruits of his dominion, so "the title of king does not signify an inheritance, or a property or a usufruct, but a function and a procuratorship". This applies equally to the royal patrimony and to the goods of subjects: "kings are only administrators of the royal patrimony, not proprietors or usufructuaries; . . . since this is so, they are clearly still less able to bestow upon themselves the ownership [*proprietas*], the use, or the fruits, either of anyone's private belongings, or of the public belongings of individual municipalities".[27] Should a king seek to deprive a subject of his property without common consent, then he has violated the custodial nature of his office and alienated himself from his claim to lordship. Such arguments on the relationship between property and sovereignty often turn their attention to Rome. In one telling, the *lex regia* records a transfer of sovereignty from the people to the king. In the Monarchomach version, this is not a transfer so much as it is a delegation of authority, so that, as Daniel Lee has shown, the people retain "their collective title of ownership, just as a landlord who leases or mortgages a fief to a tenant still retains the rights of ownership".[28]

The relevance to *The Rape of Lucrece* will be clear. Tarquin seeks to possess and to conquer Lucrece, and, by extension, to disrupt Collatine's title to her and to his dominion. A member of the house of Tarquin flexes in absolutist style two of the three functions of ancient kingship, those of sovereign and of general. But the poem renders such flexion an act of brute force at odds with princely virtue. Absent is the kind of monarchy that would forestall the desire of subjects to limit sovereign power through property claims. Rather, we see everywhere the rapacious attitude toward property characteristic of tyrannous rule, which inevitably provokes a backlash. Tarquin leaves the siege of Ardea, an effort to impose Rome's will on a town hovering between dependence and independence, and, in Livy's

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23 Bodin (1606, p. 88). On Lucrece as possession, see also Belsey (2001), esp. 317–19.
24 Ibid., p. 92.
25 Ibid., p. 93.
26 Hotman (1972, p. 255). In Livy's telling, attitudes on property distinguish Tarquin from his predecessor, Servius: where Servius secured his reign by dividing conquered land amongst citizens, thus expanding his base of support, Tarquin used precisely this populism to foment opposition to Servius in the senate; see Livy, *History*, 1.46.
27 Brutus (1994, pp. 125, 127).
28 Lee (2016, p. 126).

account, an effort to plunder the wealth of the Rutuli.[29] And by assaulting and devaluing Collatine's property, Tarquin has proven himself to be an untrustworthy usufructuary. In their lament after Lucrece's death, Collatine and Lucretius try to outdo each other in their grief over her lost value: "The one doth call her his, the other his, / Yet neither may possess the claim they lay" (1793–94).[30] Under Tarquin the Proud's tyrannous rule they have no means of seeking remedy for the harm they have been dealt, making rebellion the only possible course of action. Shakespeare's presentation of this moment hews closely to Machiavelli's *Discorsi*:

> [Tarquin the Proud] was expelled not because his son Sextus had raped Lucretia but because he had broken the laws of the kingdom and governed it tyrannically, as he had taken away all authority from the Senate and adapted it for himself . . . . For if Tarquin had lived like the other kings and Sextus his son had made that error, Brutus and Collatinus would have had recourse to Tarquin and not to the Roman people for vengeance against Sextus . . . . For when men are governed well they do not seek or wish for any other freedom.[31]

In Machiavelli's reading, the tyrant's impulse to run roughshod over law and tradition produces rebellion, as subjects cannot expect appeals to law or tradition to be heard. And here, as in the passage of Tacitus we have already seen, this lack of good government produces a clamoring after liberties, which can be a public good if also one vexed by competition, instability, and disruption.

The point on good monarchical government receives strong emphasis in the poem. In her appeals for mercy, Lucrece describes the kind of monarchy at the heart of harmonious order:

> Thou art not what thou seem'st, and if the same,
>
> Thou seem'st not what thou art, a god, a king;
>
> For kings like gods should govern everything.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> This deed will make thee only loved for fear,
>
> But happy monarchs still are feared for love.
>
> With foul offenders thou perforce must bear,
>
> When they in thee the like offences prove.
>
> If but for fear of this, thy will remove.
>
> For princes are the glass, the school, the book,
>
> Where subjects' eyes do learn, do read, do look. (600–2, 610–16)

Lucrece is urging Tarquin to embody an idealized monarchical authority. Strikingly, that monarch is unconstrained by law, but must be cognizant of the example he sets for subjects. Tarquin's internal government ought to approach god-like impeccability and be the foundation of right rule; it is instead cast in disorder by his unruly "will," a violent appetite which also threatens political disorder. The passage also implies that the king with proper self-government can justly "govern everything," positively imagining enlightened absolutism. If we style this a republican poem, we overlook such complexities. That Lucrece is utterly powerless before a monarch who refuses to govern his desires shows how absolute rule shades into tyranny if left unchecked. That certainly feels like a republican sentiment. But her expression in this crucial scene of an idealized version of monarchial authority is the most earnest political yearning in the text: "I sue for exiled majesty's repeal" is a desire in the poem that goes unanswered, certainly by Tarquin though also by the political machinations of Brutus (640).

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29 Livy (1919, pp. 196–97) [1.57.1].
30 Belsey also notes the emphasis on possession in this moment; see Belsey (2001, pp. 317–18).
31 Machiavelli (1996, p. 217) [3.5].

And it feels like more than a rhetorical flourish motivated by her dire situation: we would search the poem in vain for a similarly idealized expression of the virtues of republican government. Republics may secure liberties, especially those centered on property, but authority in the richest sense of the term is attached to a monarch who is a pattern of virtue.

This leads us to consider the third function of kingship, the religious function, by which ancient kings occupied the highest priesthood in the realm. From this quality Tarquin is most thoroughly alienated. Much more than a lapse in princely virtue or a "shame to knighthood" (197), his violent, destructive desires are consistently figured as bestial, even demonic.[32] Lucrece awakes to find Tarquin in her bedchamber and starts as if "she hath beheld some ghastly sprite, / Whose grim aspect sets every joint a-shaking" (451–52). Even as he is contemplating his attack on Lucrece, we are made aware of his distance from religion, which he dismisses outright: "Who fears a sentence or an old man's saw / Shall by a painted cloth be kept in awe" (244–45). Such internal debate between "frozen conscience and hot burning will" is a "graceless" mock of Protestant disputation culture, from which Tarquin further distances himself in anticipating easy, external forgiveness for his crime: "The blackest sin is cleared with absolution" (354). Burrow rightly points out in his edition that "absolution" does not necessarily carry a Roman Catholic charge; the term appears in the general confession of *The Book of Common Prayer*, but there it is God who grants "absolution and remission" of sins. Tarquin seems to be imagining a less exacting, and less penetrating, confessor.

The point here is not that he is a graceless Roman Catholic in a Protestant poem, but rather that the language of grace is deployed to emphasize Tarquin's distance from divine order. And this bears directly on the poem's imagining of political order, because the sacred aura that ought to cling to members of the house of Tarquin is transferred to the chaste body of Lucrece. The contrast could not be more pronounced in the scene of the rape itself:

> Here, with a cockatrice' dead-killing eye,
> He rouseth up himself, and makes a pause,
> While she the picture of pure piety,
> Like a white hind under the gripe's sharp claws,
> Pleads in a wilderness where are no laws,
> To the rough beast that knows no gentle right,
> Nor aught obeys but his foul appetite. (540–46)

In *Amoretti* 49, published the year after *Lucrece*, Spenser more conventionally uses the cockatrice as a figure for his beloved's eyes, with their "powre to kill".[33] Here it takes on a much more sinister charge, reinforced by the sharp claws of the "gripe," most often read as a griffin. Again this is reminiscent of Spenser, who refers to this rapacious mythological beast, and lends it a demonic aspect, in *The Faerie Queene*, with both poets drawing on its traditional association with covetousness.[34] Especially relevant is the vision in Daniel 7, with its four beasts representing iniquitous earthly rule, the first of which is a griffin transformed into a human and whose monstrosity is let loose in the world: "The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it".[35] In the vision, the thrones of these beasts are "cast down" to make way for the "Son of man" who emerges

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32 Shakespeare will later make the same association in Macbeth's dagger speech: "With Tarquin's rauishing [strides], towards his designe / Moues like a ghost" (2.1.55–56).
33 Spenser (1989), *Amoretti* 49, 2.
34 Spenser (2001), *Faerie Queene* 1.5.8, where Sansfoy is likened to a griffin, and 2.11.8, where griffins are among the "misshapen wightes" attacking the House of Alma.
35 Dan 7.4.

from the "clouds of heaven" and is given "an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which should not be destroyed".[36]

This resonance with Daniel makes Lucrece's "pure piety" an anticipation of Christ's, an association also made at the moment of her death. In an oddly convoluted image, two streams of blood, red and black, pour from her chest wound at the end of the poem, with the impure blood "that false Tarquin stained" being surrounded by water:

About the mourning and congealèd face

Of that black blood a wat'ry rigol goes,

Which seems to weep upon the tainted place,

And ever since, as pitying Lucrece' woes,

Corrupted blood some watery token shows,

And blood untatined still doth red abide,
Blushing at that which is so putrefied. (1743–50)

Aristotle had associated black blood with impurity.[37] But the image equally recalls the blood and water draining from the pierced side of Jesus (John 19.34), here adapted to Lucrece in a way equally recalling Saint Augustine's famous reading of her, namely that Christian belief, unlike its Roman counterpart, would offer her a path to redemption even if she had consented to Tarquin's advances.[38] But of course, the presence of the black blood also separates Lucrece from Christ: for all that her chastity is strongly associated with heavenly purity throughout the poem, she is at one remove from Christ's sinlessness. In the poem's thicket of religious signification, Roman and Christian, the corruption of Lucrece is not presented as a merely pagan concern easily transcended by the soul's capacity for Redemption. Her loss of purity cuts deeper.

Lucrece nonetheless remains closer to heavenly purity than are the poem's other characters. That is obvious in Lucrece's appeals to Tarquin, where she most fully embodies the voice of virtue. But it is also true of the fascinating account of her relationship to Collatine. Even as her status as property recurs throughout the poem, Lucrece's inner virtue remains beyond her husband's possession: in Tarquin's tent he "Unlocked the treasure of his happy state, What priceless wealth the heavens had him lent / In the possession of his beauteous mate" (16–18). Dynamics of possession are highly charged in the poem, and we should be attentive to them. Here Collatine possesses his mate, but this treasure's real source of value is possessed by the heavens. Or, put differently, heaven retains ownership of Lucrece's virtue and Collatine is a usufructuary. Just as the poem suggests limits on monarchy in associating Tarquin's encroachments on property as tyrannical and morally corrupt, here limits are placed on Collatine's property rights vis-a-vis his wife's inner beauty. The poem draws a conclusion from Augustine's reading with radical implications in terms of gender and marriage: if Lucrece's soul has an untouchable purity, then that purity must have a heavenly source. Heaven's king cannot be alienated of his property, so Collatine cannot lay claim to Lucrece's virtue. That is not a conclusion in which *The Rape of Lucrece* is especially invested. If marriage does not touch upon internal properties, then the critique intended may take aim at certain interpretations of the marital bond rather than on marriage per se: to be "one flesh" is to be united only in flesh. Here again, as with Tarquin's brief remark on the ease of absolution, heated confessional controversies are suggested rather than fully

[36] Dan 7.9–12.
[37] Aristotle (1965, pp. 218–19) [3.19].
[38] See Augustine (1957, pp. 86–87) [1.19]: "she should not have killed herself if it was possible to engage in penance that would gain her credit with her false gods". The claim follows Augustine's critique of the Roman celebration of Lucretia: if she did not consent to Tarquin, then her suicide is the unjust murder of an innocent; and if she did consent, then she should not be celebrated for her purity (pp. 84–87). See also the discussion of the violation of captured virgins on 75–77 [1.16].

engaged: the poem does not want to come down on any particular side but it does seem colored, or at least tinted, by the religious debates with which it is surrounded.

Much more significant is what Lucrece's heavenly virtue implies about Roman religion: if the poem stages the inauguration of the Roman republic, then it also stages a historical moment when the bodies of women come to fullest prominence in Roman religion. Once kings are eliminated, then the tight association of political and religious supremacy in the body of the king falls, too. Coming first to mind will be Vestal virgins, who play a prominent part in the age of the kings and in the republic—according to Plutarch, it is a Vestal virgin who is widely held to have given birth to Romulus.[39] The connection between Lucretia and Vesta was certainly apparent to Middleton, whose 1600 poem *The Ghost of Lucrece* is rife with references to the deity: "Rape ... hath sepulchred in the shade of dust / *Dianaes* milken robe, and *Vestaes* shield".[40] Even more relevant for our purposes is the *flaminica*, wife of the *flamen dialis*. The republican replacement for the king's status as high priest is the *sacerdos publicus*, an appellation most often applied to the *flamen dialis*. While his office entitled him to a seat in the senate, that right was a later development and not always exercised, and many of the strictures imposed upon him suggest that he must operate at one remove from the dust and heat of daily life, to lend him something of the untouchability of a god. The *flaminica*, selected according to strict rules centered on purity, had a more direct association with sanctifying the business of government and daily life: Macrobius tells us that "it is the custom for the wife of the flamen to sacrifice a ram to Jupiter in the Regia on every market day", which also became days of public business.[41] It is the *flaminica* who enters the space of sovereignty to bless its presiding over economic and legal affairs.

I do not intend to suggest a close, direct parallel between Lucrece and the Vestal virgins or the *flaminica*. But Shakespeare's poem does draw on these politico-religious functions assigned to women in presenting a chaste Lucrece as the character against whom political legitimacy is measured. Awareness of these aspects of Roman civic religion where "pure" women feature prominently lends especial significance to Tarquin's identification of Lucrece as worthy of worship when he is contemplating rape:

> Fair torch, burn out thy light, and lend it not
>
> To darken her whose light excelleth thine;
>
> And die, unhallowed thoughts, before you blot
>
> With your uncleanness that which is divine.
>
> Offer pure incense to so pure a shrine. (190–94)

The more loosely figurative contrast between light and dark shades quickly into a language more pointedly invoking religious ritual—"unhallowed," "uncleanness," "incense," "shrine".[42] In doing violence to Lucrece, Tarquin is doing violence to the entire economy of Roman worship, and the political order to which it is bound.[43] Just as with the issues of property we have explored, we get a sense of Tarquin being alienated from authority before his attack on Lucrece occurs.

It is significant that in calling for revenge, Lucrece is no longer able to invoke her purity in unqualified terms, becoming distanced from the quality on which the Roman religious function of women depends. When she has Collatine and the assembled lords pledge vengeance on her attacker, she is less divine than previously, deploying languages of chivalry and of legal trial: "Knights by their oaths should right poor ladies' harms", she pronounces, and soon after wonders "What is the quality

[39] Plutarch (1914, pp. 96–97) [*Lives*, "Romulus," 3].
[40] Middleton (1600) sig. B3r. On Vesta, see also Kahn (1976, pp. 50–51).
[41] Macrobius (2011, pp. 200–1) [1.16.30]. See also Dumézil (1973, pp. 119–24).
[42] See Burrow n. ad. 192, that "unhallowed" was just coming in the 1590s to develop the sense "wicked" (*OED* 2) as opposed to the stronger sense of "not formally hallowed or consecrated" (*OED* 1).
[43] In a less religious key, Miola (1983) similarly notes that "Lucrece resides in the middle of the Aristotelian and Ciceronian series of concentric circles that expand outward to include the family, household, city, nation, and world .... Tarquin's rape of Lucrece violates all the circles of social order that surround her" (pp. 24–25).

of my offence . . . May any terms acquit me from this chance?" (1694, 1702, 1706). At this moment the concerns raised by Augustine come to the fore, though that effect is achieved by cleaving to Livy in a way that shows Roman values to be leading Lucrece on the path to self-destruction. In Shakespeare as in Livy, Lucrece asserts her innocence. "Though my gross blood be stained with this abuse," she states in *The Rape of Lucrece*, "Immaculate and spotless is my mind" (1655–56).[44] In both texts the assembled lords agree with this sentiment, and in the poem "all at once began to say / Her body's stain her mind untainted clears" (1709–10). But Lucrece is too much in thrall to a religious and cultural fixation on female purity, as is so visible in Shakespeare's poem when she gazes upon the Troy tapestry and wishes she could tear at Helen's beauty with her nails (1471–72).[45] She imposes the punishment of death on herself so that other women who have been raped do not find mercy: "'No, no,' quoth she, 'No dame hereafter living / By my excuse shall claim excuse's giving'" (1714–15). This again echoes Livy's account, where Lucretia declares, "I do not absolve myself from punishment; nor in time to come shall ever unchaste woman live through the example of Lucretia".[46] The close proximity to Livy throughout this scene makes the more obvious an important departure. When Livy's Lucretia declares herself guiltless, her death is offered as evidence of her innocence: "my body only has been violated; my heart is guiltless *as death shall be my witness* [*mors testis erit*]".[47] Shakespeare's Lucrece states that her soul will "in her poisoned closet yet endure" (1659), playing up the distance between Roman honorable death and Christian heavenly reward. As with the allusion to the griffin of Daniel 7, we are made aware of a Christian dispensation soon to shatter Roman religion like a potter's vessel.

As I have suggested already, it would be terribly reductive to see this elevation of Christianity above Roman religion as the point of the poem. Christianity, rather, enables a spiritual redemption of which Lucrece cannot yet be aware, even as it also disrupts the kind of unified political authority that she, and the poem, seem so strongly to desire. No Christian monarch can be *rex sacrorum* in the pre-republican Roman sense. In addition, until Christ's reign, it is, to return to the language of Daniel 7, our fate to be governed by griffins, flesh-eating bears, winged leopards, and horned beasts, placing enlightened and harmonious politics at one remove from history, in prophetic mode. *The Rape of Lucrece* thus stands as a meditation on the imperfection of political forms, monarchical and republican, which look very much like mechanisms of wielding power. Sometimes these mechanisms are thoroughly corrupt, sometimes modestly so, but, as in the *raison d'état* writers, the pursuit of interest is their lifeblood. Republican settlement, which the poem significantly downplays, does not solve these problems of human government, which are equally visible in Shakespeare's other works of the 1590s, whether on English or Roman history: the *Henry VI* plays, *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard III*, *Richard II*, *King John*, and *Julius Caesar*. In these works, tyranny typically leads to rebellion, but attempts to embody the role of priest-king, visible in Richard II, lead to their own kind of instability. If *The Rape of Lucrece* is not entirely brimming with the spirit of monarchical republicanism, it is nonetheless very much a product of Elizabeth's final years, with their anxieties on transitions of power, their skepticism of a royal authority uniting church and state, and their worries about the kind of interest-driven, factional politics set to emerge from the ashes of a monarchical line.

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[44] Cf. Livy (1919, pp. 202–3) [1.58.7].
[45] For readings of the Troy tapestry scene, see Benedict J. Whalen's contribution to this special issue, Whalen (2018); see also Maus (1986, pp. 79–82) and MacDonald (1994, pp. 91–96).
[46] Livy (1919, pp. 202–3) [1.58.10].
[47] Livy (1919, pp. 202–3) [1.58.7]; emphasis mine.

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Article

"For One's Offence Why Should so Many Fall"?: Hecuba and the Problems of Conscience in *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Hamlet*

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Abstract: In *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Hamlet*, Shakespeare focuses upon the effects of sin and the problems of conscience that it causes. However, he does so by shifting focus from the sinner to the one harmed by the sin. Through this shift in focus, Shakespeare explores sin as something that does not only harm the sinner and his immediate victim, but as something that strikes against the common good. Sin harms humanity in its corporate nature, and the consequences of sin—sorrows, guilt, conflicted conscience, and the desire for absolution—spread from the sinner to his victims and the larger community. At pivotal moments in both works, Shakespeare turns to artistic representations of the figure of Hecuba, sorrowing in the midst of the destruction of Troy, as a means for navigating the strained point of intersection between private conscience and the common good.

Keywords: Shakespeare; Hamlet; The Rape of Lucrece; Hecuba; conscience; sin

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When discussing *The Rape of Lucrece*, it has become commonplace for scholars to mention Gabriel Harvey's marginalia in his copy of Speght's edition of Chaucer, in which he remarked, "the younger sort takes much delight in Shakespeare's Venus, & Adonis: but his Lucrece & his tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, have it in them, to please the wiser sort" (Harvey 2018).[1] Harvey identifies a relationship between *Lucrece* and *Hamlet* that has been subsequently explored in a variety of ways; Harold Walley argues that "*Lucrece* lays the foundation for Shakespeare's whole subsequent treatment of tragedy" (Walley 1961, p. 480), and others observe certain similarities between the titular characters of the works.[2] Indeed, one of the most superficially obvious points of conjunction is the fact that, at crucial moments, both Lucrece and Hamlet meditate upon artistic representations of Hecuba, grieving as Priam is killed in front of her and as Troy is destroyed around her. This sorrowing figure of Hecuba performs an important and similar role in both works: as wronged mother and wife, and as queen of a city destroyed, she is a compressed symbol for the devastating effects of sin, both private and public. Shakespeare develops this understanding of sin more broadly in each work: in *The Rape of Lucrece* and in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's heroes are, like Hecuba, the victims of others' sins, and though they are the victims and not the perpetrators of these sins, they nevertheless struggle with crises of conscience.

In focusing upon the problems of conscience that sin provokes in its victims, Shakespeare emphasizes a particular understanding of sin and its effects that was prevalent in medieval and

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1 For example, see (Maus 1986, p. 66; Roe 1994, p. 99; Kietzman 1999, p. 21).

2 In discussing the difficulty of the situation imposed upon Lucrece, John Roe observes, "she resembles Hamlet more closely than any other Shakespearean hero" (Roe 1994, p. 113), and Andrew D. Weiner argues that both "are obsessed with a sex crime" and "obsessed with the idea of suicide" (Weiner 1995, p. 48). András Kiséry qualifies the similarities that others identify, arguing that "in spite of their superficial similarities, in political terms, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is of a different nature than *Lucrece*" (Kiséry 2016, p. 77).

early modern England: he depicts sin as something that harms not only the sinner or the sinner's immediate victim, but as something that strikes against the common good. In this respect, the guilty and the guiltless suffer the effects of sin. Indeed, the guiltless suffer not only as victims, as does Lucrece, but also simply because sin harms mankind in his corporate nature. Especially in late medieval England, the concept of human beings sharing a common good through being part of a common body had strong theological and political or theo-juridical associations. On the one hand, each individual Christian was understood to exist as a member of the body of Christ; on the other hand, political regimes imitated this theological language to express the view that each subject participated in a common life as a member of the king's body, the body politic.[3] In *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's focus moves outward from the sinner to the sufferers. This movement contrasts with the deep interiority we are accustomed to notice in Shakespearean tragedy; here we see how one man's sin disrupts another's conscience.[4] In both works, sins have an effect upon humanity in its communal relations, and the protagonist is forced to try to set things right. In both cases, they seem unable quite to do so—Hamlet strains towards perfect conscience, and Lucrece towards absolution, but the efforts of both are finally muddled. In this context, Shakespeare turns to an artistic representation of Hecuba. In each case, artistic representation of the sorrowing queen of Troy enables the protagonist to address these deepest challenges of the soul, which partially lie outside the reach of any individual, since they emerge at the intersection of the individual and the corporate aspects of man's existence. Art, and in particular the encompassing figure of the grieving Hecuba, becomes the means of relating an individual's private conscience to the common good.

The understanding of each individual as constituting part of the corporate body of Christ is derived from several passages in the New Testament, most notably Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Paul declares that, "as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:12–13).[5] Shortly before his arrest and crucifixion, Christ himself used similar language, praying for his disciples, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us . . . And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one" (John 17:21–23). In his development of this idea, Paul carefully emphasizes that the unity is real, not merely an abstraction or useful description, for, "whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:26–27). The reality of this corporate understanding is not just that all Christians find life through Christ, but that the whole mystical body suffers when one member suffers.

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3 For a general discussion of the development of the conceptualization of the church as the mystical body of Christ, especially from the eleventh century on, see (De Lubac 2006, pp. 75–122). Ernest Kantorowicz famously develops de Lubac's work by showing that the "extent late medieval and modern commonwealths actually were influenced by the ecclesiastical model, especially by the all-encompassing spiritual proto-type of corporational concepts, the *corpus mysticum* of the Church" (Kantorowicz 1957, p. 194, and see esp. 193–272). *Political Theology and Early Modernity* (Hammill and Lupton 2012) contains several helpful essays, especially Jennifer Rust's "Political Theologies of the Corpus Mysticum: Schmitt, Kantorowicz, and de Lubac" (pp. 102–23) which reevaluates the ways that Kantorowicz developed de Lubac's work. Rust's *The Body in Mystery: The Political Theology of the Corpus Mysticum in the Literature of Reformation England* (Rust 2014) is an important continuation of this reevaluation, and includes compelling discussions of Shakespeare's engagement with the tradition of the *corpus mysticum* in *Titus Andronicus* and *Measure for Measure*.

4 This is not to deny the rich interiority in some of Shakespeare's plays, but to emphasize that, in these works, it is an interiority that is initially provoked by another's sin. For a helpful discussion and contextualization of ways in which Hamlet's internal struggles reflect both Catholic and Calvinist treatments of conscience and the internal life, see (Kaufman 2011). Kaufman writes, "Shakespeare's Danish prince seems a relic of the cultural practices favored by both Jacobethan Calvinists and expatriate Catholic pietists, all of whom came close to consecrating inconstancy and to equating "the true feeling of religion" with an intensely inward, disorienting search for consolations—among Jesuits—and for assurances of election–among puritans" (pp. 440–41).

5 All biblical references are drawn from the King James Version.

The pervasive nature of both the theological and political conceptions of humanity's corporate nature in late medieval and early modern England has been well documented.[6] But to appreciate Shakespeare's immediate context, it is helpful to look at one of the more famous expositions of this conception in early modern England. In his "Devotion XVII," John Donne hears a bell ringing, and meditates,

> No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee. (Donne 1990, p. 272)

Donne stresses that each individual is part of a larger body, a body that is involved in all of its members, and that grows or diminishes, is exalted or debased, as its members fare. And Donne is quite clear that he is not merely speaking in terms of life and death, but of the moral life of mankind: "The church is catholic, universal, so are all her actions; all that she does, belongs to all. When she baptizes a child, that action concerns me; for that child is thereby connected to that head which is my head too, and ingraffed into that body, whereof I am a member" (Donne 1990, p. 271). Changes in one man's moral condition necessarily affect the larger body of which he is a member. In meditating upon this, Donne is drawn out of himself and his private meditations on conscience and death, and prays for his fellow man: "I am bold, O Lord, to bend my prayers to thee for his assistance, the voice of whose bell hath called me to this devotion. Lay hold upon his soul, O God, till that soul have thoroughly considered his account" (Donne 1990, p. 274). Note that here, Donne's meditation moves from consideration of mankind's corporate nature to a charitable prayer for another member of that body, and in particular, he prays for the other soul to have time to examine his conscience, and to "perfect his account before he pass away" (Donne 1990, p. 274). Arnold Stein examines this devotion, stressing Donne's emphasis upon a good death's public and penitential aspects, and he suggests,

> "The inward and outward experience [of a good death] meet in the effect upon others, and their presence is clearly important to Donne . . . witnesses are deliberately linked to the dying man by Donne's prayer, which brings him out of his own strenuous isolation to participate in the scene which he has already responded to by imagination and prayer." (Stein 1981, p. 498)

Donne's "Devotion XVII" helps us understand what Shakespeare is representing in *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Hamlet*, for it touches upon many of the same elements that Shakespeare explores when considering the troubled relations of sin and conscience with respect to the common good, and the individual and corporate aspects of human nature. Lucrece and Hamlet are similarly drawn out of a "strenuous isolation" to consider the common good, and seek through their deaths to accomplish a positive good for others, while also achieving some penitential absolution for evil which they did not commit but by which they are still in some way stained.

In *The Rape of Lucrece*, the ways in which Tarquin's sins specifically affect the political order are pronounced. The "Argument" describes the change of government that results from Tarquin's violation of Lucrece, and the poem concludes with "Tarquin's everlasting banishment" (l. 1855).[7] Shakespeare's poem repeatedly insists that a ruler's moral evils affect the entire political body. This political element

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6 For example, see (Duffy 2005, pp. 130–54, 303–76). Duffy writes, "the overwhelming impression left by sources for late medieval religion in England is that of a Christianity resolutely and enthusiastically orientated towards the public and the corporate, and of a continuing sense of the value of cooperation and mutuality in seeking salvation" (p. 131). See also (Shuger 2001; McEachern and Shuger 1997, esp. pp. 116–60; Hutson 2009).

7 All references to Shakespeare's works are from *The Norton Shakespeare* (Shakespeare 2016). For helpful arguments regarding Shakespeare's criticism of monarchy and embrace of republicanism, see (Platt 1975; Hadfield 2005, pp. 130–53). Andrew Moore argues that Shakespeare is explicitly engaging with changes in the classical definition of tyranny in early modern political philosophy in *Shakespeare between Machiavelli and Hobbes: Dead Body Politics* (Moore 2016, pp. 125–52).

is clear and pointed: Collin Burrow has noted that when Lucrece seeks to dissuade Tarquin from raping her, we witness a "textbook example of political oratory in this period: the civic aspect of rhetoric in Elizabethan England was not displayed by speaking to the Senate, but by giving counsel" (Shakespeare 2002, p. 52). Yet despite Lucrece's eloquence, her counsel fails, and "the ideal tempering of a monarch's passions by reason and counsel is shown only in a state of radical dysfunction" (Shakespeare 2002, p. 53). The entire Roman political body is ill with disorder, because its ruler cannot control his passions, and is deaf to counsel. Something is rotten in the Roman state. Lucrece directly addresses this point with Tarquin: "Thy princely office how canst thou fulfill / When, patterned by thy fault, foul sin may say, /He learned to sin, and thou didst teach the way?" (ll. 628–30). The prince's evil actions pattern sin for his subjects, and part of this example is a rebellion of proper subjects against their ruler, of passions rebelling against reason. In her later sorrowing meditations, Lucrece stresses,

> The baser is he, coming from a king,
>
> To shame his hope with deeds degenerate.
>
> The mightier man, the mightier is the thing
>
> That makes him honored, or begets him hate,
>
> For greatest scandal waits on greatest state. (ll. 1002–6)

Tarquin, being noble king, is all the baser in his slavish fall, is capable of greater scandal, and causes greater hatred because of the elevated nature of his office.

However, Shakespeare emphasizes that sin does not only harm the common good in the explicitly political form of the ruler affecting his subjects. When Lucrece gazes at the painting of the fall of Troy while waiting for Collatine to arrive, she wonders,

> Why should the private pleasure of someone
>
> Become the public plague of many moe?
>
> Let sin, alone committed, light alone
>
> Upon his head that hath transgresséd so.
>
> Let guiltless souls be freed from guilty woe.
>
> For one's offence why should so many fall,
> To plague a private sin in general? (ll. 1478–84)

The emphasis here is not upon the ruler corrupting his subordinates through bad example and license, but rather upon private sin as such effecting a public evil. Here the ruler is reduced to the anonymous "someone"—rather than political station, Lucrece stresses the anonymity of the sinner and the private nature of the sin. She wonders about precisely the point Donne made so clearly—"any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind" (Donne 1990, p. 272). Tarquin's sin is explicitly described as bringing his soul's immortality into subjection to death (ll. 724–25), and this spiritual death diminishes Lucrece, not simply as victim, but as one of the "many moe" who must still suffer for "a private sin." Tarquin's sin does not just affect Lucrece because it was she he raped, nor does it only affect her because he is her political ruler. Both of these are certainly true, but she is also affected by his sin simply because in the economy of sin and its consequences that Shakespeare depicts, "the private pleasure of someone/Become[s] the public plague."

This consideration sheds light on Shakespeare's shifting of the penitential theme to focus upon Lucrece rather than Tarquin. Immediately before opening the door to Lucrece's chamber, Tarquin endures a final, compressed reprisal of the "graceless ... disputation/'Tween frozen conscience and hot-burning will" (ll. 246–47), a disputation that is the central focus of *The Rape of Lucrece* until Tarquin completes the rape. Tarquin even attempts to pray in this scene, though he quickly realizes the uselessness of prayer given his evil intent (ll. 342–50). Indeed, Tarquin's struggles with prayer

foreshadow the more famous difficulties that Claudius faces in Act 3 of *Hamlet*—both rulers turn in some distress to prayer, but then abandon it as irreconcilable with their determinations to persist in their sinful courses. But the strangest element of Tarquin's brief, prayerful scene occurs in a single line that prefigures the focus of the poem following the rape. Acknowledging that the heavens won't assist him in the act, Tarquin declares,

> Then Love and Fortune be my gods, my guide.
>
> My will is backed with resolution:
>
> Thoughts are but dreams till their effects be tried;
>
> The blackest sin is cleared with absolution. (ll. 351–54)

Tarquin's emphasis upon his firm resolution is entirely in keeping with what he has determined before. But his reference to absolution is sudden and strange. Does Tarquin hope to find absolution for this sin despite his ready acknowledgement that he is violating reason and morality, that he is impious and that it is the "blackest sin"? What sort of absolution does Tarquin envision?[8] He does not develop this thought—the line sits singly, unexplained, and in the following stanza Tarquin lifts the latch and enters Lucrece's chamber.

Tarquin's brief reference to sin and absolution is particularly striking given the shift of focus in the latter half of *The Rape of Lucrece*. Readers might be forgiven for erroneously concluding that, based upon this reference to absolution, the work will include some examination of Tarquin's guilty conscience after the act. Will he repent? Will he seek absolution? Will he undergo some penance? Indeed, Shakespeare almost teases his readers by alluding to this very thing after the rape is complete, dismissing Tarquin from the poem with the suggestive phrase, "He thence departs, a heavy convertite" (l. 743). Isn't it reasonable to expect to see the effects of this willful choice upon Tarquin's soul? If he has briefly alluded to absolution, will we witness a penitential movement or conversion? Oddly, contrition, penance, and the search for absolution are indeed the subject of the second half of the poem, but of course they all pertain to Lucrece rather than Tarquin. As Coppelia Kahn notes, "the central metaphor in the poem is that of a stain, which is repeatedly and forcefully attached to Lucrece" rather than to Tarquin (Kahn 1976, p. 47). When she kills herself in an effort to remove this stain—"The poisoned fountain clears itself again, / And why not I from this compelléd stain?" (ll. 1707–8)—she offers "her contrite sighs unto the clouds" (l. 1727). It is Lucrece who is contrite at the close of the poem. Paradoxically, after the rape the question becomes, can Lucrece find absolution, can she be cleansed of this "load of lust he left behind" (l. 734), can she find an adequate means of repenting or purging the evil that was done to her?

Shakespeare's shift in focus from Tarquin to Lucrece after the rape moves our attention from predator to prey, from sinner to innocent victim. This shift is so surprising that it led Sam Hynes to declare, "It is an obvious weakness of the poem from this point of view that the subsequent suffering of Tarquin is ignored, that he leaves the action just at the point where he begins to interest us—it is as if we saw the last of Macbeth at his Act II exit" (Hynes 1959, p. 453). Rather than a flaw, however, this shift allows Shakespeare to emphasize his depiction of sin as something not only spiritually destructive for the sinner, and not just harmful for his immediate victim, but corrosive to the common good. In stressing this point, Shakespeare subtly changes some of the traditional points of interpretation of the Lucrece story. If Lucrece's sense of stain in the poem might appear to suggest guilt on her part, and consequently look like a situation in which the victim is blamed for the rape, Shakespeare's illustration of how "the private pleasure of someone/Become[s] the public plague of many moe"

[8] Readers might well be reminded of other famous figures who attempt to manipulate confession and absolution by insincerely planning to repent while simultaneously determining to commit a sin. In Dante's *Inferno*, canto 27, Guido da Montefeltro, who accepted the pre-sin absolution from Boniface VIII, is told by a demon at the moment of his damnation, "One may not be absolved without repentance, /nor repent and wish to sin concurrently—/a simple contradiction not allowed" (Dante 2002, p. 505, ll. 118–20). This could be readily applied to Tarquin, as he determines to enter Lucrece's chamber.

(ll. 1478–79) suggests something else. The focus upon the problems of conscience shifts from Tarquin to Lucrece; so too, while she suffers as his immediate victim, Shakespeare is deliberate to point out that she suffers as his political subject, and as a part of the spiritually corporate, communal body which together will suffer public plagues for private pleasure, a body in which for "one's offence . . . many fall" (l. 1483). The poem suggests that Lucrece is a figure for the general destruction that sin effects, both politically and spiritually.[9]

Seeing Lucrece in this light clarifies why, despite her innocence, she is depicted in such a parallel manner to Tarquin.[10] Like Tarquin who held "disputation/'Tween frozen conscience and hot burning will" (ll. 246–47), Lucrece "Holds disputation with each thing she views, /And to herself all sorrow doth compare" (ll. 1101–2). Just as Tarquin had debated within himself, "revolving/The sundry dangers of his will's obtaining" (ll. 127–28), after the rape Lucrece "with herself is she in mutiny, /To live or die, which of the twain were better" (ll. 1153–54). And both characters' souls are described in terms that pointedly echo Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, the same epistle in which Paul stressed that Christ is the head of a body that includes all Christians. Paul writes, "Know ye not that ye are the Temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (1 Cor. 3:16–17). Shakespeare draws upon this description with Tarquin, writing,

> . . . his soul's fair temple is defaced,
>
> To whose weak ruins muster troops of cares,
> To ask the spotted princess how she fares.
>
> She says, her subjects with foul insurrection
> Have battered down her consecrated wall,
> And by their mortal fault brought in subjection
> Her immortality, and made her thrall
> To living death and pain perpetual (ll. 719–26)

Not only is Tarquin's soul a temple, but, now defaced by Tarquin's sinful actions, it is subject to living death, echoing Paul's warning that if any defiles the temple, "him God shall destroy."[11] Similarly, when Lucrece determines to kill herself, she describes her soul, saying,

> 'Her house is sacked, her quiet interrupted,
> Her mansion battered by the enemy,
> Her sacred temple spotted, spoiled, corrupted,
> Grossly engirt with daring infamy.
> Then let it not be called impiety,
>
> If in this blemished fort I make some hole
> Through which I may convey this troubled soul. (ll. 1170–6)

[9] Sara E. Quay argues that after the rape, Lucrece "can no longer symbolize the wholeness she was originally constructed to reflect" and that "as the men in the poem hover over her bleeding body, they watch the life go out of their own social 'body' as well. The patriarchal system is significantly altered by the disruption of woman . . . the men are faced with the breakdown of their social system" (Quay 1995, pp. 7–8). See also (Kunat 2015).

[10] For other points on Lucrece and Tarquin's similarities, see (Kramer and Kaminsky 1977; Maus 1986, pp. 67–72).

[11] Sam Hynes has observed the ways that Tarquin's rape is presented as a violation of himself: "the significant rape is the rape of Tarquin's soul" (Hynes 1959, p. 453).

Despite the obvious and radical dissimilarities of Tarquin and Lucrece, Shakespeare's poem insists that we see them as reflecting certain important aspects of the other. Lucrece, though victim, is much like Tarquin in being subjected to violently disordered passions that violate her and disturb her conscience.

Shakespeare constructs this parallel between Tarquin and Lucrece to show how sin and its effects, here including a sense of guilt and the desire for cleansing absolution, move out from the sinner to the victim and beyond. By shifting the focus to Lucrece after the sin, we are forced to consider the way in which the sin of just one man, even if a "private pleasure" (l. 1478) can indeed become the "public plague of many moe" (l. 1479). The movement from Tarquin's initial internal struggle to Lucrece's subsequent guilt to the final parade of "her bleeding body thorough Rome, /[. . .] to publish Tarquin's foul offense" (ll. 1851–52) illustrates this expansion and movement from the deliberations within one conscience to the effects of those deliberations, played out on a large and most public stage. Collin Burrow touches upon this dynamic, writing, "It has been said that the poem is caught uncomfortably between two incompatible ethical models: Lucrece has a soul, and a profound sense of inward guilt; she also has a keen sense of family honour and is overwhelmed by the shame that goes with the violation of that public honour by Tarquin. Is the poem concerned with interior guilt or public shame, with insides or outsides?" (Shakespeare 2002, p. 59). The answer is that it is deliberately concerned with both; the entire structure of the poem, the specific parallels between Tarquin and Lucrece, and Lucrece's very language about sin, all contribute to the depiction of sin in the outward movement of its effects.

All of these elements are brought together with heightened effect when Lucrece meditates upon the painting of the fall of Troy. As Lucrece waits for Collantine to arrive, she turns to the painting as "means to mourn some newer way" (l. 1365). This is an important moment in a poem that consists largely of "claustrophobic interiority" (Shakespeare 2002, p. 56). When Lucrece seeks out the painting, she is preparing to move from deliberation within herself to public confession, a move from the internal to the external, from the meditative to the confessional and exhortative. The painting serves as a means of making this transition, both for the poem as a whole and for Lucrece in particular. Lucrece searches the painting "To find a face where all distress is stell'd," and she finds it in Hecuba, who is gazing upon Priam as Pyrrhus kills him. Meditating upon this work of art helps Lucrece move beyond her own internal struggles and sorrows:

> . . . all this time hath overslipp'd her thought
>
> That she with painted images hath spent,
>
> Being from the feeling of her own grief brought
>
> By deep surmise of others' detriment,
>
> Losing her woes in shows of discontent.
>
> It easeth some, though none it ever cured,
> To think their dolor others have endured. (ll. 1576–82)

The painting draws Lucrece outside of herself; she is "brought" from "the feeling of her own grief" to a larger perspective that transcends the individual. Here, art does not remove sorrows, but eases them; it challenges Lucrece "to think" more largely about her grief, placing her particular distress in relation to others. The painting reorders Lucrece's passions by forcing her to relate her own thoughts to her community, and in this respect it reinforces the sense of a corporate, shared existence. It is the specific means of intellectual movement from the internal to the external, from the individual to the general, from the subjective to something more universal.[12]

[12] Discussing Lucrece's final confession and suicide, Christopher Tilmouth has suggested that "this alleviation of paralyzing shame is also a renewal of her conscience, but a renewal deliberately performed under a public gaze. She gathers an audience

The most striking and important aspect of Lucrece's "deep surmise of others' detriment" (l. 1579) is her finding Hecuba as the correlative figure of her sorrow, and her attack upon Helen as "the strumpet that began this stir" (l. 1471).[13] Aside from the title The Rape of Lucrece, the word "rape" only appears twice in the poem; first, it appears in a brief catalog of evil things that Opportunity allows, including also envy, treason, and murder (l. 909). The second occurrence of the word is in the initial description of the painting: "Priam's Troy, /Before the which is drawn the power of Greece, /For Helen's rape the city to destroy" (ll. 1367–69). "Helen's rape" led to the destruction of Troy, the destruction of a polis—a cataclysmic, apocalyptic event for ancient Greeks. And regardless of the degree of Helen's complicity in her abduction or her love for Paris, the Trojan prince's rape of Helen, like Tarquin's rape of Lucrece, was a violation of her family as well as her self, a violation the price for which his entire city would pay. Paris' treatment of Helen is a perfect instance of when "the private pleasure of someone/Become[s] the public plague of many moe" (ll. 1478–79). Shouldn't Lucrece find her situation in some way parallel to Helen's?

Despite their similarities, Lucrece identifies not with Helen, but with Hecuba. What's Hecuba to her, or she to Hecuba? Hecuba, a figure in whom "the painter had anatomized/Time's ruin, beauty's wrack, and grim care's reign" (ll. 1450–51), witnesses the destruction of her family and her city, all as a consequence of the lustful actions of another. Hecuba, in whom sorrow is anatomized, is decidedly innocent. Lucrece meditates on this precise fact, stating,

> Lo, here weeps Hecuba, here Priam dies . . .
>
> And one man's lust these many lives confounds.
>
> > Had doting Priam checked his son's desire
> > Troy had been bright with fame, and not with fire. (ll. 1485–91)

Paris, of course, is primarily responsible for the tragedy, but Priam bears partial responsibility as well. Both of them die—but the figure of sorrow is Hecuba, who witnesses, suffers, and weeps. Lucrece's sense of affiliation with Hecuba, rather than with Helen, further underscores the ways in which the painting serves to adjust Lucrece's sorrow and her self-understanding.[14] If she focused upon herself solely as the victim of Tarquin's lust, and the sorrows that his violence have brought upon her in particular, Lucrece might indeed have found Helen as the figure whose sorrows at least partially reflected her own. But the painting draws Lucrece out of her own grief and moves her toward an understanding of the general, and Hecuba, whose woe is repeatedly associated with the destruction of the city as a whole, becomes the figure who reflects her own sorrows. In presenting Hecuba in this manner, Shakespeare was working within a firmly established tradition that represented the Trojan queen as "a *mater dolorosa*, the epitome of grief and human suffering" (Westney 1984, p. 436). Indeed, this literary tradition generally presented "the story of the sorrowing Hecuba as a mirror in which human beings might see themselves" (Westney 1984, p. 444). Lucrece certainly sees herself in Hecuba, and thus she also sees herself in relation to the communal whole, due to the painting's depiction of the destruction of the polis that rages around Hecuba. Shakespeare's lengthy description of the whole painting underscores this point—sorrows are shown not in isolation, but in the context of woe much larger than one individual's experience of it. Seeing one's self in Hecuba can have definite

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for her final act and casts it in public terms" (Tilmouth 2009, p. 510). He too sees in *The Rape of Lucrece* an exploration of the conscience as private, on the one hand, and as something that "sets the self within a field of social relations" (p. 514) on the other.

[13] John Roe observes that "whereas it is consistent that Tarquin should partake of the qualities of both Sinon and Paris, that Lucrece should find herself caught between Hecuba and Helen seems at the same time unfair and yet unavoidable" (Roe 1994, p. 114). She may be "caught between" them for a moment, but there is little doubt that she rejects comparison with Helen and finds enough likeness with Hecuba that she can give voice to her silent sorrows.

[14] Mary Jo Kietzman similarly observes that "the women are united by a shared experience of despair coupled with the position of subjection from which both view events. Lucrece's identification with Hecuba is an act that involves self-transformation" (Kietzman 1999, p. 39).

consequences, however. Tanya Pollard notes that "Euripides' *Hecuba* was by far the most popular of the Greek plays printed, translated, and performed in sixteenth-century Europe," and while throughout most of Euripides' play, Hecuba "evokes tragic pathos," she also "points to another model of tragedy: the triumph of action, and in particular, of revenge" (Pollard 2012, pp. 1064, 1067).[15] Shakespeare's Lucrece follows this model: she moves from lament to the action of public confession, with the clearly stated intent to "purge [her] impure tale" (l. 1076) and to get "revenge on him who made [her] stop [her] breath" (l. 1180).

Lucrece finds a reflection of herself in Hecuba, not as another victim of rape, but in the fact that Hecuba herself is a figure for "guiltless souls" suffering "guilty woe" (l. 1482). In this respect, Hecuba represents the suffering inflicted upon mankind in its corporate nature, both as a body politic and as the suffering body of Christ. And it is in precisely this sense that Shakespeare turns again to the figure of Hecuba in *Hamlet*. If it is impossible to identify exactly what Gabriel Harvey saw that pleased "the wiser sort" in *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Hamlet*, the works bear a close relationship with respect to their depiction of sin and its effects upon both the individual and the community. In both, we find the ruler ineffectively struggling with his conscience as he turns to prayer, and these troubles of conscience are transposed into the person whom the ruler has wronged. Furthermore, as the victims struggle with the consequences of sins that have been committed against them, a meditation upon an artistic representation of the fall of Troy becomes the direct means of moving from the internal to the external, and of communicating matters of private conscience in a public setting.

As we have noted, Claudius' failed attempt at prayer in Act 3 echoes Tarquin's failure at prayer immediately before he opens Lucrece's chamber door. And just as Tarquin's evils are explored in the political context of a ruler corrupting his subjects, so too the political consequences of Claudius' sins are evident throughout the play.[16] But it is Hamlet's struggles with conscience and proper moral action, not Claudius', that lie at the heart of the work. This is, on the face of it, a curious focus. Hamlet is the one wronged, both on a personal level and as a member of the suffering political state. But it is he rather than Claudius who bears the more profound burden as a consequence of Claudius' sin. "The time is out of joint" (1.5.189), and "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (1.4.90) as a result of Claudius' murder of King Hamlet, but it falls to Hamlet "to set it right" (1.5.190). The profound difficulty of the task enjoined upon Hamlet is not lost on the prince nor the audience: how can Hamlet get revenge but "taint not [his] mind" (1.5.85)? How can he keep his conscience clean?[17] Indeed, the mission is so morally problematic that Hamlet and his audience must wonder if the ghost "may be a devil" (2.2.518). And even after confirming the general truth of the ghost's narrative, Hamlet still faces the difficulty of finding a morally acceptable way to accomplish revenge.[18] This preoccupation is stressed in the final scene, where Hamlet not only claims that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern "are not near my conscience" (5.2.57), but also asks "is't not perfect conscience" (5.2.66) to kill Claudius? Though Hamlet and Lucrece are the victims of very different sins, they find themselves similarly compelled to struggle with the effects of others' sins, and with grave questions of conscience provoked

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[15] Pollard offers a helpful account of Hecuba's place in the literary traditions of sixteenth-century England, and how Shakespeare works in that tradition. Curiously, though, Pollard only gives the briefest of mention to *The Rape of Lucrece*, devoting the great majority of her attention to Hamlet's Hecuba.

[16] András Kiséry argues that "Claudius is the character in the play most exercised by the public perception of political acts and political figures" (Kiséry 2016, p. 83).

[17] For Shakespeare's depiction of revenge as it relates to his classical sources, see (Miola 1992, pp. 32–67). For a classic argument that Elizabethans, as Christians, would have thought private revenge morally inadmissible see (Prosser 1971). For considerations of *Hamlet* and revenge in relation to Reformation theological debates and changes, see (Rist 2008, pp. 27–74; Curran 2006).

[18] Catherine Belsey suggests that while "private revenge is regarded as a sin, there remains the public problem of Claudius' crimes, and here conscience confronts a new and more complex difficulty" (Belsey 1979, p. 132). Belsey identifies some of the important ways in which the matters of conscience in *Hamlet* are both private and public, both internal and externally related to the political state.

by these circumstances. Directly before killing herself, Lucrece concludes her confession to Collatine by asking a series of questions:

> What is the quality of my offence,
>
> Being constrained with dreadful circumstance?
>
> May my pure mind with the foul act dispense,
>
> My low-declinéd honour to advance?
>
> May any terms acquit me from this chance? (ll. 1702–5)

These questions find an echo in Hamlet's struggle to not "taint" his mind, and to find an acceptable moral course of action despite his difficult situation.

Amidst these thematic similarities, the clearest and most important unifying element between *Hamlet* and *The Rape of Lucrece* is the role of artistic representations of Hecuba and the fall of Troy. In *Lucrece*, the painting of the fall of Troy lacks words, and Lucrece gives tongue to the sorrows depicted in the work. In *Hamlet*, the opposite is true—rather than a painting, all we get are words, drawn from a play. However, the play "was never acted, or if it was, not above once" (2.2.358–59), and the speech that Hamlet "chiefly loved" (2.2.368) is not so much dramatic as it is descriptive. *Hamlet*'s representation of the fall of Troy is entirely verbal, lacking any stage action or physical representation of the event. Indeed, even within the unnamed play that was perhaps never acted, the whole speech was "Aeneas' talk to Dido" (2.2.369)—so the play would never have enacted the fall of Troy, but only related it. In *Lucrece*, we have a nonspeaking picture, and in *Hamlet* we have a speaking, descriptive nonpicture.

Whichever way Shakespeare explores the fall of Troy, however, Hecuba takes center stage.[19] Lucrece had turned to the painting "for means to mourn some newer way" (l. 1365), and in Hecuba found a face "where all distress and dolour dwelled" (l. 1446). Hamlet turns to the subject by asking the player, "Come, give us a taste of your quality. Come, a passionate speech" (2.2.355–56). But while he remembers that "it begins with Pyrrhus" (2.2.373), he is particularly anxious for the description of Hecuba in her sorrows. When Polonius protests that the speech is too long, Hamlet quiets him, asking the player, "Prithee, say on. He's for a jig or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps. Say on; come to Hecuba" (2.2.421–23). When the player finishes his description of Hecuba, Hamlet responds to Polonius' request "Prithee, no more" with agreement, "'Tis well." (2.2.443). Clearly, Hecuba is the figure who captures Hamlet's attention.[20] This is further underscored by his meditation in the following soliloquy, when he wonders about the player's passionate response to the lines describing Hecuba.

But, like Lucrece's, Hamlet's focus upon Hecuba initially seems misplaced. After all, Pyrrhus is a young prince who has lost a father and is enacting his bloody revenge. Priam is an old king being murdered. These figures might reasonably be expected to resonate with Hamlet. But the player describes Hecuba's sorrow as so powerful that it would have even moved "passion in Gods" (2.2.440), and that any human onlooker "'Gainst Fortune's state would treason have pronounced" (2.2.433). This claim is borne out, as the player is moved to blushes and tears by the lines he recites, and Hamlet consequently wonders at Hecuba and the player, and denounces himself, his lack of passion, and his inaction. In the player's speech, Hecuba simultaneously figures as an innocent individual personally wronged by the violence inflicted upon her family, and as a representation of the larger, innocent, suffering political body. It is in these respects that she appears as a more appropriate parallel for Hamlet than either Pyrrhus or Priam. And clearly, as in *The Rape of Lucrece*, Shakespeare draws on the

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[19] Collin Burrow discusses ways in which Shakespeare's representation of Hecuba in *Lucrece* and in *Hamlet* draws on both typical early modern rhetorical lessons and on Shakespeare's own reading of Virgil; see (Burrow 2013, pp. 62–71). See also (Enterline 2012, pp. 120–39).

[20] Part of the reason for this is that, as Marjorie Garber observes, "the desperate and grieving Hecuba, Priam's wife, running barefoot up and down, is sharply contrasted to Gertrude, who married again so quickly after her husband's death" (Garber 2004, p. 499).

literary tradition that developed from Euripides' *Hecuba*. Hecuba is a figure of sorrows that acts as a mirror in which Hamlet can see himself, and arrive at deeper self-knowledge. In Euripides' play, Hecuba finally turns from lament to revenge upon Polymestor, the king of Thrace who killed her son. "Capable of melting audiences and destroying kings, Hecuba offers a model of tragedy with both emotional and political power" (Pollard 2012, p. 1074) and Hamlet clearly follows this model.

Hecuba's sorrows, stirring up the player's passions, subsequently act upon Hamlet's, and instigate his move from internal impasse to action. Hamlet's meditation upon Hecuba and the player leads him to conclude that he should not "unpack [his] heart with words/and fall a-cursing like a very drab" (2.2.504–5). Instead of struggling entirely within himself, Hamlet turns outward to catch Claudius' conscience. Like Lucrece, Hamlet responds to Hecuba by turning from the internal to the external, by turning from his own questions of conscience to the question of the guilt of the king. Indeed, this movement is cast explicitly in terms of gaining verifiable knowledge; Hamlet insists that given the dubious nature of the ghost's intentions, he'll have "grounds/more relative" (2.2.523–24) than just its story and his "prophetic soul" (1.5.41). His subsequent enlistment of Horatio's assistance in observing Claudius watch the play confirms his ready action in pursuit of a more objective understanding.

In his meditations upon Hecuba's sorrows, Hamlet finds a way to order his own mixed passions, directing his energies toward a meaningful end.[21] As in Lucrece's case, these ends have to do with the conscience of another whose evils are affecting the whole state. Hamlet's sudden and deadly actions that follow so quickly upon the player's speech reflect the degree to which Hecuba has changed him. Of course, Hamlet's subsequent bloody course, like Lucrece's, still presents grave moral questions—if in Act 5 he continues to demonstrate concern for doing something in "perfect conscience" (5.2.66), audiences must be troubled by the deadly rashness that Hamlet praises (5.2.7).[22] Indeed, John Curran suggests that Hamlet's assertion of "perfect conscience" in Act 5 is a reductive simplification of his earlier questions of conscience, and "bizarrely incongruous with the conditions of his life" (Curran 2018, p. 2).[23] Nevertheless, Hamlet, like Lucrece, is finally concerned with the future of the state, and seeks to explain himself and clear his name. He tells Horatio: "report me and my cause aright/To the unsatisfied" (5.2.317–18), implying that such a confession would accomplish satisfaction, that it would set things right.[24] His vehement insistence upon having Horatio tell the story shows how it preoccupies his final thoughts. Even when he is distracted by Fortinbras' arrival, and expresses some hope for the future of Denmark in approving the fact that Fortinbras will likely become king, Hamlet still insists, "So tell him, with th'occurrents more and less" (5.2.335). Hamlet wants all told, and wants it all told to the future ruler.

Neither *The Rape of Lucrece* nor *Hamlet* offer fully satisfactory solutions to the problems of conscience that each depict. Indeed, the very lack of any clear resolution to questions of conscience, sin, and absolution reflects the complicated and contradictory understandings of these matters prevalent in Reformation England.[25] Nevertheless, Shakespeare consistently depicts sin as something that affects more than just the sinner's soul and relationship with God. In both works, the focus upon the struggles of conscience shifts from the sinner to his victim, and Shakespeare emphasizes not just the particular

[21] Marjorie Garber describes the pivotal nature of Hamlet's listening to the player's speech, writing, "Here at the play's midpoint it is his last glance backward, and it accomplishes something crucial for both the character and the play. Through the players, though fiction, he finds not only emotion—a way of engaging and accessing his own suppressed and unarticulated feelings—but also what he so badly needs and longs for: action. He is ready to catch the conscience of the King" (Garber 2004, p. 499).

[22] Belsey argues, "the play as a whole suggests that Hamlet's mind is tainted—not in the sense that he is mad, but that he is inevitably corrupted by his mission ... Hamlet is in no sense responsible for the situation in which he finds himself, but he becomes tainted by it, killing Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and, indirectly, Ophelia. We can see why: as pawns of Claudius, they represent the enemy. But their deaths are evidence that Hamlet has lost his innocence. It appears that to act morally he must act violently, and yet he cannot act violently and retain his integrity" (Belsey 1979, p. 148).

[23] See also (Curran 2006, pp. 201–18).

[24] See (Hirschfeld 2014, pp. 65–93).

[25] See (Stegner 2016, pp. 1–42 and 174–80). See also (Kaufman 2011), who provides ample examples of both "Calvinist and Catholic pietists whose passions for structuring desire expressed themselves much as Shakespeare's Hamlet does" (p. 444).

ways in which a sinner's immediate victim might experience the effects of that sin, but also the ways in which sin harms the communal life of mankind, in both theological and political senses. The body politic and the body of Christ are wounded by sin, and we witness the tragic struggle for "guiltless souls [to] be freed from guilty woe" (l. 1482). In Shakespeare's works, no man is an island, and while trials of sin and conscience are depicted with a rich inward turn, they are never confined entirely to the individual. And in demonstrating this understanding of the expansive nature of the effects of sin and the problems of conscience that it gives rise to, Shakespeare employs an artistic representation of the figure of Hecuba sorrowing as a means of navigating the vexed relationship between an individual's private conscience and his participation in the common good. When Shakespeare confronts the corporate effects of sin, he turns to Hecuba to show that the sorrows of innocent victims may be fruitful, and that artistic representations of these sins and their resultant sorrows may be markedly effective in bringing individuals to look beyond themselves, and understand their places within a larger body.

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Article

Hamlet the Heretic: The Prince's Albigensian Rhetoric

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Abstract: Some of Hamlet's speeches reflect a dualistic view of the world and of humanity, echoing in particular some of the heretical beliefs of the Albigensians in southern France some centuries earlier. The Albigensians thought that the evil deity created the human body as a trap for the souls created by the good god, and Hamlet repeatedly expresses disgust with the body, a "quintessence of dust" (II.ii.304–305). Because they regarded the body as a soul trap, the Albigensians believed that marriage and procreation should be avoided. "Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?" Hamlet demands of Ophelia, adding that "it were better my mother had not borne me" (III.i.121–24). He sounds most like a heretic when he goes on to say "we will have no more marriage" (III.i.147). Though Hamlet continues with dualistic talk nearly to the end, there is some turning toward orthodox Christianity.

Keywords: Hamlet; Albigensian heresy; Dualism; Catholicism

This essay will suggest that some of Hamlet's speeches reflect a dualistic view of the world and of humanity, echoing in particular some of the heretical beliefs of the Albigensians in southern France a couple of centuries earlier. I do not propose this interpretation as a definitive one that supersedes all the excellent scholarship of the past but as one more layer of meaning in this astonishingly complex and mysterious play, which continues to challenge us with "thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls" (I.iv.56). With some previous interpretations it may not be compatible, but with many it is.

The setting of the play is medieval and Catholic. The original telling of the Hamlet story by Saxo Grammaticus places the events in medieval (hence Catholic) Denmark. David Beauregard has demonstrated in overwhelmingly convincing detail that the play assumes a Catholic milieu (Beauregard 2008, pp. 86–108). He is right to conclude that "contrary to some recent critical claims, *Hamlet* does not appear to be a very Protestant play" (p. 87). Yet the anachronistic fact that Hamlet and Horatio have been studying at the university in Wittenberg (which was not founded until 1502) offers a tantalizing and unmistakable allusion to Luther and the Reformation, indicating that Protestant theology must somehow impinge on the play. Horatio's initial disbelief in ghosts also suggests the Protestant tendency to consider them illusions or else apparitions of spirits, either angelic or demonic, while Catholics typically thought that ghosts were souls in Purgatory (Shaheen 1999, p. 480). When first encountering the ghost, Hamlet, too, takes the Protestant perspective, supposing it must be either "a spirit of health or goblin damned" (Shakespeare 1969, I.iv.40). But the ghost identifies himself as the soul of his father, suffering in Purgatory, and, as Stephen Greenblatt points out, when Hamlet swears "by Saint Patrick" (I.v.136), he invokes the patron saint of Purgatory (Greenblatt 2001, p. 233). Thus these Wittenberg scholars have their Protestant assumptions rudely challenged, and the play begins with a theological confrontation.

To this clash of Protestant and Catholic views of the afterlife, I would add that some of Hamlet's talk later in the play reflects the dualistic doctrines of the Albigensians, who believed in a good god, creator of the spiritual world, and an equal evil god, creator of the physical world. In their view, the physical world was not only fallen but inherently evil. In his disgust with his uncle and mother, Hamlet begins to denounce the physical world itself, saying it is a prison (II.ii.236–45). In the same

scene he declares that "this goodly frame the earth seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air . . . appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors" (II.ii.295–99). The Albigensians also thought that the evil deity created the human body as a trap for the souls created by the good god, and Hamlet repeatedly expresses disgust with the body, a "quintessence of dust" (II.ii.304–305). Because they regarded the body as a soul trap, the Albigensians believed that marriage and procreation should be avoided. "Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?" Hamlet demands of Ophelia, adding that "it were better my mother had not borne me" (III.i.121–24). He sounds most like a heretic when he goes on to say "we will have no more marriage" (III.i.147). Such extreme statements echo neither Catholic nor Protestant theology but the radical dualist belief that the physical world and the human body are fundamentally evil. Hamlet is motivated by his melancholic temperament, reacting to the shocking discovery of familial murder and what he regards as an adulterous and incestuous union—enough to give anyone doubts about the inherent goodness of creation. Yet it must be significant that the rhetoric he employs is strongly reminiscent of Albigensian doctrines. Driven by his personal despair, he adopts the despairing worldview of the most widespread and persistent heresy of the Middle Ages.

Before developing this argument further, I wish to reflect briefly on the larger discussion concerning Shakespeare and religion. A generation or two back, there was little talk of either his politics or his religion, the assumption being that he was agnostic in both of those debated realms of thought, or that his universal genius transcended such immediate issues. Christopher Baker surveys some of the critics who held that viewpoint, mentioning George Santayana, G. R. Elton, and Harold Bloom (Baker 2007, p. 57). More recently, however, there has been much serious discussion of our playwright's political and religious commitments. Given that he never speaks in his own voice in his plays, this could be a parlous endeavor, but those scholarly discussions have, in fact, opened up the plays in new and valuable ways. In his excellent survey of critical works on Shakespeare and religion for this special issue, John Cox notes that in recent years one trend has been toward seeing Shakespeare's depictions of religion, and references to it, as serving a mostly aesthetic and dramatic purpose rather than expressing religious belief of any kind. For instance, Cox quotes David Scott Kastan as saying that "Religion in the plays is a psychological and social reality that registers as form rather than a credal one that registers as belief" (Kastan 2014, p. 7; quoted by Cox 2018, p. 8). And he quotes Richard McCoy thus: "I now see faith in Shakespeare as more theatrical and poetic than spiritual" (McCoy 2013, p. ix; quoted by Cox 2018, p. 10). This looks like a return to the agnosticism of Shakespeare scholars of yore, but it is incoherent to suggest that religious elements in these plays can serve strictly aesthetic purposes: religious truth and religious beauty are too intertwined to allow such a line to be drawn. In fact, the connection between them is one of the debates of the Reformation era: Catholics holding that the aesthetic power of vestments, ritual, dialogue, and music draws us bodily into the mysteries; Protestants averring that all those are traditions of men, trappings that distract us from the inner spiritual reality. Traditional theology argues that the three Transcendentals—the Good, the True, and the Beautiful—are all aspects of God's Being and thus inseparable from each other. From this perspective, aesthetics and belief are not easily teased apart.

Critical appreciation for competing theological beliefs in Shakespeare's plays reminds us that Elizabethan drama had its roots in the medieval mystery plays and never stood much chance of becoming a purely secular art form. The medieval drama arose as part of the Easter liturgy (the famous *quem quaeritis* trope) and then developed into the cycle of mystery plays that retold Biblical history—and eventually into the more secularized drama of the Renaissance. Hamlet alludes to the mystery plays, which Shakespeare likely saw as a child, when he urges the players not to overact, for then "It out-herods Herod" (III.ii.13). Religious ceremony is a dramatic enactment, and Shakespeare shows himself intensely aware of the religious overtones of his dramas.

Take, for example, the repentance of Claudio in *Much Ado*. When he learns of his great error, he says to Leonato, "Impose me to what penance your invention / Can lay upon my sin" (V.i.260–61). His language is explicitly Catholic, referring to the sacrament of confession and the penance that is an

essential element of it, though Leonato is not a priest. Protestants rejected this sacrament vociferously, along with the belief in Purgatory that was connected with it. Part of the penance Claudio is given is to place an epitaph on Hero's tomb, and Claudio does so in a separate scene, in which he reads his epitaph and has a song about her sung. He concludes the ceremony by promising, "Yearly will I do this rite" (V.iii.22). Though it does not follow prescribed forms, this is a "rite," a religious ritual, one that is intended to be repeated each year, and the ceremony is meant to represent a genuine repentance on the part of young Claudio, who has behaved so badly toward Hero that it is hard for the audience to forgive him. The religious language and ceremony here are familiar to the audience and integral to the drama; the ritual concentrates feelings of repentance and lays them before the Divine.

This small but important scene looks forward to the ceremony of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation at the end of *The Winter's Tale*, which, as Cox points out, is laden with religious language strongly evoking Christian belief: "To insist that such words have merely esthetic denotations is to ignore the connotations that give the plot much of its emotional vitality and depth" (Cox 2018, p. 10). In this special issue, Grace Tiffany ably and convincingly demonstrates the genuine religious beliefs at work in *The Winter's Tale*, although she exaggerates, it seems to me, Calvinist overtones in the play (Tiffany 2018, pp. 8–10). Tiffany's argument is that Leontes' penitential commitment to daily visits to the chapel where Hermione and Mamillius lie invokes Catholic practice (which it does) and is inefficacious: "Though he performs his pledge, these acts of ritual penitence do not mitigate his grief and guilt" (p. 8). True enough, but they prepare him spiritually for the forgiveness he receives at the end. Indeed, "Paulina is Pauline in her vigorous exhortations to virtuous behavior" (p. 9), but Catholics completely accept the teachings of Paul (though understanding them differently), and why is this "virtuous behavior" not to be seen as works? Again, Paulina's "explicit call for faith" (p. 9) is certainly Pauline, but Catholic theology strongly emphasizes the need for faith—while rejecting the Lutheran reduction to the *Sola Fide* dogma. A fascinating Catholic interpretation of Paulina is offered by Clare Asquith, who demonstrates convincing connections between Shakespeare's pivotal character and Lady Magdalen Browne, Viscountess Montague, an openly recusant aristocrat who died shortly before the play was written, and whose great nephew, Lord Strange, and grandson, the Earl of Southampton, were Shakespeare's patrons (Asquith 2005, pp. 36–42). In any case, this is where the debate should occur concerning the final scene of *The Winter's Tale*, between Catholic and Protestant readings, not over a question of whether there is any authentic religious thinking involved.

It is indeed difficult to say what the playwright's deepest beliefs were, given that he always speaks through dramatic characters, but there is ample evidence of real Christian belief throughout. If Shakespeare ever does speak in his own voice, it is in the Epilogue to *The Tempest*, spoken by Prospero, who is identified in many and unmistakable ways with the playwright himself. The Catholic significance of this final passage is demonstrated effectively by Beauregard, who shows in detail that "the twenty lines of the epilogue are interlaced with the technical language of sin and grace" (Beauregard 1997, p. 163). The epilogue is a retirement speech by one who is giving thought to his impending death, and it ends with a request for intercessory prayers: "As you from crimes would pardoned be / Let your indulgence set me free" (V.Epi.19–20). This echoes the Lord's Prayer, but it also uses affirmatively the most fraught word of the Reformation era. Whether his dramatic use of Catholic language, doctrine, and ritual clinches the argument that Shakespeare was a "church papist" will continue to be debated. Yet it is tempting to see this valedictory speech as William Shakespeare's version of the Catholic Spiritual Testament signed by his father, John Shakespeare, and hidden away in the rafters of his house (Beauregard 1997, p. 159). This one is hidden in plain sight but is sufficiently ambiguous to avoid prosecution. What matters to the general critical discussion is that Shakespeare's art is inseparable from the religious practices and tensions of his day.

Nowhere is this tension more prominent than in *Hamlet*, a play about a Catholic ghost in an increasingly Protestant world. One of the issues involved is the interpretation of the Albigensian movement. This sect arose in southern France in the 11th century. They were a neo-Manichean group, possibly influenced by preceding dualists such as the Bogomils in Bulgaria. A fairly even-handed

article by Nicholas Weber in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* gives a concise account, emphasizing what is generally accepted by modern historians (Weber 1907). The name "Albigenses" (derived from the town of Albi) was used to denote this sect at the Council of Tours (1163), one of the many church councils that denounced them. They were also called Cathars, from *katharos* (pure), and this designation gives them something in common with the later Puritans, who also named themselves "pure." St. Bernard preached against their teachings, as did St. Dominic at a later time, but the Albigenses proved quite resistant to orthodox theology. Eventually, Pope Innocent III called for a crusade against them (in 1207), and much blood was shed over a period of many decades. The medieval Inquisition tried many of their leaders, turning them over to civil authorities for execution. Still, the Albigenses persisted for some time, having spread to parts of Spain, Italy, and Germany. It was not until sometime in the 14th century, nearly three centuries after its first appearance, that the sect finally disappeared.

This was no minor event in the history of Christianity, and it would have been well known to educated people in Shakespeare's time, two centuries later. In a recent and thoroughly researched book, Malcom Barber emphasizes the shock that this movement gave to the church:

> Catharism was the greatest heretical challenge faced by the Catholic Church in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The attempt by the Cathars to find an answer to the fundamental religious and philosophical problems posed by the existence of evil, combined with their success in persuading large numbers of Christians in the West that they had solved these problems, shook the Catholic hierarchy to its very core, and provoked a series of reactions more extreme than any previously contemplated. (Barber 2013, p. 1)

Having exhausted the resources of preaching to the Cathars, and feeling that the very existence of the church was threatened, Pope Innnocent felt compelled to call for a crusade against them, though he knew it would be a bloodbath, as indeed it was. Memory of this brutal war did not fade by Shakespeare's time, and all educated people of that time must have been aware of the crusade and some of the theological issues involved. Catholic commentaries denounced the Albegensians as heretics, but some Protestant writers, especially those of the Puritan persuasion, saw them as noble reformers and martyrs, as we will see.

The Albigensians were indeed reformers, responding to the widespread corruption of the clergy at the time and calling for apostolic clerical poverty (as did the internal reform movements of the Dominicans and Franciscans). In a deeply researched book on the subject, H. J. Warner repeatedly calls attention to the legitimate aims of the Cathars. He argues that their dualism was emphasized less than their call to morality of life. When candidates for admission to the sect were catechized, he tells us, they were not asked to affirm the dualist doctrine: "Thus discipline of life was presented to them not as a struggle with an evil God, but as a following of Apostolic Christianity and a practical protest against a corrupt hierarchy" (Warner 1922, p. 88). Since it was an earlier reform movement, it tended to be viewed sympathetically by Protestants of Shakespeare's time, in spite of its heterodox teachings.

What were those teachings? The Albigenses believed in two equal deities: a good principle, who created the spiritual world and human souls; and an evil principle, who created the physical world and the human body as a trap for souls. They rejected the Old Testament as a creation of the evil god. They denied the full doctrine of the Incarnation, asserting that Jesus Christ only appeared to be born of Mary, only appeared to be embodied and came to free souls from their bodies. Naturally, they rejected the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. The Trinitarian doctrine was cast aside, for the Albigenses regarded the son and the spirit as created beings, not equal to the good god. They also renounced the sacraments and instead offered their adherents just one ceremony, the "Consolation," in which a laying on of hands signified a purification from all sin. As Barber explains,

> Catharism represented total opposition to the Catholic Church, which was viewed by the Cathars as a false and fraudulent organisation which had prostituted itself for power and ill-gotten wealth. The sacraments through which the Catholic Church claimed to open the way to salvation were quite valueless, since they were founded upon the claim that Christ

> really had lived on earth, had been crucified, and then resurrected, events clearly impossible, since God could not have taken on material form in the first place. (Barber 2013, p. 2)

Thus they returned to controversies of the early centuries of Christianity concerning the nature of Jesus Christ, siding with those who denied the central doctrine of the Incarnation. It followed that sacraments, which all employ physical elements and recall Christ's physical life on earth, would also be declared invalid.

The whole aim of Albigensian practice was to liberate the soul from the body. Ordinary members were called "credentes" (believers); the more advanced priestly adherents were the "perfecti" (perfect), and they practiced a more severe asceticism. The believers would typically wait until they thought themselves near death before receiving the Consolation, after which they often sought to die while in that state of grace. If death did not come quickly they would typically starve themselves, a process of passive suicide they called the *endura* (Barber 2013, pp. 114–15).

Given that they believed the body to be a prison of the soul, the Cathars considered marriage and procreation to be evil. Members (especially the Perfect) were encouraged to remain celibate, or, even if not celibate to disdain marriage and avoid procreation. Here is Barber's description of these beliefs, quoting contemporary sources:

> Good matrimony was when 'our soul was joined to God through good will, and that was the sacrament of matrimony.' In contrast, 'carnal matrimony' was not matrimony at all, and carnal intercourse between husband and wife was 'always a sin', even more than if a man had intercourse with a woman who was a stranger, as carnal acts between those who were married were more frequent and therefore engendered greater shame. (Barber 2013, p. 113)

In the Cathar account of the Fall, the evil god, Satan, is the creator of the physical world and the bodies of Adam and Eve. He tricks souls into inhabiting those bodies. Satan himself impregnates Eve, and all her offspring are therefore known as "sons of the devil" (Barber 2013, pp. 96–97). Further procreation is thus to be avoided.

With this background in mind, let us turn to the play. In Hamlet's first soliloquy he bemoans "this too too sullied flesh" (I.ii.129), expressing an extreme disgust at his corporeal existence—both too solid and too besmirched. He goes on to indict the entire world: "O God, God, / How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world! / Fie on it, ah fie, 'tis an unweeded garden / That grows to seed" (I.ii.132–36). Naseeb Shaheen points out that Shakespeare is here using a commonplace metaphor, "since a garden, whether properly cared for or neglected, was to Elizabethans an image of the world" (Shaheen 1999, p. 474). The garden symbol naturally calls to mind the Garden of Eden, seen as corrupted with weeds and untended after the Fall. Perhaps its growing to seed suggests the unprofitable generation of people as well as plants. This goes beyond a reference to the Fall in the orthodox understanding, in which both human kind and the world itself are understood to be created good but corrupted by the Original Sin: the world seems to Hamlet inherently and irremediably corrupt.

Hamlet acknowledges that God has "fixed / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter" (131–32) but wishes it were not so. He here reveals a melancholic temperament responding to his father's sudden death and his mother's shockingly quick remarriage to his uncle. However, his words reflect the Cathars' contentions that the physical world and the body are not only fallen but innately evil, as well as their desire to free their souls from their bodies by suicide. He is held back by orthodox beliefs, but his longing for death is couched in terms that echo dualistic disgust with the world and the body.

After his meeting with his father's ghost, Hamlet's melancholy is naturally intensified, and from the first it seems that his madness is not entirely feigned, or that it has more of an edge to it than would be necessary to throw Claudius off the scent. Speaking with Polonius, and apropos of nothing, he launches into talk of reproduction: "For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion—Have you a daughter?" (II.ii.181–82). The revolting image of the spontaneous generation of

maggots in rotting flesh sets the tone for all his remarks on the subject, and he quickly identifies that sort of generation with human procreation, adjuring Polonius, "Let her not walk i' th' sun. Conception is a blessing, but as your daughter may conceive, friend, look to 't" (184–86). This addresses Polonius's own fears about Ophelia walking too much in the sunny affection of the prince, but it also generalizes a profound doubt about the value of procreation. Conception is thought to be a blessing, but Hamlet will never again acknowledge that; instead, he will consistently see it as something foul, an act that perpetuates the evil physical world, begetting worms out of the rottenness of the flesh. The allusion here to the old idea of spontaneous generation further reduces human sexual love to something that involves no soul or mind or emotion at all, something completely physical, not spiritual. Polonius is aware that there is some method in this madness, though he does not appreciate the irony of his own statement: "How pregnant sometimes his replies are!" (206–207).

> Rosencrantz and Guildenstern now enter the scene, and Hamlet greets them by asking, "What have you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of Fortune that she sends you to prison hither?"
>
> Guildenstern: Prison, my lord?
>
> Hamlet: Denmark is a prison.
>
> Rosencrantz: Then is the world one.
>
> Hamlet: A goodly one; in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons, Denmark being one o' th' worst. (II.ii.237–45)

It is not only Denmark that seems a prison house to him but the whole weary and unprofitable world. As the conversation continues, Hamlet tells them that he has "lost all my mirth," to the point where "this goodly frame the earth seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire—why it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors" (293–99). Just as he knows that conception is a blessing, he knows the world is beautiful, and he describes it beautifully—but only to highlight his own sense that it is loathsome. He has ceased to believe, it would seem, that on the last day there will appear "New heaven and new earth" (Rev. 21:1).

Man is similarly beautiful: "What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties; in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals! And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?" (300–5). All Christians believe that human beings were created from earth, but they also take seriously the words of Genesis telling them that they were created in the image and likeness of God. It was common in Shakespeare's age to see the human body, however fallen, as reflecting the immortal soul. To see dust as the very essence, the fundamental nature of the human body is indeed heterodox. As John Curran puts it, "If our *quintessence* is of dust, this implies the elimination of all other ways truthfully to see ourselves" (Curran 2006, p. 12). Curran sees in this statement a Protestant view of humanity; my suggestion is that the Protestant view tends toward something even more disgusted by the flesh, the Cathar vision of the body as purely evil. Shaheen compares this passage to Psalm 8:

> What is man that thou art mindful of him: and the sonne of man that thou visitest him? Thou madest him lower than the angels: to crowne him with glory and worship. Thou makest him to haue dominion of the works of thy hands: and thou hast put all things in subiection vnder his feete. (Ps. 8.4–6)

Hamlet's speech does echo this passage, especially in seeing man as created just a little lower than the angels on the chain of being. But he reverses the line of thought: the Psalm begins with an acknowledgment of mankind's unworthiness and then marvels that nevertheless the Creator made

us almost angelic and gave us dominion over all other creatures; Hamlet begins with a beautiful description of human nobility but ends in disgust at the physical composition of our bodies out of dust. This reverses the words of human creation in Genesis itself, where God begins with clay but breathes into it an immortal soul. According to the Cathars, the good god made only souls, which were then tricked by the evil one into entering bodies made of clay and thus trapped. Hamlet's speech resonates with such a dualistic belief.

It is in the next scene that Hamlet speaks most like an Albigensian. In his most famous soliloquy, he continues to contemplate suicide, though his fear of the dreams that might come "When we have shuffled off this mortal coil" (III.i.67) is orthodox. The "coil" refers to the turmoil and disturbance of our mortal life, which the melancholic and the Cathar view as being the whole of it. In the following conversation with Ophelia before the play, Hamlet condemns procreation: "Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?" (III.i.121–22). His play on the slang meaning of a nunnery as a brothel makes the situation even more hopeless, associating even celibacy with carnality (as did many Puritan preachers as well). Curiously, the Albigensians were sometimes reported by their Catholic critics (whether accurately or not is hard to tell) as rejecting marriage but practicing sodomy as a way of satisfying their carnal desires while avoiding producing children. The word "breeder" emphasizes the animality of sexual love, and this passage echoes the earlier reference to breeding maggots. It is, of course, perfectly traditional to say that when one begets children one brings into the world human beings who will certainly be sinners, but the implication that children are completely defined by their sinfulness is shockingly heretical in its denial of redemption and grace. Hamlet refers to Original Sin moments earlier, proclaiming that "virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it" (117–18). To deny the efficacy of virtue might be simply a Protestant rejection of works theology, but the tone here is one of complete hopelessness: there is nothing that can overcome the evil of a world created by an evil god. Only the death of the body can release the soul.

Hamlet continues his diatribe against procreation: "I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me . . . " (122–23). Even though he is fairly honest, it would be better had he never been born; it would be better if no one were born. Here he comes close to Lear's demand that the storm should "Crack Nature's moulds, all germains spill at once, / That makes ingrateful man" (III.ii.8–9), but where Lear is expressing misanthropy, Hamlet couches his rejection of procreation in Christian terms. What he says runs contrary to the divine injunction in Genesis to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1.28). To avoid breeding more sinners, Hamlet decrees, people should practice celibacy (or the anti-procreative sexuality of the brothel), and marriage must be rejected: "I say we will have no more marriage. Those that are married already—all but one—shall live. The rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go" (147–49). This renunciation of marriage is neither Protestant nor Catholic. The Protestants insisted that even ministers should be free to marry, and for Catholics marriage was one of the seven sacraments. For both, one of the essential purposes of marriage was begetting and raising children. In denouncing both procreation and marriage, Hamlet sounds very much like an Albigensian.

In the last two acts, Hamlet continues to express dualistic beliefs. Asked what he has done with Polonius's dead body, he replies that he has "Compounded it with dust, whereto 'tis kin" (IV.ii.6). Again, to say our bodies are made from dust and return to dust is ordinary Christian teaching, but to say that we are kin to dust smacks of a radical rejection of the body. Similarly, to declare that "We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots" (IV.iii.21–23) is to focus morbidly on the decay of the body, forgetting the belief, expressed in the ancient Apostles' Creed, in the "resurrection of the body." In the wonderful and powerful graveyard scene, Hamlet continues his meditation on bodily decay while looking at skulls being tossed from the ground. With mordant wit, he imagines "the noble dust of Alexander . . . stopping a bunghole" (V.i.191–92) and

> Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay,
> Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.
> Oh that that earth that kept the world in awe

Should patch a hole t'expel the winter's flaw! (V.i.200–203)

Saints down through the ages have meditated on the body's decay, and some, such as St. Jerome, kept a skull handy as a *memento mori*. David Beauregard (following Louis Martz) notes a very similar passage in Luis de Granada's *Of Prayer and Meditation* (Beauregard 2008, p. 87). Yet the bitter tone of these lines seems to dwell on the death of the body in a way that denies its eventual resurrection on the last day. The Doctor of Divinity who presides over the "maimed rites" for Ophelia explains,

Her obsequies have been as far enlarged
As we have warranty. Her death was doubtful,
And, but that great command o'ersways the order,
She should in ground unsanctified have lodged
Till the last trumpet. (V.i.213–16)

Shaheen cites 1 Cor. 15.52: "At the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall blowe, and the dead shall be raised vp" (Shaheen 1999, p. 492). Here is a reminder of orthodox dogma, the belief that suicide is a mortal sin precluding burial in consecrated ground, and the belief that at the last trumpet all bodies will be raised from the ground to be knit together again and reunited with their souls in heaven or hell. The priest's words stand in contrast to those of Hamlet.

Though Hamlet continues with dualistic talk nearly to the end, there is some turning toward orthodox Christianity. After his near-death experiences at sea, he is "set naked" back on Danish soil (IV.vii.43), a type of Jonah brought back renewed and chastened to prophesy to the sinful world. He proclaims himself boldly at the graveyard: "This is I, / Hamlet the Dane" (V.i.244–45), asserting not only his identity but his kingship. And he proclaims unambiguously his love for Ophelia, implicitly acknowledging the goodness of sexual love and marriage. Peter Milward also sees this return to Christian belief, suggesting that "something in Hamlet's conscience is awakened . . . by the burial of Ophelia, which is in a sense arranged for him by divine providence . . . he comes to reveal a Christlike spirit of forgiveness in the end" (Milward 1987, p. 5). At the beginning of the final scene, the Prince remembers that God cares for worms like him, crawling between heaven and earth: "There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (V.ii.208–209). He here recalls the words of Jesus: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and one of them shal not fall on the ground without your Father?" (Matthew 10:29, quoted by Shaheen 1999, p. 493). Even the lowliest creatures of the physical world were created good and are held in the providential care of the Creator; so too Hamlet. I cannot agree with Curran when he frames this reference to Providence as a capitulation to the Calvinist denial of free will and a deterministic sense that "nothing can be otherwise than it is" (Curran 2006, p. 205). Hamlet expresses, it seems to me, a peaceful resignation, not a despairing one. Significantly, Hamlet asks pardon of Laertes before they fence, and as they are dying Laertes begs, "Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet. / Mine and my father's death come not upon thee, / Nor thine on me!"—to which Hamlet responds charitably, "Heaven make thee free of it!" (V.ii.318–21). It is a scene of Christian forgiveness worthy of the romances and predicated on the orthodox belief that our sins have been atoned for and may be forgiven. These are strong hints that Hamlet returns to his senses and embraces orthodox belief at the end.

Let us not claim to have plucked out the heart of Hamlet's mystery (III.ii.351), yet we may hope to shed some light upon it. Religious questions are particularly insistent and fascinating in *Hamlet* and have stimulated excellent critical evaluations. Some have concluded that within the play Shakespeare does not take sides in the Protestant-Catholic debate. For instance, Peter Iver Kaufman compares Hamlet's famously troubled self-reflection to a movement within Protestant circles to encourage "a regimen of self-lacerating introspection," which they often called "Christian clearing" (Kaufman 2011, p. 428). However, Kaufman also notes that a very similar emphasis on brutal self-examination was promoted in Catholic circles, especially in the spiritual exercises of the Jesuits (pp. 434–35). Kaufman offers a refreshingly irenic acknowledgment of the common ground that Catholics and Protestants shared, though they often refused to admit it. Maurice Hunt has reached a similar conclusion: "my argument

discovers the surprising extent of Shakespeare's amalgamation of Protestant and Catholic motifs and ideas in single images, concepts, and characterizations" (Hunt 2004, p. ix). Still, Protestant and Catholic beliefs are in many places in the play kept distinct from each other and seen as opposed.

As a witness to the theological intensity of *Hamlet*, a fine collection of essays on Shakespeare and Christian culture edited by Dennis Taylor and David Beauregard contains three pieces on this one play, each offering a distinct perspective. John Freeman finds echoes of recusant writers: "Called back from Wittenberg, the seat of Protestant learning, Hamlet struggles with the demands of a Catholic past pressed upon him by his phantasmal father" (Freeman 2003, p. 250). Freeman convincingly finds a Catholic Hamlet, but a conflicted and even reluctant one. Jennifer Rust also points to Hamlet's connection with Wittenberg and follows earlier critics in noting the "conflation of the historical Diet of Worms with the decaying body of Polonius" (Rust 2003, p. 260). The Diet of Worms was an assembly called by the Holy Roman Emperor in 1521 to question Martin Luther. There he famously said he could not recant his teachings but must follow the Scriptures and his own conscience. It was the point of no return. Luther was given safe conduct when he departed, but the Edict of Worms declared him a heretic and ordered his capture. The irresistible play on words employed by Shakespeare (a "diet," or assembly of leaders, in the city of Worms / worms dieting on Polonius) strongly evokes this historical moment. Rust also points out that Tyndale's translation of the Bible was published in Worms in 1527, connecting that city yet more closely to the Reformation in England. The main point of Rust's essay is that a particular type of melancholy, "spiritual melancholy," was recognized at that time and spoken of in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, as well as other sources. Her contention is that Hamlet suffers from that sort of melancholy, which comes about from an inauthentic religious impulse. "Though Wittenberg may have been particularly redolent of spiritual melancholy," she writes, "the condition itself was clearly a source of concern in Calvinist England as well" (Rust 2003, p. 266). This interpretation also seems reasonable, and it leads into the third essay, by R. Chris Hassel, on "Hamlet's Puritan Style," in which the author "explores the ways in which Hamlet's outspoken, even hyperbolic, righteousness towards himself and others echoes the unique diction, syntax, and imagery of the represented Puritan, if not always the real one" (Hassel 2003, p. 287). This analysis is consistent in some ways with Hassel's earlier essay on "Hamlet's 'Too, Too Solid Flesh,'" in which he argues that "Hamlet's compulsion to do and to know perfectly is part of a larger paradigm of egotism which Luther variously calls the 'idols,' 'snares,' or 'traps' of the flesh" (Hassel 1994, p. 616). So we have (in just one book) Hamlet as a recusant (albeit a reluctant one), a sufferer from spiritual melancholy, and a Puritan—with all three essays offering compelling support. It seems we are no more likely than his erstwhile friends to pluck out Hamlet's mystery, yet there are important revelations in these efforts.

Hassel's chapter is the only place where I have come across reference to the Albigensians in relation to the play. He cites Patrick Collinson's book on *English Puritanism*: "Collinson points to the 'insinuation of the ancient heresy of perfectionism,' Novationism, Catharism, Albigensianism, what you will, as one of the benchmarks of Puritanism" (Hassel 2003, p. 301). The tendency of English Calvinists (at least the stereotypical ones) toward a self-righteous perfectionism can lead in the direction of a hyper-spiritualism that rejects the body as evil and thus in the direction of Catharism. Collinson indicates that the connection between Puritan and Cathar (and, again, the two terms meant "pure") was made by critics of the Puritans. He gives as an instance "that master of invective, the ex-Carmelite monk John Bale. Writing in the reign of Mary of some of his fellow protestant exiles, he attacked them as 'our Catharites or brethren of the purity'" (Collinson 1987, p. 8). The connection between Cathar and Puritan was primarily made, then, by opponents of these zealous English Calvinists, yet Puritan writers did not reject the association.

Indeed, the Puritans often recognized a kinship with those medieval heretics, regarding them as early reformers. For instance, John Foxe, in his very popular book of Protestant martyrs, *Acts and Monuments*, includes both Waldensians and Albigensians among the martyrs (Foxe 1583). A little after the time of the play, J. P. Perrin wrote *Luthers fore-runners: Or, a cloud of witnesses deposing for the Protestant faith*, and his title page states that the book is divided into three parts: "The second

containes the historie of the Waldenses called Albigenses" (Perrin 1624). Perrin thus includes both sects (identified as one) among the fore-runners of Luther. Perhaps Shakespeare is assuming that the dualist heresies mouthed by Hamlet in his agony align with the ideas of those fervent Protestants who had come to be known as Puritans.

John Foxe was certainly the most famous of the English Puritan writers in Shakespeare's time, and he embraces the connection with the Albigensians. Leonard Tinterud summarizes Foxe's Preface thus:

> This world had always had two churches, God's true church and the devil's chapel nearby. The true church had seldom been visible, and had usually been small and under persecution, discernible only to those who were its members. The false church had usually been visible, powerful, pompous, wealthy, cruel and persecuting—a clerical church . . . The clerical false church had charged the true persecuted church with heresy. (Tinterud 1971, p. 44)

Foxe assumed that any group persecuted by the Church of Rome and called heretical was actually part of the true Church. Here is how he himself puts it in the section where he discusses the Albigensians:

> What these Albigenses were, it cannot be well gathered by the old popish histories: for if there were any who did hold, teach, ore maintain against the pope, or his papal pride, or withstand and gainsay his beggarly traditions, rites, and religions, &c. the historians of that time, in writing of them, do, for the most part, so deprave and misreport them (suppressing the truth of their articles) that they make them and paint them forth to be worse than Turks and infidels . . . otherwise it is to be thought (and so I find in some records) that the opinions of the said Albigenses were sound enough . . . (Foxe 1870, p. 356)

Clearly, the Puritans did not endorse the dualistic ideas that the Albigensians had been accused of holding. As a recent historian, Abraham Friesen, puts it, " . . . all of those who, in one fashion or another, saw themselves as heirs to the medieval heretics were not really interested in what the latter stood for—with the possible exception of Foxe's interests in Wycliffe. Beginning with Luther and the martyrologists, they were primarily interested in legitimating themselves against the attacks of the Catholics, and they sought to use the medieval heretics to accomplish this" (Friesen 1998, p. 189). Nevertheless, to a writer with Catholic leanings, such as Shakespeare, it would have been tempting to see the Puritans as veering toward the old heresy by their perfectionism and their rejection of the physicality of the Catholic Church's sacraments, ceremonials, festivals, and icons. His depictions of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* and Angelo in *Measure for Measure* signal an anti-Puritan attitude. Hamlet's preaching against the wickedness of the world and the body registers not only Puritanical rhetoric but Cathar. This is not to say, of course, that Shakespeare's tragic hero consciously adopts the teachings of the medieval heretics. But in his melancholic railing against the sins of his mother and uncle and against the deviousness of nearly everyone around him, Hamlet falls into rhetorical excesses that echo those old dualistic doctrines. His terrible confusion of heart becomes a theological confusion which rejects traditional truths of the Christian Faith.

Dualism is perennially attractive because it satisfies an intuitive sense that the world is in fact very bad, full of both natural evils and moral evil. St. Augustine was famously drawn to the Manichean version, and after his conversion to orthodox Christianity he worked hard to confute it and to develop an alternative theology of good and evil. In his Theodicy (worked out in his *Confessions* and elsewhere), he argues that evil is not a separate being but rather is non-being, an absence of good. In this view, even Satan was created good and chose evil, which meant choosing to deny the good in himself and diminish his own being. Thus Dante describes him as a pathetic beast frozen in the ice and barely able to move, unable to speak (*Inferno*, canto xxxiv). In *Paradise* Lost, Milton initially presents Satan as newly-fallen and still attractive and powerful, but he fades as he continues to choose malice until he actually makes himself into a serpent (Lewis 1942, p. 97). His offspring, Death, is a shapeless shadow without any real substance (*Paradise Lost*, Book II). The struggle between Good and Evil in this

orthodox theological perspective is ultimately no struggle at all, for evil is self-defeating. Still, it often does not seem that way, especially to those seeking spiritual perfection while confronting profound evil in this vale of tears. Such a one is Hamlet.

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Article

"I Knew Him, Horatio": Shakespeare's Beliefs, Early Textual Editing, and Nineteenth-Century Phrenology

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Abstract: As Hamlet gazes into Yorick's skull, he reassembles the quirks of the jester's personhood and also imagines a self that he used to be, in relation to Yorick. Partially through the lens of *Hamlet*, characterized by A.C. Bradley as Shakespeare's most "religious" play, this essay interrogates how several eighteenth-century textual editors, and some nineteenth-century scholars and popular admirers, imagine and construct Shakespeare's beliefs: the first, through their efforts to reassemble the textual "bones" of Shakespeare's works; and the second, through the rising pseudoscience of phrenology, operating in the background in the national debate to exhume and examine Shakespeare's skull.

Keywords: Hamlet; Yorick; Shakespeare's religion; phrenology; Shakespeare's skull; textual-editing; C.M. Ingleby

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Hamlet's *contemptus mundi*—that we are the "beauty of the world," noble in action and godlike in reason, yet little more than a "quintessence of dust" (2.2.273–74) unable to escape rotting in the grave a few feet below the surface—must have been keenly felt in a period that thought intently and intentionally about death.[1] That meditation drove some to foster a yearning for eternal things, and was instrumental in preparing the soul for its journey heavenward, as Jeremy Taylor admonishes: "Since we stay not here, being a people but of a dayes abode, and our age is like that of a flie, and contemporary with a gourd, we must look some where else for an abiding city, a place in another countrey to fix our house in, whose walls and foundation is God, where we must find rest, or else be restless forever" (Taylor 1651, p. 20). Discerning what Shakespeare himself believed regarding life in this world and the possibility of an afterlife is unresolvable.[2] At first glance, the poet's will seems promising. Drawn up in January 1616 and revised in March to accommodate the recent marriage of his daughter Judith, Shakespeare begins with what appears to be a clear expression of faith: "ffirst [*sic*] I Comend my Soule into the handes of god my Creator, hoping & assuredlie beleeving through thonelie merittes of Jesus Christe my Saviour to be made partaker of lyfe everlastinge" (Chambers 1930, vol. 2, p. 170). The certainty of the expression is checked, however, by the formulaic character of the genre of preambles to last wills and testaments in the early modern period.[3] Michael Wood notes that biographers have depicted Shakespeare variously as "an outward conformist but with inward regrets; a reverent agnostic; [or] a humanist who found greatest solace in the pagans." Wood characterizes him as a Christian, but

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1 Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from *Hamlet* throughout are from (Shakespeare 2006a). Lockerd (2019) explores Hamlet's prevailing attitude of disgust for the body in the context of the dualistic Albigensian heresy, and suggests that after Hamlet's sea journey, the prince returns to some measure of orthodox belief.

2 For a useful survey of recent work on Shakespeare's religious beliefs, see (Cox 2006). Cox (2018) reiterates that Shakespeare's own beliefs are impossible to ascertain, and addresses how scholars in the last decade have particularly moved away from arguing for Shakespeare's Catholic identity while maintaining an interest in the cross-currents of belief, atheism, and denominational tensions in the plays.

3 On the circumstances of the will, see (Chambers 1930, vol. 2, pp. 174–80). A facsimile of the will, and discussion of its contents, are found in (Schoenbaum 1975, pp. 242–50).

urges that like many of his contemporaries, he was one who "probably eschewed certainties and no longer held any deep sectarian conviction" (Wood 2003, p. 340). Shakespeare's characters certainly demonstrate a full range of belief, what Alison Shell terms "heterocosms" (Shell 2010, p. 15): from mixed nihilism (Macbeth) to skepticism (Hamlet); from a conviction in the rhetorical utility of the language of faith for political gain (Henry V) to the manipulation of language in the service of the exaltation of self-autonomy (Iago and Edmund); from belief in the gods' cruelty or indifference (Titus Andronicus and Gloucester) to God's sovereign Judgment of souls (Henry V, Othello, and, again, Hamlet). As David Scott Kastan puts it, "Shakespeare declines to tell us what to believe, or to tell us what he believed. But this is not the familiar claim of his disinterested secularism"; Shakespeare was, instead, supremely interested in representing the "experience of belief" rather than confirming "the truth of what was believed" (Kastan 2014, p. 7). Religion, for Shakespeare, was thus primarily aesthetic.[4]

That may be a judicious assessment for twenty-first century scholars, but the early history of Bardophilia is littered with the conflation of the one (belief as represented in the plays) with the other (Shakespeare's own beliefs). As Kastan describes, "in the absence of an archive of biographical evidence, we make the work an allegory to fill in what we wish we had" (Kastan 2014, p. 40). In this essay, I hope to put some pressure on that "wishing" by examining how some prominent eighteenth- and nineteenth-century admirers, biographers, and textual editors of Shakespeare—zealous for any detail that would illumine the dramatist's elusive life and mind—fell into the trap that Samuel Schoenbaum describes: "[t]hus does each man convert Shakespeare to his own belief or infidelity ... " (Schoenbaum 1970, p. 459). In other words, I mean to interrogate how the "religion in Shakespeare" was translated into the "religion of Shakespeare," tracing this tendency through the lens of *Hamlet*, a play which the eminent late-Victorian critic A. C. Bradley asserted was the nearest that Shakespeare approached to a "religious drama" (Bradley 1991, p. 166). The heterocosms of belief in *Hamlet* led many to speculate on Shakespeare's own beliefs, culminating in a national debate to exhume his skull—Yorick-like—in order to ascertain them.

1. 18th Century Circumlocution and Certainty Regarding Shakespeare's Beliefs

Editorial attempts in the eighteenth century to address Shakespeare's beliefs about the "undiscovered country," either through biography or editorial emendation, tend to avoid direct speculation about his doctrinal affiliation. But they were, nonetheless, trying to "dig up" the authentic Shakespeare through his textual bones. The early biographer and editor, Nicholas Rowe, began his six volume *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear* with his *Some Account of the Life &c. of Mr. William Shakespear* (Rowe 1709), asserting that there is a vital relationship between biography and bibliography. When it comes to considering "Men of Letters ... the knowledge of an Author may sometimes conduce to the better understanding his Book" (Rowe 1709, vol. 1, p. ii). Rowe's early assumption that the life is a lens to view the works set the agenda for some later critics, even though his particular portrait of Shakespeare as being "a good-natur'd Man, of great sweetness of his Manners, and a most agreeable Companion" or a "Man Excellent on most Occasions" seems, in the end, not to have much bearing on how Rowe understands the plays (Rowe 1709, vol. 1, pp. vii, xv). At the conclusion of his brief *Account*, perhaps discouraged by the lack of biographical material that might reveal how Shakespeare's life impinges on the plays, he concedes, "This is what I could learn of any Note, either relating to himself or Family: The Character of the Man is best seen in his writings" (Rowe 1709, vol. 1, p. xxxvii). Here, Rowe seems to reverse the initial formulation: in the relative absence of biographical details, we discern the playwright's life through the work—a powerful assumption that governed biography and

[4] For recent challenges to this assumption, see (Lockerd 2019; Tiffany 2018). In this special issue, Smith (2018) explores the experience of religion in *Measure for Measure*, and how religion is paradoxically both the problem and the solution for the dilemmas of the play. Garrison (2018) and Clegg (2019) address how differently Shakespeare's characters think about the afterlife.

textual analysis well into the nineteenth century. Moreover, even though he has shifted to privileging the works over the life, Rowe is not altogether specific in his *Account* about what precisely we can know about Shakespeare's "character" through his works.

In Rowe's short biography of Shakespeare, which became the unaltered standard for much of the century, he does not make any explicit statements about the playwright's personal beliefs regarding the afterlife, except to note his uncanny ability to represent the otherworldly. Shakespeare's imagination "raises his Fancy to a flight above Mankind and the Limits of the visible World" (Rowe 1709, vol. 1, p. xxiii) in plays such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*. But Rowe makes an implicit comment about Shakespeare's religious inclinations by way of circumlocution in the dedicatory epistle to Charles Seymour, sixth Duke of Somerset. Somerset's ancestor Edward Seymour, first Duke of Somerset, was the brother of Jane Seymour and the uncle of Edward VI, "whose Piety and Zeal for the true Religion [i.e., Protestant Church of England], will preserve his Name Dear and Sacred to our Church forever" (Rowe 1709, vol. 1, n.p.). When Henry VIII died, Somerset was appointed Lord Protector and he played an initial role in young Edward's transition, though he himself lacked the heavy-handedness required of an effective ruler. Rowe compliments this ancestor of the current Somerset for standing strong against "those wicked and ambitious Men, who design'd the Subversion of Church and State" and who "could not propose to have brought about those fatal Designs, till they had first remov'd the Duke of Somerset" (Rowe 1709, vol. 1, n.p.). Whatever the personal religious beliefs of the first Duke, he aligned himself with the reforming party's politics.[5] Rowe's praise of Somerset's descendant thus places his guardianship of his own *Works of Mr. William Shakespear* within that Reformation context. Just as the first Somerset protected the "Establish'd Church, the Crown, and Your Country" from the "pernicious Councils" who threatened to bring in a "religion equally destructive to the Church and State," the sixth Somerset will safeguard England's established poet against the forces that conspire against him. Rowe laments that the "Present Age is indeed an unfortunate one for *Dramatick Poetry*; she has been persecuted by Fanaticism, forsaken by her Friends," and in the midst of "such perillous Times, I know no Protection for *Shakespear*, more Safe nor more Honourable than Your Grace's" (Rowe 1709, vol. 1, n.p.). The forces of "Fanaticism" that Rowe mentions are not clarified, but he may be referring to the recently renewed barrage of antitheatrical attacks led by the theologian Jeremy Collier in his *A Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698).[6] Collier, later consecrated as a non-jurist bishop with some distinctly Catholic pretensions in the eucharist, including prayers for the dead, was motivated in Rowe's day by the same religious fervor against blasphemy and poorly drawn morality on the Restoration stage, as that exercised by early puritans against the renaissance stage in the previous century. Rowe's analogy may function as no more than obligatory patronage to a man known by contemporaries as "The Proud Duke." But insofar as the analogy works, Rowe suggests that Shakespeare is like the true "Establish'd Church" that must be protected from "wicked and ambitious" designs seeking to subvert his cultural prominence and (perhaps) religious orthodoxy.

If Rowe implies something about Shakespeare's beliefs by circumlocution, Lewis Theobald offers the first explicit comments about them in *Shakespeare restor'd* (1726), a bold intervention against the perceived flaws of Alexander Pope's Shakespeare edition published the previous year.[7] Peter Shillingsburg recounts that the goal of early editorial practice was "to search out those words that

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[5] Rowe makes Somerset out to be the last bulwark against the "wicked" Catholic forces that would eventually marshal around Mary Tudor. But such praise is better directed towards John Dudley, first Duke of Northumberland, who worked behind the scenes to discredit and oust Somerset through the Regency Council, badly engineered the ascendancy of his daughter-in-law Jane Grey when the young king died, and then unexpectedly reconverted to Catholicism (earning Rowe's disdain) on the eve of his execution under Mary I. See (Bush 1975; MacCullough 2001).

[6] The cultural impact of this pamphlet and an assessment of its contents are addressed in (Beljame 1948, pp. 230–42).

[7] *Shakespeare restor'd* led to Theobald's seven-volume edition in 1733, which performed the real systematized work of collation, emendation, and commentary on the plays that characterizes modern textual editing, and theorized the selection of criteria for the Shakespearean canon, from whole works down to individual words (Depledge and Kirwan 2017, p. 150).

the editor either does not understand or does not like and replace them with words which he does" (Shillingsburg 1996, p. 21). *Shakespeare restor'd* provides several such examples, for Theobald proclaims that "*SHAKESPEARE'S Works* have always appear'd to me like what he makes his *HAMLET* compare the World to, an *unweeded Garden grown to seed*" (Theobald 1726, p. ii). Theobald took his pruners first and most vigorously to tidying *Hamlet* by comparing the same textual moments in the copies available to him. Generally, he brings together the best of resources—dictionaries, commentaries, grammars, collated copies—and makes sound, scholarly judgments. Theobald's shrewd editorial eye was shaped by his extensive experience with the London theater and wide reading in English drama, his training as a lawyer and his practice as a classical translator, as well as familiarity with the pitfalls of the publication process. In treating *Hamlet*, Theobald places Shakespeare's beliefs in the afterlife most comfortably among the pagans, as we will see in a moment.

On occasion, Theobald is driven by the aesthetic approach that Shillingsburg describes, intuiting what Shakespeare really meant to convey in certain textual moments that bother him. Theobald is puzzled, for instance, when the ghost, "Doom'd ... to walk the night," is "confin'd to fast in fires" during the day (1.5.10–11); while he understands the sentiment that fasting is assigned as a penance by the church, he wonders how fasting, even in fire, would be a punishment for an immaterial being (Theobald 1726, p. 45). While he admits that all the current copies of the play retain the reference to the ghost's fasting in flames, Theobald argues that the phrase should be emended to communicate what Shakespeare really intends: the ghost is "*confin'd to ROAST in fires*" (Theobald 1726, p. 45). Defaulting to his classicist orientation, Theobald explains that the playwright deliberately echoes *Aeneid* VI when the ghost of Anchises explains to his son that souls must burn in the underworld for their crimes before being sent to Elysium (Theobald 1726, p. 47; see Vergil 1964, VI.713–51). Theobald returns to Virgil again to offer commentary on the apparent contradiction in the "To be or not to be" speech (3.1.55–87): Hamlet surmises that no one has ever returned from the "undiscovered country" (3.1.78) despite the evidence of his father's ghost testifying to the contrary. In Theobald's reckoning, we are to understand that the ghost has come from a "*middle state* or *local purgatory*" where he was "doom'd for a Term only, to expiate his Sins of Nature" (Theobald 1726, p. 83). Shakespeare possibly avoids the contradiction because "tho' he admits the *Possibility* of a Spirit *returning* from the Dead, he yet holds that the *State* of the *Dead* cannot be *communicated*, and with that Allowance, it remains still an *undiscover'd Country*" (Theobald 1726, p. 84). Theobald implies something about the dramatist's own religious beliefs when he emends *Hamlet*, asserting that Shakespeare shares with "the Antients" the "same Notions of our abstruse and twilight Knowledge of an *After-being*," noting that Virgil must pause in the narrative to pray to the gods of the underworld to reveal their mysteries (Theobald 1726, p. 84; Vergil 1964, VI.264–67), a piety that Theobald notes is echoed in Gaius Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* in the next generation of Roman poets (Theobald 1726, p. 84; Flaccus 1913, III.399).

It would be prudent not to extrapolate too much from these two examples. But as Marcus Walsh asserts, the "tendency of eighteenth-century editors to conjectural emendation needs also to be understood in the light of their editorial orientations" (Walsh 1997, pp. 118–20). Theobald's classicist orientation causes his emendation in the first instance and his commentary in the second to paganize the ghost's origins, as no sense of the Catholic purgatory is even entertained. Shakespeare seemingly has blended both the pagan and Catholic senses, for the Ghost comments that his story should inspire Hamlet's revenge, else he be "duller ... than the fat weed/That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf" (1.5.32–33), an allusion to Charon's underworld ferry. Theobald's placing Shakespeare comfortably in the company of Virgil and the Roman poets on these points, though small, creates larger interpretive problems. The effect is to minimize or negate the ambiguity of Hamlet's Catholic-Protestant spiritual exercise in discerning whether the ghost is "a spirit of health or goblin damned" who brings "with

thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell" and an intention that may be either "wicked or charitable" (1.4.40–42)—the very act of deliberation that is part of the root of his delay for revenge.[8]

Perhaps because of instances such as these, Samuel Johnson characterizes Theobald as "a man of narrow comprehension and small acquisitions, with no native and intrinsick splendor of genius" (Johnson 1765, vol. 1, p. D1v). In the *Preface* to his eight-volume *The Plays of William Shakespeare* (1765), Johnson generally commends Theobald's corrections to Pope's edition and gives him his due for his zeal in small things. But Johnson castigates the "exuberant excrescence of his diction," Theobald's "triumphant exultations over Pope and Rowe," and his "contemptible ostentation" when praising himself for inserting a comma (Johnson 1765, vol. 1, p. D1r).

Johnson's own early encounter with *Hamlet* ended in terror. As his friend Hester Lynch Piozzi recalled, "I have heard him relate ... how, when he was about nine years old, having got the play of Hamlet in his hand, and reading it quietly in his father's kitchen, he kept on steadily enough, till coming to the Ghost scene, he suddenly hurried up the stairs to the street door that he might see people about him" (Piozzi 1786, pp. 19–20). Johnson asserts in the *Preface* that the strength of Shakespeare's rendering of his characters is that they think in and react to situations—natural or supernatural—in ways that the reader imagines he or she similarly would if placed in the circumstances (Johnson 1765, vol. 1, p. A4r). So, when he assesses Hamlet's prodigious fright and amazement at this most "dreadful operation of supernatural agency" (Johnson 1765, vol. 8, p. 161), Johnson surely must have in mind his own childhood encounter with the play.

Like Rowe, Johnson tends to avoid direct speculation about Shakespeare's religious convictions. But he himself was a reverent man, and James Boswell characterized him as "a sincere and zealous Christian, of high-Church-of-England and monarchical principles" (Boswell 1936, p. 6) and his diary entries demonstrate his awe for the power of the sacraments, honoring the authority of the institutional church, and his repeated personal habits of examining the state of his soul (Kaminski 2012, pp. 27–30).[9] Because of his own Christian humanist orientation, Johnson is bothered by what appears in his eyes to be too much moral neutrality in Shakespeare:

> His first defect is that to which may be imputed most of the evil in books or in men. He sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose. From his writings ... he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to shew in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance. (Johnson 1765, vol. 1, p. B1v)

Johnson falls short of calling Shakespeare irreligious here; it may be that the assessment he offers best regards issues of dramatic style. But given his pieties, it is difficult to separate Johnson's notions of a work's distinctly moral purposes from the perceived religious beliefs and practices to which the writer may subscribe. Johnson's complaining of Shakespeare's habitual leave-taking in moral instruction is demonstrated in his commentary on Hamlet's first instinct to slay Claudius when he kneels to pray (3.3.73–75). Even though Hamlet is representative of the "virtuous character," Johnson loathes that he is "not content with taking blood for blood," and Hamlet's desire to punish the king with "damnation ... is too horrible to be read or to be uttered" (Johnson 1765, vol. 8, p. 236). In all the notes and commentary on *Hamlet* that Johnson's edition provides, this one is the most revealingly

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[8] By 1563, Article XXII of the Church of England's *Thirty-Nine Articles* had clearly rejected the doctrine of purgatory: "The Romish Doctrine concerning Purgatory ... is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God." For Protestants, spiritual apparitions were either good angels visiting on behalf of heaven, or evil angels masquerading as such and tempting the living to despair and destruction; ghostly appearances of the dead would be evidence of the latter. (West 1955) presents the early modern Catholic and Protestant views of ghosts and argues that the pneumatology in *Hamlet* is deliberately ambiguous.

[9] For more on Johnson's religious commitments, see (Quinlan 1964; Chapin 1968).

personal. *Hamlet* remains an imperfect play for Johnson: as a revenger, Hamlet largely fails to bring about what he had promised to do of his own accord, and Claudius' death comes about by an accidental turn of events; and, finally, our satisfying feelings of justice upon the death of the murderous and usurping king are cut short by the drowning of Ophelia, "the young, the beautiful, the harmless, and the pious" (Johnson 1765, vol. 8, p. 311).

If Johnson was uncomfortable with the thought of an irreligious or insufficiently pious Shakespeare, William Richardson and Maurice Morgann praised Shakespeare for the malleability of his belief. Richardson and Morgann represent a shift in the later eighteenth century towards character criticism that became more popular with Romantic writers like William Hazlitt and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In his quirky *A Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of Some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters* (1774), Richardson remarks that the perfection of dramatic representation is "effectuated" only when "the poet in some measure becomes the person he represents" and is able to "retire from himself, become insensible of his actual condition, and regardless of external circumstances, feel the very incidents he invents" (Richardson 1774, p. 26). This protean ability of Shakespeare to dwell in his characters, to feel what they feel and to believe what they believe, is similarly applauded in Morgann's influential *An Essay on the Dramatic Character of John Falstaff* (1777). For Morgann, the dramatist's great characters—Falstaff, Lear, Hamlet, Othello—are but "different modifications of Shakespeare's thought" and being (Morgann 1825, p. 16). His characters differ qualitatively from those of his contemporary playwrights because of his "wonderful facility of compressing, as it were, his own spirit into those images, and of giving alternate animation to those forms" with such depth and scope that "he must have *felt* every varied situation, and have spoken through the organ he had formed" (Morgann 1825, p. 64; emphasis Morgann's). Consequently, Shakespeare's interest in writing the "heterocosms" of belief, to borrow Alison Shell's phrase again, goes beyond simply representing them: Shakespeare *believes* all things.

When *Hamlet* returns from his ghostly interview, he calls together Horatio and Marcellus, who may or may not hear the Ghost's command to keep silence. The ghost's interjection causes Hamlet to startle, "*Hic et ubique*? Then we'll shift our ground" (1.5.155–56). For Richardson and Morgann, and the generation of Romantic essayists after them, Shakespeare's beliefs are "here and everywhere." As we will see shortly, Shakespeare's skull, that once entertained so many beliefs "bounded in a nutshell" (F 2.2.252), inspired a national debate on the viability of shifting a few feet of precious ground, in order to ascertain more precisely the poet's beliefs and proclivities in a more "scientific" way.

2. 19th Century Bone Grubbing and the Religion of Shakespeare's Skull

The identification of Yorick's skull by the gravedigger in 5.1, amid the several anonymous skulls tossed haphazardly out of the grave he is preparing, has always seemed mysterious: *How* did the gravedigger know that *that* was Yorick's skull? Kenneth Branagh's 1996 film production addresses the issue with a skull that features prominent protruding front teeth; as Hamlet gazes at its distinctive grin, Branagh smash cuts to Yorick alive and well, smiling and playing with young Hamlet, and then cuts back to the graveyard (Branagh 1996). In the play text, Hamlet gazes upon the singularity of Yorick's skull, enfleshing it with the memory of his kisses, imbuing it with his jokes, songs, and "flashes of merriment" (5.1.178–81), but he also constructs in the bare relic a picture of his own past and his own younger self in relation, as much as he sees the end to which he himself will come. Michael Neill remarks that a skull "is at once the most eloquent and empty of human signs," for it both summons and shuns the self it once contained, and "acts as a peculiar and sinisterly attractive mirror for the gazer, drawing endless narratives into itself only to cancel them" (Neill 1997, pp. 234–35). As will become clear, just as Hamlet reconstructs Yorick's self—and thus himself—while gazing into that skull, Shakespeare's own skull is as much an external object for consideration as it is a looking glass.

While many antiquarians and Shakespearean specialists of the nineteenth century seemed largely uninterested in uncovering Shakespeare's beliefs, admirers and enthusiasts continued to conjecture. Charles Knight published a popularized edition of the plays, *Pictorial Shakspere* (1838–1841), in an

attempt to wrest the playwright from the hands of specialists, accompanied by a new near-hagiographic biography, *William Shakspere: A Biography* (1843). In full confidence he declared that Shakespeare died a Christian, "full of tranquility and hope" and the "assured belief which the opening of his will has expressed with far more than formal solemnity" (Knight [1843] 1851, p. 317).[10] Knight's biography was speculative and occasionally fictionalizing in the absence of many facts concerning Shakespeare's life, but it set a popular precedent.[11] The century saw many admirers sometimes turning Shakespeare into versions of themselves, including Shakespeare the shrewd businessman; Shakespeare the champion of Victorian morals; Shakespeare the Catholic, Shakespeare the puritan and recusant, and Shakespeare the skeptic or atheist (Kewes 2002, p. 78; Schoenbaum 1970, pp. 459–63).

This latter view led W.J. Birch in 1848 to claim Hamlet as Shakespeare's greatest skeptic, a "censurer of mankind—the type generally of unbelievers who criticize the world, and from its anomalies, censure religion" (Birch 1848, p. 133). Birch's view of the poet's essential cynicism is seconded by his contemporary Walter Bagehot. In a personal moment, Bagehot confesses that coming across a "certain religionist is like striking the corner of a wall": their rigid ideas about human behavior or thinking leave one bruised. In his assessment, Shakespeare's skepticism of ideas, voiced through many of his finest characters, renders him the perfect champion against inflexible religionists: he was a dramatist given to the protean and mundane "religion of the week-days" rather than the doctrinaire religion of Sundays, and thus "qualified to administer a rebuke to people of the prevalent religion" (Bagehot [1853] 1915, vol. 1, pp. 258–59). For Birch in particular, Hamlet's skepticism is also Shakespeare's, for whom "all explanations of religion were deemed unsatisfactory," and the play demonstrates that religion works not to "alleviate all the ills," but functions instead "as something that makes weak the will" (Birch 1848, pp. 150, 154). In this play, Shakespeare is "more personally objective" (Birch 1848, p. 134) than elsewhere; that is, Hamlet *is* Shakespeare. Horatio's faith, characterized by Birch as echoing "popular prejudices," is the foil to Hamlet's unbelief, characterized as "reason" (Birch 1848, p. 171), and for Birch it is obvious towards which of the two the poet was inclined. To bolster the side of reason against faith, the skeptical prince finds his greatest allies in the gravediggers, who treat death with ridicule and "make a burlesque of everything sacred" (Birch 1848, p. 166). In their successive banter "there is no mention of a future state . . . ; no hint of more equal justice hereafter, and we may say of Shakespeare, as Hamlet says of the gravedigger, he had no feeling for the business" (Birch 1848, p. 167). Throughout Birch's treatise, it becomes clear that just as Yorick's skull becomes the looking glass for Hamlet, *Hamlet* becomes the looking-glass for Birch's own skepticism, such that Hamlet = Shakespeare = Birch.

This is precisely the kind of cultural conversion of Shakespeare that Samuel Schoenbaum and David Scott Kastan described, as I mentioned earlier. By the nineteenth century, the "religion in Shakespeare" was being translated into the "religion of Shakespeare." As we will see in a moment, the grounds for completing that task shifted from scouring the plays to fingering the material remains of the poet. And for some, the playwright himself became an institutionalized object of secular devotion in the "religion *of Shakespeare*," the impulses of which may still be discernable.

In an intriguing use of the word, Birch observes that Hamlet's/Shakespeare's skeptical musings on morality and existence are "phrenological" (Birch 1848, p. 156): the pseudoscience of phrenology which gained popular ascendancy in the early nineteenth century, despite its widespread rejection by most in the scientific community ("bumpology" was the derogatory term; *schädellehre*, or "the doctrine of the skull," was the exalted, preferred term by its earliest practitioners).[12] Phrenology assigned personality,

[10] On Knight's efforts to popularize Shakespeare against perceived pedantic efforts by editors like John Payne Collier to make him available mostly to specialists and scholars, see (Lesser 2015, pp. 40–56).

[11] For more on the history of Shakespearean biography, see (Gilvary 2018).

[12] For more on this disjunction and the various attacks on phrenology as a legitimate science, see (Parssinen 1974, pp. 1–20; De Giustino 1975). In England, phrenology was popularized by George Combe, one of the founders of the Edinburgh Phrenological Society; see (Combe 1828).

character, behavioral tendencies, sentiments, and temperament to twenty-seven, and perhaps up to forty, parts of the brain that were topographically located and "measureable" by the phrenologist's delicate fingering of protuberances, dips, and other variations in the patient's skull. It was the perfect uniting of the material and the immaterial, the calibrated physical attributes predicting and governing the invisible aspects of human behavior and belief. Secretiveness or mirthfulness, veneration or combativeness, introspection or garrulity, reverence and spirituality, wit and wonder—the physical features of the skull confirmed these and other intangible propensities. As Franz Joseph Gall, the forefather of phrenology, summed up, "each particular cerebral part, according to its development, may modify, in some degree, the manifestation of a particular moral quality or intellectual faculty" (Gall 1835, vol. 2, p. 224). What Birch seems to indicate here is that just as Hamlet discerns the "bumps" in the moral landscape within Elsinore castle to determine the hidden reality of circumstance, Shakespeare's play can be interpreted in the same way that a phrenologist reads a skull, thereby determining and fixing the essence of the person who owned it, or in this case, the writer who wrote it. Nineteenth-century phrenology became the new key to unlocking Shakespeare's beliefs, religious or otherwise.

But digging up his skull was required. In 1794, the "wild, rather dashing young fellow" Frank Chambers did just that; or so relates the 1879 narrative of his midnight caper, *How Shakespeare's Skull Was Stolen* (Warwickshire 1879, p. 268). The narrative's anonymous publication in *The Argosy* literary magazine, complete with three titled chapters by "a Warwickshire Man," nurtured a blustery national debate on whether or not England ought to disinter the remains of its favorite son for inspection, to ascertain what might be revealed about the accuracy of the Bard's portraiture, about his personality, his religious inclinations, his habits of thinking, if not also to satisfy the impulse towards literary idolatry.

The Warwickshire Man begins by describing the means of transmission for the story, as well as the origins of Frank Chambers's motivation for sneaking into Holy Trinity Church at midnight in the autumn of 1794. Chambers's nephew, the recently deceased and unidentified "Mr. M.," kept notes, letters, and memoranda of various conversations between them over the years, which had fallen into the provenance of the narrative's author and now editor and transcriber, identified as Reverend Charles Jones Langston, living in the rectory of Sevington when the story was published. Apprenticed to a surgeon in the sleepy village of Alcester in 1787, Chambers had fallen into the company of Lord Francis Seymour-Conway, newly-created Marquess of Hertford, and occasionally attended dinner parties at his manor, Ragley Hall. During one of these parties, a guest mentioned an old challenge issued by the quirky aristocrat Sir Horace Walpole to his close friend, the M.P. George Selwyn, during the 1769 Jubilee: an offer of 300 guineas for Shakespeare's skull (about £315 pounds at the time, equivalent to about £40,000 today). "If he cudth theal away hith brainth, that were theap to him [Walpole], thir," lisped the schoolmaster and minister Reverend Samuel Parr (Warwickshire 1879, p. 270). In the hopes of filling his "scantily-furnished pocket" from the ready funds of Walpole, Frank Chambers hatched his plan (Warwickshire 1879, p. 275).

Chambers promised £3 apiece to Jim Hawtin, Harry Cull, and Tom Dyer if they helped him steal the prize. Having broken the lock of the church door, and with the recently white-washed Stratford Bust of Shakespeare grinning above them, Dyer and Cull began scraping the mortar along the edges of the gravestone. The slab was cautiously raised and set aside: the doorway to the illustrious dead had been opened. The men dug with shovels to a depth of three feet. Chambers felt a surge of adrenaline as he watched the darker earth turn upwards and he noticed the peculiar damp smell of decay that caused Hamlet's own gorge to rise as he gazed upon poor Yorick. Cull was the first to finger something "fine and heavy," but it was a stone. And then Dyer found it. But the skull was two feet away, not in the location they had guessed, judging from the position of the slab. Reenacting, however briefly, Hamlet's meditative study of Yorick's skull, Chambers notes, "I handled Shakespeare's skull at last, and gazed at it only for a moment, for time was precious." Chambers remarks, "It was smaller than I expected, and in formation not much like what I remembered of the effigy above our heads" (Warwickshire 1879,

p. 274). But he had his prize, and after paying the men their due, he celebrated that night with the lads over nine quarts of ale at a tavern, auspiciously called the "Globe."

Following celebrations, Chambers wrote to Sir Horace Walpole detailing the upshot of his risky labors. The aristocrat assured him that he "would give all the skulls of his living relatives . . . to possess that of the deceased bard" (Warwickshire 1879, p. 274). But in the end, Walpole's assistant reneged on the original terms of the wager. Instead of paying 300 guineas for the precious skull, he bargained to extract one of the loose front teeth. Chambers walked out. In a last ditch effort to sell the skull, Chambers sought Rev. Samuel Parr, knowing the minister's fondness for Shakespeare. Chambers found the minister and schoolmaster that evening entertaining a mutual acquaintance, John Bartlam. While the timing of Bartlam's visit was inconvenient, Chambers took the risk anyway and broached the old subject. He tepidly sounded Parr out with the hypothetical scenario of his being offered the skull for purchase. The reverend, however, was scandalized that anyone would desecrate Shakespeare's grave: "I would have any man whipt at the cart's tail who violated the thanctity of that grave: it would be worthe than . . . thacrilege" (Warwickshire 1879, p. 276).[13] Chambers hastily dropped the conversation piece. The next morning, Bartlam privately accosted him, having correctly intuited that the skull was in Chambers's possession, and he coaxed assurances from Chambers to return it. The curse etched into Shakespeare's gravestone seemed to come alive: "GOOD FREND FOR IESUS SAKE FORBEARE,/TO DIGG THE DVST ENCLOASED HEARE./BLESTE BE Y^{E} MAN Y^{T} SPARES THES STONES,/AND CVRST BE HE Y^{T} MOVES MY BONES." Chambers did seem to be "curst" with its possession—a literary artifact of immeasurable worth, taken with considerable risk at the charge of sacrilege against the church, with no prospective buyers, and now the dawning possibility of blackmail if he did not keep his gentlemanly promise to reinter it.

Langston's narrative concludes with Chambers's resolution to rebury the skull. Tom Dyer assured him that he could do the business himself, and Chambers handed over the skull. But when Chambers inspected the slab after Sunday services he spotted "an ominous crack right across the slab, about two feet from the end near the communion rails" (Warwickshire 1879, p. 277). Panicked, Chambers confronted Dyer at the Four Alls tavern, where the man admitted that, as he was lifting it, the slab had snapped. But Dyer solemnly pledged, "the old chap was there beneath, as safe as a door nail" (Warwickshire 1879, p. 277). But *was* he? C.J. Langston's account closes with a short conversation between the aging Frank Chambers and his nephew, the unidentified "Mr. M." who had entrusted Langston with their correspondence. Curious, the nephew had asked his Uncle Frank directly whether Dyer actually returned the skull. Echoing Horatio's words to Hamlet, when the prince asks if it is possible that the remains of Alexander the Great could stop the hole for a casket, Chambers responds: "Twere to consider too curiously to consider so" (Warwickshire 1879, p. 277; Shakespeare 2006a, pp. 5.1.192–95).[14]

It is entirely plausible that the account by the "Warwickshire Man" Rev. C.J. Langston is nothing more than a "lurid fiction," as Samuel Schoenbaum characterizes it, with many scholars agreeing (Schoenbaum 1970, p. 471). It reads like a nineteenth-century popular ghost story crossing wires with emergent Victorian detective fiction, populated by some stock characters. Regardless of its historical veracity, its publication in 1879 dramatized an ongoing national conversation, one that reached American shores as well, among enthusiasts and experts on the subject of whether or not the bones of William Shakespeare ought to be exhumed in spite of the curse and, presumably, the playwright's own wishes. Just as Yorick's skull had allowed Hamlet to reconstruct the clown's personhood, advocates for disinterment argued that Shakespeare's skull would potentially tell the stories that had eluded biographers and portrait artists for centuries.

[13] Here, the account drops the lisp of Rev. Parr in this second episode involving his character. I have inserted the lisp to maintain consistency with that detail, which Langston seemed to think of importance to preserve in the first episode.

[14] A sequel appeared a few years later, detailing the lengthier story of Dyer's attempts to return the skull; see (Warwickshire 1884).

The lawyer and American aficionado for Shakespeariana, Joseph Parker Norris, was among the first to champion the possibility of digging up Shakespeare's body, even before the publication of Langston's account in *The Argosy*. He edited a bi-monthly column in *The American Bibliopolist* called "Shakespearean Gossip." Dissatisfied with the Stratford Bust in Holy Trinity, and critical of the well-known Droeshout portrait that accompanies the *First Folio*, he advocated photographing Shakespeare's skull in the interests of making "a better portrait of him than we now possess" (Norris 1876, p. 38). Resorting to Hamlet's remark about seeing the ghost of his departed father in Gertrude's chamber, Norris asserted that such a photo of him "in his habit as he lived" (3.4.133) would "a relic be of inestimable value to the world ... what would not be given for such a treasure?" (Norris 1884, p. 71).

Norris's intentions may indeed have been driven in part by the aesthetics of portraiture. But given the popularity of phrenology in the day—even Queen Victoria subjected her children to the phrenologist George Combe's agile fingers—there is good reason to believe that his motives were influenced by the pseudoscience. In fact, in 1875 Norris had republished for private circulation E.T. Craig's short pamphlet, *Shakespeare's Portraits Phrenologically Considered* (1864). Craig had looked approvingly upon the high frontal lobe and prominent eyes depicted in the Droeshout portrait, but his assessment of the Stratford Bust is dismissive because it does not fit the phrenological profile one would expect of a universal genius, as Shakespeare must surely have been. "I have examined many thousands of heads," Craig explains, "and never met with such a heavy-looking figure associated with a man of capacity, culture, and mental power ... Destructiveness, secretiveness, alimentiveness [appetite or hunger], and acquisitiveness [desire for accumulation] are all large; while ideality and wit are scarcely indicated" (Craig 1864, pp. 2–4). What might Shakespeare's actual skull reveal about him, wondered Norris? About human possibility? One anonymous article, published in the Cincinnati *Commercial Gazette*, argued that Shakespeare's skull ought to be housed in a position of honor in the Royal College of Surgeons "as the apex of the climbing series of skeletons, from the microscopic to the divine" (reprinted in Ingleby 1883, p. 48). It is not clear what "the divine" would look like on such an ascending chart, but apparently the gap between Shakespeare as dramatist and God as Creator of the human drama itself is negligible.

With some sting, Norris was dubbed a "bone-grubber" by the London *Evening Telegraph*, and he describes the hurt and isolation he felt among his fellow friends and Shakespeareans as a result of the bad press (Autograph Letters, 27 August 1883). But his efforts found their advocate in the well-credentialed academic and Life Trustee of Shakespeare's Birthplace, Dr. Clement Mansfield Ingleby, who fueled the conversation in his short book *Shakespeare's Bones: The Proposal to Disinter Them, Considered in Relation to Their Possible Bearing on His Portraiture* (1883). When Ingleby sets out his reasons for exhuming the bones of Shakespeare, with the kind of academic clout that Norris lacked, he states his intentions are "to find such evidences as time may not have wholly destroyed, of his personal appearance, including the size and shape of his head, and the special characteristics of his living face" (Ingleby 1883, p. 2). Ingleby hated the Stratford Bust even more than Norris, but his objections are more than aesthetic. He, too, was a proponent of phrenology, having been examined by the prominent phrenologist James Quilter Rumball on three separate occasions, at ages 18, 23, and 44, the latter just eleven years before the publication of Langston's 1879 account in *The Argosy* (Rumball 1842–1868). Consequently, his argument for establishing the accuracy of Shakespearean portraiture aside, we must understand Ingleby's motivation as driven in part by the pseudo-science. From Norris's and Ingleby's positions, phrenology could help recover the authentic Shakespeare: not just the natural grace of his external features (which must surely contradict, in their opinion, the goggle-eyed, marble-headed tradesman depicted by the Stratford Bust), but also the divine mold of Shakespeare's internal dispositions and religious or skeptical proclivities—illuminating that which had been as elusive as quicksilver, as hidden as dreams. Phrenology was an even more intimate book

to read and discern the true soul of the man from his material remains. Like Norris, Ingleby was a "bone-grubber."[15]

As a result of the publication of Ingleby's book, the prominent antiquarian and Shakespeare scholar J.O. Halliwell-Phillipps wrote to the Mayor of Stratford Sir Arthur Hodgson on 1 September 1883 advocating that they respect the wishes of the epitaph as "the only possible manner" in which a nation's "gratitude can now be expressed." If the skull were found, he argued, "and its formation corresponded to the monumental bust, there would merely be a confirmation of our present knowledge." On the other hand, if the skull did not match the bust, "the inference would naturally be that it was not Shakespeare's, the evidence of the bust altogether outweighing that of a particular skull found in a grave" (Halliwell-Phillipps 1883, n.p.). His plea was successful. The Town Council of Stratford met in October 1883 and passed an unambiguous resolution:

> That a record be made upon the minutes of this meeting of the most entire and emphatic disapproval of this Corporation to any proposition or project for interfering in any way with, or disturbance of, the grave, tombstone, and monument of Shakespeare in the Chancel of Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-on-Avon. (reprinted in King 1884, p. 7)

In his short book *Shall We Open Shakespeare's Grave?* (1884), the Canadian Shakespearean scholar Thomas Davies King hailed the decision of the Town Council and likened Ingleby's absurd agenda to "a pious Jew of the Tribe of Levi searching for the grave of Moses, and if found, exhuming the body to satisfy himself whether the immortal and incomparable master piece of Michael Angelo [*sic*], on the tomb of Julius II, is a correct interpretation of the great Law Giver." As Joseph's bones were a "sacred deposit by the children of Israel" (Gen. 50:25–26), so "the bones of Shakespeare have been considered as a sacred deposit by the English people during three centuries" (King 1884, pp. 13–14). Since 1883 the Stratford Town Council's deliberations against Shakespeare's disinterment have been honored.

So have the wishes expressed on Shakespeare's gravestone, that the "GOOD FREND" pass by without digging up the remains. Most biographers remark on the exceptionally unexceptional quality of the epitaph, and we cannot be certain whether Shakespeare wrote it (Kastan 2014, p. 28). Regardless, it may be worth asking about the imagined identity of the "GOOD FREND": Whom did the writer have in mind? Samuel Schoenbaum suggests that it is not the generations of passers-by at which the curse in these verses is aimed, but the church sexton, the parish officer often charged with ringing the bells in a church tower and digging graves (Schoenbaum 1970, p. 4). On occasion the sexton would have to remove bones from one grave, placing them in a great anonymous charnel house, or bury multiple bodies in the same grave, in order to make room for others, especially during times of plague. If Schoenbaum's assumption is correct, then the epitaph appears to express some measure of burial anxiety. Shakespeare hyperbolically dramatized a crowded burial in *Hamlet*, even if he himself had no anxiety about the possible removal of his bones. When the funeral party arrives and Ophelia's body is placed in the grave shortly after Hamlet's conversation with the gravedigger, Laertes declares, "Hold off the earth a while,/Till I have caught her once more in mine arms" (5.1.238–39) and he leaps into the grave. Not to be outdone in grief, Hamlet follows imploring that he "Be buried quick with her" (5.1.268), even if it is with Laertes, with whom he is grappling.[16] Both men are claiming to be the more faithful lover and possessor of Ophelia's body—a situation analogously recapitulated in the cultural forces embodied by Ingleby and Halliwell-Phillipps as they grappled for proprietorship of

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[15] C. M. Ingleby's book did indeed create some "hubbub," and letters to him following its publication indicate that the reactions were both sympathetic and hostile; see (Autograph Letters 1883–1884). For a provocative study on the representational afterlife of Shakespeare, see the essays in (Marsden 1991).

[16] Q1 is explicit that "*Hamlet leaps in after Laertes*" (Shakespeare 2006b, scene 16, line 145); Q2 and F are silent, but modern editors supply a similar stage direction because Claudius' command—that the two grappling men be separated (5.1.253)—implies that Hamlet has jumped into the grave. For more on both the stage history of this direction, and how editors have handled it, see (Zitner 1985, pp. 139–48).

Shakespeare's body. The former was driven by a quasi-religious devotion to glean the poet's secrets from a relic, and the latter was determined to preserve mystery, orthodoxy, and pious restraint.

The burial anxiety expressed in the epitaph—by or on behalf of Shakespeare—had been unfounded. Shakespeare's bones would not be relegated to the anonymous charnel house that was adjacent to Holy Trinity Church.[17] Nor would his skull be exhumed and subjected to phrenological analysis. Instead, the poet would be venerated himself in the Religion of Humanity headquartered in Newcastle-on-Tyne, which arose near-contemporaneously with the nineteenth-century national debate. Here his plays were his praises and humanists were his priests. Effigies of Shakespeare decorated their chapel; prayers of commemoration were offered in his name; pilgrimages were made to his birthplace; a new calendar was instituted featuring a month of reflection and meditation on Shakespeare as a champion of human promise and progress.[18] Rather than recovering the "*religion* of Shakespeare," the sect invented the "religion *of Shakespeare*" by arrogating some of the aesthetics and practices of Catholicism. Arguably, a similar secular devotion to Shakespeare remains active even if not institutionalized. As Lynda E. Boose characterizes that reverence in contemporary critical circles, "Shakespearean scholarship effectively constitutes the equivalent of a cultural Rorschach inscribing the issues, the ideologies, the tensions, and the terms of debate that define the preoccupying investments for any given historical moment ... " (Boose 2004, p. 607). In other words, we figuratively look into the empty eye sockets of his skull and see ourselves. The poet *did* have an afterlife, with admirers and scholars resurrecting his selfhood over and over again, even if heaven did not.[19]

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[17] Writing in 1694 to his friend Edward Thwaites, William Hall noted that the Stratford charnel house was "a repository for all bones they dig up; which are So many that they would load a great number of waggons" (Schoenbaum 1975, p. 251). According to (Bloom 1902, pp. 10–11), the charnel house was pulled down in 1801, after years of disrepair.

[18] The Religion of Humanity became the Church of Humanity under the direction of Richard Congreve. At his death, the sect followed J. T. Looney, one of the central figures associated with the Oxfordian theory of authorship. For more on this, see (Shapiro 2010, pp. 164–82).

[19] See (Utsi and Colls 2017) and (Harris 2016). In 2010, a team of scientists from the Centre of Archaeology at Staffordshire University was given permission by the vicar of Holy Trinity Church, Reverend Patrick Taylor, to use non-invasive Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) to investigate the subsurface conditions in the Shakespeare family gravesites. The survey results did determine that despite the epitaphs's curse, Shakespeare's grave was in fact opened at least once, likely in order to make repairs to a sinking chancel floor. The GPR survey, however, was unable to verify if Shakespeare's skull is comfortably resting there. under the slab or not, as the data is unable to discriminate between the minute electromagnetic differences of soil and bones after so many centuries of decay and intermixture.

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Article

Shifting Religious Identities and Sharia in *Othello*

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Abstract: Despite twenty-first century research advances regarding the role of Islam in Shakespeare's plays, questions remain concerning the extent of William Shakespeare's knowledge of Muslim culture and his use of that knowledge in writing *Othello*. I suggest that the playwright had access to numerous sources that informed his depiction of Othello as a man divided between Christian faith and Islamic duty, a division which resulted in the Moor's destruction. Sharia, a code of moral and legal conduct for Muslims based on the Qur'an's teachings, appears to be a guiding force in Othello's ultimate quest for honor. The advance of the Ottoman Empire into Europe with the threat of conquest and forced conversion to Islam was a source of fascination and fear to Elizabethan audiences. Yet, as knowledge increased, so did tolerance to a certain degree. But the defining line between Christian and Muslim remained a firm one that could not be breached without risking the loss of personal identity and spiritual sanctity. Denizens of the Middle East and followers of the Islamic faith, as well as travel encounters between eastern and western cultures, influenced Shakespeare's treatment of this theme. His play *Othello* is possibly the only drama of this time period to feature a Moor protagonist who wavers between Christian and Muslim beliefs. To better understand the impetus for Othello's murder of his wife, the influence of Islamic culture is considered, and in particular, the system of Sharia that governs social, political, and religious conventions of Muslim life, as well as Othello's conflicting loyalties between Islam as the religion of his youth, and Christianity, the faith to which he had been converted. From Act I celebrating his marriage through Act V recording his death, Othello is overshadowed by fears of who he really is—uncertainty bred of his conversion to Christian faith and his potential to revert to Islamic duty. Without indicating Sharia directly, Shakespeare hints at its subtle influence as Othello struggles between two faiths and two theologies. In killing Desdemona and orchestrating Michael Cassio's death in response to their alleged adultery, Othello obeys the Old Testament injunction for personal sanctification. But in reverting to Muslim beliefs, he attempts to follow potential Sharia influence to reclaim personal and societal honor.

Keywords: Shakespeare; Othello; revenge; religion; Islam; Muslim; honor; Sharia

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Twenty-first century Western fears about Islamic extremism are not new. William Shakespeare makes reference to the threat of Turkish invasion and spread of Islam in nearly half of his dramas of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The use of terms like "infidels" (*King Richard III*), "Mahomet" (*King Henry VI—Part One*), and "Turks" (in *Hamlet, Othello*, etc.) reminded Elizabethan audiences of the Ottoman advance into Europe with the intent of conquest and conversion. In Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello*, the hero, a Christian converted from Islam, murders his wife after being tricked into believing she has committed adultery. Subsequently learning of her innocence, he then kills himself to pay for his criminal act. Critics of the play have devised a number of theories about Othello's character and behavior. However, I believe Shakespeare reveals the dilemma of a Moorish husband divided between his dueling Muslim and Christian identities.

In several plays, Shakespeare features a non-Caucasian character who, despite villainous conduct resulting in disgrace or punishment, manages to draw our sympathy along with our condemnation. Aaron the Moor, Shylock the Jew, Caliban, and Othello offend viewers' moral and legal sensibilities. Yet, Shakespeare draws our attention to these characters' humanity, emphasizing some qualities that make

them eerily similar to us. Their divided nature mirrors contradictions in ours. We see this in Othello's agonizing attempts to ignore Iago's accusations of Desdemona as well as his final repentance for her murder. This article will focus on Shakespeare's development of Othello's hybrid Muslim-Christian identity that ultimately leads to his downfall. Considering throughout various ways in which recent critical discussions of Islam in *Othello* in the past decade and a half have enriched our understanding of Shakespeare's tragedy, this article will seek to participate in these discussions even as it offers its own contribution to how Islam is treated in *Othello*. The information used in this article is not intended to convey an authoritative purview of Islam or its scriptures and interpretations. Rather, it offers introductory contexts from a lay perspective as consideration for potential influences on William Shakespeare's construction of his character Othello, recognizing throughout that Shakespeare neither directly mentions Sharia in the play nor demonstrates awareness of the various complex manifestations of Sharia within Islamic culture.

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century travel reports, business exchanges, and harem tales, along with numerous encounters between eastern and western cultures, seemingly influenced Shakespeare's treatment of this theme of dueling identities. A growing body of contemporary research reveals new insights into Elizabethan understanding of Islamic culture and its impact on stage drama. But was Shakespeare familiar with the concept of the Qur'an-based Sharia, a code of conduct and honor principles governing family relations and social contexts? If so, how did his understanding impact the development of Othello's character? Othello the Moor is a naval general who, seemingly converted to Christianity as a youth (possibly by force), alternates between Christian and Muslim identities when confronted by allegations of adultery against his bride, Desdemona. Othello's wounded ego and his appeal to justice in murdering Desdemona becomes evident in his wavering between Christian identity as a husband emotionally struggling with the belief that his wife has been unfaithful and Muslim beliefs demanding justice to reestablish honor.

Othello's shifting identity can be considered within the larger framework of personal identity in the theater during Shakespeare's time. Although racial stereotypes played a role in Elizabethan perceptions of non-European beliefs and values, Peter Berek raises the question of the fluidity of social and religious identity on the Elizabethan stage: "The theater of the 1590s was obsessed by the possibilities that identity might be willed or chosen and social position achieved by deeds, not birth" (Berek 1998, p. 130). Plays like *Tamburlaine*, *Richard III*, and Shakespeare's tetralogy beginning with *Richard II* and ending with *Henry V* underscore this theme. Marranos, or Iberian Jews converted to Christianity, are plausible representations of the notion that identity is not stable and can be created by individuals themselves, an idea that has stood the test of time. Othello is a prime example of shifting identities: He was presumably born Muslim, kidnapped into slavery, and converted to Christianity; he eventually became a Venetian general who secretly married into Venice's ruling class and led a military expedition to Cyprus. During the play, questions subtly arise as to whether he is Christian or Muslim, Venetian or Moor, honorable or criminal. This duality serves as the locus of his (dis)orientation and resulting actions.

Conversion, forced or not, represents the holistic transition from one religious or national identity to another, and in the English theater this transition often manifested in romantic and erotic matters. Jane Hwang Degenhardt notes in *Islamic Conversion and Christian Resistance on the Early Modern Stage* that religious conversion was presented on the stage in sexual as well as physical terms (Degenhardt 2010). In *Othello*, The secret marriage of Othello and Desdemona forms the crux of the conflict representing the threatened union of East and West with the advance of the Ottoman Empire into Europe. As a convert from Islam to Christianity, Othello's divided nature confronts first his wife and then himself as he struggles with his religious identity in response to his wife's alleged infidelity.

Marital conflict lies at the core of *Othello*'s plot and invites scrutiny of Othello and Desdemona's sexual relationship as well as their religious beliefs. Because the marriage is never clearly consummated, the attempted union between East and West literally embodied in the union of Othello and Desdemona is doomed to failure, representing historical reality as well as Othello's insecurities.

Indeed, Othello's identity is questioned from the beginning of the play. Daniel Boyarin argues that "the open secret at the heart of [*Othello*] is the secret of Islam in Europe ... the Moors had been ruling much of 'Christian' Europe for centuries" (Boyarin 2011, pp. 254, 256). In the play, Othello's marriage to Desdemona is challenged by Brabantio and the Venetian Senate, his naval command is criticized by Iago who envies Cassio's promotion, and soon Othello's military leadership in Cyprus will be rescinded. The person that Othello seems to be in Venice transitions during his brief tenure in Cyprus to become someone that colleagues and friends scarcely recognize. Thus, his identity shift is witnessed by many who are unable to explain it.

Despite the challenges to his legitimacy that Othello receives from the play's earliest scenes, Othello affirms his Christian identity in leading a naval force against the Ottomans and in using the plural pronoun "we" to designate Christians in danger of "turning Turk." Jonathan Bate describes Othello's Christian identity from the play's beginning:

> To the play's original audience, one of the most striking things about the figure of Othello would have been that he is a committed Christian. The "ground" of the play is laid out in the first scene, when Iago trumpets his own military virtues: "And I—of whom his eyes have seen the proof/At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds/Christened and heathen" [1.1.28–30]. These lines give an immediate sense of confrontation between Christian and heathen dominions, with Rhodes and Cyprus as pressure points. Startlingly, though, the Moor is fighting for the Christians, not the heathen. Again, consider Othello's response to the drunken brawl in Cyprus: "Are we turned Turks, and to ourselves do that/Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?/For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl" [2.3.170–71]. Such Christian language in the mouth of a Moor, a Muslim, is inherently a paradox. It suggests that Othello would have been assumed to be a convert. The "baptism" that lago says he will cause Othello to renounce [2.3.343] would have taken place not at birth but at conversion. The action of the play reconverts Othello from Christianity, through the machinations of Iago. (Bate 2001)

Iago's destructive rhetoric elicits Othello's bodily and emotional afflictions to damage Othello's fragile Christian identity and to promote a victim mentality. As Othello's physical health is impacted by epileptic seizures, his mental health is assaulted by Iago's torment about Desdemona's alleged adultery. Ignoring both Muslim and Christian injunctions to seek spiritual counsel in matters requiring sober judgment, Othello instead follows his own faulty reason until he is overtaken by passion.

1. Islam and Sharia

Although Muslim-Christian conversions abound in Elizabethan drama, Shakespeare's *Othello* produced in 1604 may be the only period drama to feature a Moor who shifts back and forth between Christian and Muslim identities. To try and understand Othello's murder of his wife, we should consider the influence of his Christian beliefs and latent Islamic principles, and in particular, the system of Sharia that governs social, political, and religious conventions of Muslim life. The following is a description of the "History of Sharia":

> Shariah is an Arabic term used to designate Islamic law ... The shariah is not deemed a religious law by virtue of the subject matters it covers, for these range far beyond the sphere of religious concerns strictly speaking and extend to the mundane affairs of everyday life ... Although Muslims agree that they are bound by the shariah, the interpretations of its requirements have differed historically according to sectarian and school divisions, ... In the Islamic view, governments exist only to ensure that the shariah is properly administered and enforced ...
>
> Should the government of a Muslim society fail in its obligation to uphold the shariah as the positive law, or the judges of this world fail in their obligation to administer justice in

accordance with the shariah, the individual believer would still be held to the responsibility incumbent upon all Muslims to conform their behavior to the shariah. (Jones 2004)

Thus, practicing Muslims are personally responsible for following Sharia when judges and societies fail to uphold Qur'anic laws. A Muslim living in Western society would be expected to adhere to Sharia practices despite the lack of a Sharia court, a matter that will become germane to Othello later in the play when he prepares to kill Desdemona, an execution he pronounces as just despite the lack of any legal or spiritual directive.

2. Adultery and the Death Penalty

Othello's murder of Desdemona (based on Iago's false accusation of adultery) is the chilling climax of the play. The killing appears to be premeditated rather than a crime of momentary passion. Does Othello kill Desdemona for personal revenge? Or, as military commander of the Cyprus garrison, does Othello murder his wife as deserved punishment for her alleged immorality? His frequent use of the word "honor" seems to invoke an intentional judicial act to deal with her criminal and immoral behavior and to restore justice to the local / military community.

In Renaissance Europe, adultery was often treated a serious crime. In many regions, a husband could be excused for killing an adulterous wife, and in some cases, her murder would not be judged a crime. Generally, European royal wives convicted of adultery were judged to have committed treason against the state, which could result in execution ("Women"). Other cultures practice honor killings as well. For example, the Japanese form of honor suicide, *seppuku*, was originally practiced by samurai to preserve or restore honor, and later the act spread to non-Samurai people. Honor killings are carried out as a means perceived by the perpetrator, often a patriarchal or matriarchal authority, of restoring honor to a family or an individual who has been damaged by the immoral or sexual actions of another person.

The "honor killing" principle witnessed in many global regions remains active and controversial today, although the practice is not restricted to Sharia adherents. The earliest Abrahamic faith (Judaism), from which Christianity and Islam derive, prescribed the death penalty for adultery in priestly law as found in the Book of Leviticus: "And the man that committeth adultery with *another* man's wife, *even he* that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death" (Leviticus 20:10 KJV). The death penalty was God-ordained for personal spiritual sanctification: "Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I *am* the Lord your God. And ye shall keep my statutes, and do them: I *am* the Lord which sanctify you" (Leviticus 20:7–8 KJV). Othello might have had this Scripture in mind from his Christian indoctrination. As the military leader of Cyprus, it makes sense that the legal jurisprudence he had learned doctrinally would be the guiding response to Desdemona's crime. Othello in Cyprus lacks either a contemporary Christian spiritual authority or a Sharia court venue through which to process Desdemona's perceived adultery. Lacking these means, as the military ruler of Cyprus, he assumes the role of judge, jury, and executioner. Othello realizes from Brabantio's warning that Desdemona had deceived her father in eloping (1.3.292–93), and Iago later reminds Othello of this subterfuge (3.3.206). The fear is planted from the start that Desdemona is capable of committing further immoral acts (since familial disobedience could be punished judicially) that would subsequently justify (or require) his revenge. Othello comes to believe this has happened, and Desdemona must be punished and prevented from committing further crimes, since early modern Europe assessed adultery committed without the spouse's knowledge as an illicit act (vs. cuckoldry if the husband was aware but failed to punish or interfere with the adultery). Marital infidelity was often treated on the stage as an act that led to tragic outcomes: "Adultery was thought to lead to socially tragic ends, such as the death which occurs at the end of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, when Giovanni kills his sister Annabella" (Almadani 2014, p. 61).

It is well documented that Shakespeare was thoroughly familiar with the Bible and often referenced it in his writing (see, for example, Marx 2000; Shaheen 1999; and Hamlin 2013). Shakespeare would have known Levitical law. Although any knowledge that Shakespeare may have had of Sharia is necessarily speculative, and though we cannot know precisely what Shakespeare might have intended

Othello to believe or practice about Christianity or Sharia, it may be inferred from his eventual repeated use of the word "honor" that Othello's intent became to follow what he understood to be the Sharia code based on his Muslim origins, which seems to be a regional rather than universal interpretation of Sharia laws pertaining to adultery.

3. Islam in Early Modern English Literature and Other Sources

In "Shakespeare and Religion," John Cox asserts that Shakespeare's knowledge of non-Christian religions was based largely on reading (Cox 2018, p. 1). Cox refers to Cyndia Susan Clegg's point that several books on Moors and Turks were readily available in English at the time *Othello* was written, noting the strong emphasis on 'rigorous notions of justice and law in Islamic societies'" (Clegg 2006, p. 3). Indeed, even before Shakespeare's lifetime, the British were beginning to gain access to new information about Islamic culture. Andrew Borde's *The First Book of the Introduction of Knowledge* (1547) "describes the customs and manners of various nations, from the English and their neighbors to the Moors, the Turks, the Egyptians, and the Jews." He indicates that the Moors who were brought into Christendom kept "much of Mohammed's law, as the Turks do" (Borde 1547). This suggests that Muslims who became Christianized through slavery or release often continued to practice Islam, which would have been noteworthy in a Christian England that was still struggling with religious Catholic-Protestant conflict. In the late sixteenth century as playhouse drama drew inspiration from history, travel accounts, and literature, there were "numerous sources available" about Islamic religion and culture (Vitkus 2000, p. 18). In the theatre, popular dramas include Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays (1587–8), along with Robert Greene's *Selimus* (1588) and *Orlando Furioso* (1589), depicting Islam and Turkish court life (Vitkus 2000, p. 126). Shakespeare had ready access to these sources.

While Cinthio's *Hecutommithi* is the widely-acknowledged primary source for Shakespeare's *Othello*, contemporary accounts of Turkish life by English travelers offered additional insight to Islamic society. Turkey at the heart of the Ottoman Empire appears to be the best-known source for Islamic culture and Sharia values. A well-known story by Richard Knolles in his *General Historie of the Turkes* reveals the emphasis placed on honor over love. Mahomet the Great, a Turkish sultan, fell in love with a beautiful Grecian captive and spent his time with her as courtiers began to worry about his neglected duties. Mustapha Bassa, a long-time courtier, courageously voiced concern to the Sultan about the need to protect the ruler's honor and national security. At first incensed, Mahomet then arranged a banquet to which he brought the woman, gorgeously dressed. Leading her before the guests that had begun to question his ability to rule, the Sultan grabbed the concubine by her hair, pulled his falchion, and cut off her head (Knolles 1603, p. 351). Her death illustrates the preeminence of honor as a critical principle of the Turkish court. The concubine's name was Irene, or "Hiren" in the Westernized version, and Shakespeare's contemporaries, including George Peele, made reference to the account. Shakespeare himself includes a line in his play *2 Henry IV,* "have we not Hiren here?" (2.4.159–60). The plot of *Othello* represents a mini-version of the tale, where masculine honor—especially in a leader—when threatened by love or sex, must be preserved even at the cost of human life.

European captives who converted to Islam often held positions of authority in the Ottoman Empire, and some maintained contact with their homelands. Although ostracized by their European countries of origin as "renegades," many enjoyed positions of authority in Europe, "providing money, support, and protection to their relatives abroad and sometimes even engaged in charitable works in their former homes. In doing so, Christian-European renegades behaved no differently from fellow members of the Ottoman elite ... who funded public works in their birthplaces and provided patronage, obtaining lucrative offices in the sultan's service for their Muslim relatives and appointments in the Orthodox Church for their Christian kin." European diplomats within the Ottoman empire served as translators, guides, and sometimes as spies (Graf 2018).

Moreover, some converts that escaped Muslim countries brought valuable information back to England. Since the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the advances of the Ottoman

Empire in the Mediterranean and into Europe, and piracy attacks on English and European sea vessels, Elizabethans generally viewed Muslims as aggressive and bloodthirsty. “It is estimated that the Barbary pirates captured and enslaved anything between 800,000 and 1.25 million Europeans . . . Under sharia law the position of Christians [in Muslim-conquered territories] was never secure” (Scott 2016). North African pirates raiding England’s western coasts took slaves, with many converting to Islam willingly for an opulent lifestyle through serving the royal household. Daniel Vitkus points out that these converts became members of the “Muslim religious community” (Vitkus 2000, p. 4), where they would have been indoctrinated into Sharia practices. Some expatriates eventually returned to England with tales of converts and renegades that could be adapted as stage plays. The growth of international trade further increased public knowledge about the East. Brotton (2016) points out that by the late 1580s “hundreds, perhaps thousands of Elizabethan merchants, diplomats, sailors, artisans and privateers were plying their trade throughout the Islamic world, from Marrakesh to Qazvin in Persia” (Brotton 2016, p. 133). He also notes, “The registers of the Company of Stationers of London reveal that an estimated sixty books were published in Elizabeth’s reign on subjects relating to the Ottomans, over half of them in the 1590s” (Brotton 2005, pp. 204–5).Thus, the Islamic way of life became increasingly accessible to the public.

The most significant source of Islamic knowledge is Leo Africanus’s *A Geographical Historie of Africa* (Brians 1526), a valuable resource to Europeans on African geography and culture. Some scholars believe that Shakespeare modeled Othello on Leo Africanus, who experienced an adventurous lifestyle:

> Still a young man, he was captured by Christian pirates and presented as an exceptionally learned slave to the great Renaissance pope, Leo X. Leo freed him, baptised him under the name “Johannis Leo de Medici,” and commissioned him to write in Italian the detailed survey of Africa which provided most of what Europeans knew about the continent for the next several centuries . . . Leo is said to have died in 1554 in Tunis, having reconverted to Islam (Brians).

Writing extensively about African and Muslim culture, Africanus mentions facts that Shakespeare seems to have used in his play: the importance of female veiling, the custom of wives riding into battle with husbands, and violent punishments meted out to adulterers. There were tales of renegados, or Westerners who “turned Turk” for various reasons: “Now the Christians become Turkes, partly upon some extreme & violent passion. Cherseogli . . . turned Turke to bee revenged of his father, who took from him his wife, amidst the solemnitie of the marriage” (Leo 1600). In the last example, Cherseogli adopts a Muslim identity to avenge the loss of his wife. A similar theme appears in *Othello*.

4. Muslims in Shakespeare’s London

In addition to the above sources, Elizabethans had first-hand observations into Muslim life in the late 1500s and early 1600s, which the following paragraphs will outline. Practicing Muslims lived in London at this time, which must have fed gossip and cultural exchanges. According to William Dalrymple in a Foreword to Gerald MacLean’s *Re-Orienting the Renaissance: Cultural Exchanges with the East* (MacLean 2005),

> Elizabethan London had a burgeoning Muslim community which encompassed a large party of Turkish ex-prisoners, some Moorish craftsmen, a number of wealthy Turkish merchants and a “Moorish solicitor”. (MacLean 2005, p. xix)

Intercultural, commercial, intellectual, and social connections with these individuals would have broadened Londoners’ perceptions of Islam.

A recent BBC article titled “Britain’s first black community in Elizabethan London” offers an historic perspective on blacks who were or had been Muslim Moors and thus identified by religious beliefs rather than race, indicating that “Black” was more or less synonymous with “Moor,” which in

turn represented Muslim identity.[1] Shakespeare must have known about their growing population and the government's efforts to expel blacks, many from Moorish roots in northern Africa, from England toward the end of Elizabeth's reign. Wood reveals that the increasing numbers of black people in London around 1600, many freed from Spanish ships, created a population burden, and in 1602, Cecil was pressuring merchants to return some freed slaves to Barbary (Wood 2012).

Imtiaz Habib claims that between 1550 and 1660, English archives contain 277 citations of blacks (many or most of Moorish origins) in London and the countryside. Several records circa 1590s name "Resonabell a Blackmore", resident since 1579, a short distance from Philip Henslowe's Rose theatre. One of his sons, "Edward the sonne of Reasonabell Blackman silk weaver" offers a tantalizing vision of Shakespeare's observing the silk weaving process and incorporating an image of a silk handkerchief in *Othello* that was woven by an Egyptian and given by Othello's father to his mother. Public records show that blacks lived and worked in proximity to the theatre district, for example, in Shoreditch, and in Bishopsgate, one of Shakespeare's addresses. Habib argues that such a close association "makes unavoidable their [playwrights' and actors'] intimate social knowledge of black (Moor) people" (Habib 2014, pp. 131, 136). In all probability this included variations of Sharia practice.

Public records after 1606 indicate certain black individuals were Christian, baptized, or of a Christian household, which implies that those without the designation before this time were not Christians, as religious affiliation is not mentioned except for baptism into Christianity. The omissions suggest adherence to Islam (or another faith). An established and integrated Muslim population would have been noticed.

In late summer and fall of 1600, the visit of Abd-el-Oahed ben Massaood, Moroccan ambassador to London, may have influenced Shakespeare's writing of *Othello* a few months later. The dignitary and an accompanying delegation arrived in quest of an Anglo-Moroccan political alliance. Interestingly, he "observed the Islamic Hadith injunction against figurative representation, never showing his face and speaking in public from behind a veil" (Brotton 2016, p. 267). Jonathan Bate points out that Shakespeare's theatre company "played at Court that Christmas, so he may have seen the Barbarian delegation in the flesh" (Bate). Witnessing Sharia practices first-hand may indeed have stirred Shakespeare's imagination.

5. *Othello* and Religion

Shakespeare's knowledge of Muslim beliefs and practices are manifest in his tragic depictions in *Othello*: a wronged father, a rebellious daughter, an exotic suitor, and a deceptive conniver. However, the play goes further than portraying a non-Caucasian outsider's downfall. Othello's history, as told to Brabantio and Desdemona, suggests that he was born in a Muslim society, evidenced in his youthful capture and enslavement, and subsequent conversion to Christianity. Shakespeare portrays Othello as a capable naval commander whom the Venetians trust to defend their state. Yet, he also reminds us that Othello is a non-Venetian outsider with a murky past. Senator Brabantio—Othello's new father-in-law—does not accept Othello as an equal, evidenced in his horror at daughter Desdemona eloping with the Moor. Roderigo describes Othello to Brabantio as a "lascivious Moor" (1.1.126) and "an extravagant and wheeling stranger / Of here and everywhere" (1.1.136–37), stoking the father's revulsion over Othello's Moorish background and unsettled history.

Brabantio laments, "It is too true an evil" (1.1.160) and calls his daughter's marriage "treason of the blood" (1.1.169), immediately suspecting the supernatural influence of "charms" (1.1.171). Blending moral and criminal complaints, he condemns the marriage and believes his daughter has been victimized by magic. When Iago warns Othello of Brabantio's ire, Othello relies on military "services ... done the signiory" (1.2.18) and trusts his "parts," "title," and "perfect soul" (1.2.31) to

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1 To Shakespeare and his contemporaries, Turk, Arab and Moor all represented the Islamic "other," but they were not necessarily homogenized into a single image of generic "barbarianism" (Bate 2001).

support his character against public condemnation. Othello's rational response to emotional criticism underscores his seemingly stable nature and personal confidence at this point.

Despite Othello's celebrated reputation as a successful military general, Brabantio insults Othello as a thief and berates him as an enchanter, characterizing his son-in-law as a criminal and necromancer (1.3.60–64). Thus, Brabantio's recent regard for Othello is instantly transformed into loathing because of the marriage. Othello reveals to the Duke: "Her father loved me, oft invited me; / Still questioned me the story of my life / From year to year—the battles, sieges, fortunes / That I have passed" (1.3.128–31). Yet, the two men's bond is shattered by the elopement, and Brabantio insists before the Duke and Senate that Othello must have practiced forbidden arts to win Desdemona's affections: "Why this should be? I therefore vouch again / That with some mixtures pow'rful o'er the blood,/Or with some dram, conjured to this effect, / He wrought upon her" (1.3.103–6). Unapproved marriage is one of the reasons given for honor killing in societies that endorse Sharia codes of conduct. Brabantio's rejection of Othello as an acceptable husband to Desdemona serves to undercut Othello's full legitimacy as a member of Christian society, and when he declares to the exiting Brabantio and the remaining Iago, "My life upon her faith!," he explicitly places his very self at the mercy of Desdemona's sexual integrity and the truthfulness of his ensign, who in the same line he terms "Honest Iago" (1.3.294). The fragility of Othello's being, which he unwittingly admits, renders him vulnerable to the tragic effects of his uncertain religious identity.[2]

Othello's misplaced trust in "Honest Iago" leaves Othello vulnerable to his ensign's insidious deception. Believing that he has been unfairly overlooked in favor of Michael Cassio for a military promotion, Iago devises a vengeful plan to trick Othello into believing that Desdemona is having an affair with Cassio. Iago's plan strikes at Othello's vulnerability as a racial minority with a dual religious identity. The ideal of honor trumping love grows in Othello's mind as his Muslim identity is awakened by Iago's prodding to take action against his errant wife.

For her part, Desdemona does not consistently practice conservative female propriety, a failure which in some Muslim societies has long been perceived as a sign of sexual laxity. Alharbi (2015) notes that although "the system of guardianship law differs from one Islamic state to another depending on social practices, customs, and the culture of each state ... Today certain legal provisions persist [from past practice] that require women to have the presence and / or approval of a male guardian in order to benefit from such basic rights as work and freedom to travel" (Alharbi). Strikingly, when Roderigo informs Brabantio of the secret marriage, he describes Desdemona as being "Transported, with no worse nor better guard/But with a knave of common hire, a gondolier, / To the gross Clasps of a lascivious Moor" (1.1.124–26). For Desdemona to move about in public unescorted by a family member or trusted servant but rather with a "knave of common hire"—an unknown stranger—was to jeopardize her reputation even in Christian Venice, but Roderigo's words carry special significance when considered within the context of Othello's Muslim upbringing. Furthermore, in Cyprus, Desdemona leaves the sanctity of the citadel home without her protective husband or servant to meet with Cassio. Sharia suggests such behavior compromises a female's virtue, which then spreads contagiously to her family, goading male relatives like a father, brother, uncle, or husband to take action, i.e., discipline and restoration if possible, or an honor killing if the woman cannot be rehabilitated. Since Desdemona has already betrayed her father and demonstrated impropriety by eloping with Othello, her virtue has been smudged. However, Othello—newly married and rooted in Christian duty to fight the Turks—sees no need to worry. Redemption by marriage with the male transgressor is allowed in Sharia when a woman has been raped or found guilty of a sexual relationship outside of marriage, or if she has

[2] However, Shakespeare is careful not to attack Islam while hinting at its presence. Matthew Dimmock suggests that Shakespeare avoids direct confrontation with Semitic faiths: "Shakespeare's various allusions to the two Abrahamic non-Christian religions indicate an awareness of their dominant forms ... but also an unwillingness to blindly reproduce those forms ... the Mahometan [is] denied either scriptural congruence or religious coherence" (Dimmock 2015, p. 298). Shakespeare reveals impressions of Islam and Sharia to his audiences without condemning these religious practices.

chosen an unapproved spouse. Since Venice and Cyprus were Christian states, and Othello at least a nominal Christian, there is no need for redemptive action.

The more serious threat momentarily is Iago's plot against Othello because the desired naval promotion was given to Michael Cassio. As part of his revenge plan, Iago incites an alcohol-fueled brawl among the soldiers, requiring Othello to chide them for unbridled aggression and violence:

> "Are we turn'd Turks, and to ourselves do that / Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites? / For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl". (2.3.170–72)

His statement ironically foreshadows that soon Othello *will* turn Turk in allowing himself to accept Iago's false reports of Desdemona and Cassio, and in exacting judgment against his wife and himself without consulting a Christian priest or a Sharia court. After hearing Montano's report of the brawl, Othello's reason is shaken: "Now by heaven, / My blood begins my safer guides to rule, / And passion, having my best judgment collied, / Assays to lead the way" (2.3.204–7).

Seeing Othello becoming malleable, Iago states in a soliloquy that Desdemona's influence over her husband is capable of remolding his Christian faith:

> And then for her
>
> To win the Moor, were ['t] to renounce his baptism,
>
> All seals and symbols of redeemed sin,
>
> His soul is so enfetter'd to her love,
>
> That she may make, unmake, and do what she list,
>
> Even as her appetite shall play the god with his weak function. (2.3.342–48)

This renunciation effectively occurs when Desdemona's actions unwittingly incite Othello to "turn Turk" and deal with her alleged adulterous behavior.

After Othello demotes Cassio for drunken brawling, Iago manipulatively directs Cassio to plead with Desdemona to request that her husband reinstate the disgraced former lieutenant. Following Iago's advice, Cassio requests "some brief discourse with Desdemona alone" (3.2.51–2), which again places Desdemona in private contact with a non-relative male. Desdemona promises to argue Cassio's case with Othello. Iago arranges for Othello to catch Desdemona with Cassio, and then raises suspicions:

> Cassio, my lord? No, sure, I cannot think it,
>
> That he would steal away so guilty-like,
>
> Seeing your coming. (3.3.38–40)

Desdemona's subsequent greeting to Othello seemingly confirms Iago's claim with the inflected word "suitor" although she uses it, perhaps playfully, in a general sense of 'petitioner': "I have been talking with a suitor here" (3.3.42). Desdemona's naïve use of the word reveals another lapse in her judgment, one that will incense Othello, whose sensitivity to such impropriety is heightened by his Islamic background and is manipulated by Iago.

Unaware of Othello's suspicions planted by Iago, Desdemona mounts a series of pleas to have Cassio reinstated, going so far as to praise Cassio at Othello's expense and seeming to suggest Desdemona's larger discontent with Othello's person even as she expresses her commitment to Cassio:

> What? Michael Cassio,
>
> That came a-wooing with you, and so many a time,
>
> When I have spoke of you dipraisingly,
>
> Hath ta'en your part—to have so much to do
>
> To bring him in! [By'r lady], I could do much. (3.3.70–74)

> Desdemona presses her husband for nearly forty lines on behalf of Cassio until Othello meekly complies: "Prithee, no more. Let him come when he will; / I will deny thee nothing". (3.3.75–76)

Nonetheless, Othello's acquiescence draws another eight lines of complaint until the matter is settled to Desdemona's satisfaction. We may rightly suspect that Iago's previous knowledge of Desdemona's assertive and socially questionable foray to meet Othello inspired him to have Cassio set Desdemona's determination in motion on Cassio's behalf.

Also noteworthy are Othello's words when Desdemona leaves with Emilia. He groans:

> Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul
>
> But I do love thee! And when I love thee not,
>
> Chaos is come again. (3.3.90–92)

Shakespeare hints here that if Othello's love for Desdemona dies, he will lose his Christian faith—with his use of the term "perdition," meaning "utter destruction" and "spiritual ruin and damnation,"[3] alluding to a non-Christian spiritual state. The coming of "chaos" suggests the confused nature of Othello's shifting identity as he becomes increasingly disoriented by Iago's prodding.

If jealousy were not enough to ruin Othello's peace of mind and confuse his religious identity, Iago pricks Othello's honor through the implied loss of reputation:

> Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
>
> Is the immediate jewel of their souls.
>
> Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;
>
> 'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
>
> But he that filches from me my good name
>
> Robs me of that which not enriches him
>
> And makes me poor indeed. (3.3.155–161)

Confronted with the threat of a damaged reputation, Othello's Christian ideals are eroded by his emergent Muslim honor. Up to this point he has relied on his military reputation and service to Venice to sustain his good name. A subtle hint of Islam's pull emerges with his use of the word "moon," the symbol of Islam:

> Think'st thou I'd make a life of jealousy,
>
> To follow still the changes of the moon
>
> With fresh suspicions? (3.3.177–79)

Though the moon here implies changeability and inconstancy, the symbol suggests that Othello may indeed follow the Islamic moon and revert to Muslim idealism.[4]

The handkerchief Othello gave Desdemona upon their marriage is also relevant to his shifting religious identity. The handkerchief, he claims, is imbued with a spell to ensure marital faithfulness. To lose it, he insinuates, means the handkerchief's erstwhile possessor's husband will "hold her loathed" and "hunt / After new fancies" (3.4.62–63). Even more significant in light of Othello's aforementioned

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[3] I refer to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, definitions 1a and 2a.

[4] Dennis Britton rightly observes how Iago's manipulations of Othello's emotions regarding Desdemona serve as a catalyst to the chaos of Othello's shifting religious identities: "If romantic love can cement a religious identity, Iago shows that dissolving the relationship between Othello and Desdemona can undo Othello's Christian identity, transforming him into a 'turban'd Turk' at the end of the play" (Britton 2014, p. 34).

statement regarding "perdition" is his statement that "To lose't [the handkerchief] or give't away were such perdition / As nothing else could match" (3.4.67–68). Indeed, Desdemona's loss of the handkerchief is a significant catalyst to bring about the "perdition" that Othello warned of. Ironically, Desdemona loses the handkerchief not because, as Iago incites Othello to believe, she has given it to Cassio, but because, when he develops a headache that may be a symptom of his epileptic condition, Othello rebuffs Desdemona's offer of the kerchief for his pain: "Your napkin is too little" (3.3.288). In pushing the handkerchief away, he causes it to fall.

As they leave, Emilia picks up the handkerchief and explains its significance:

> This is her first remembrance from the Moor.
>
> My wayward husband hath a hundred times
>
> Wooed me to steal it, but she so loves the token
>
> (For he conjured her she should ever keep it)
>
> That she reserves it evermore about her . . . (3.3.291–95).

Thus, Othello gives the handkerchief to Desdemona as a token of marital fidelity. She keeps it "about" her as a protective talisman. Possessing the kerchief by Emilia's theft, Iago steals Desdemona's protective charm, leaving her vulnerable and exposed even as he inspires Othello to pursue "perdition" while delving into the "chaos" of his shifting religious identity.

My article, "Turning Turk," Modern English Orientalism, and Othello," explores the handkerchief's veiling symbolism as representative of the marital "covering" provided Desdemona by Othello as demonstrative of Sharia values. The handkerchief is a multifaceted icon rich with meaning. In the Ottoman Turkish seraglio, the emperor would indicate his choice of paramour for the night by giving a wife or concubine his handkerchief (Johanyak 2009, p. 90). Handkerchiefs were among the lavish gifts sent to Queen Elizabeth from Safiye, the mother of Mehmed, heir to the Ottoman Sultanate, in their exchange of

> gifts of richly worked costumes and pieces of fined died [sic] fabrics . . . One account describes "an upper gowne of cloth of gold very rich, an under gowne of cloth of silver, and . . . two handkerchers [sic] wrought with massy gould" . . . Years later when Safiye's son Mehmed III ruled, and Safiye was Valide Sultan, Elizabeth received "a robe and a girdle and two handkerchiefs worked with gold and three worked with silk" according to the custom of this kingdom. (MacLean 2005, p. 16)

Handkerchiefs played a public role as much as a private one through their intricate design, their public display, and their intimate exchange. They were often worn visibly on the body as a token of belonging to a certain household or family. They also served as romantic favors to signify a private relationship. Desdemona's handkerchief carries a spell that, when lost, would allegedly reveal her infidelity and incite her husband to a state of emotional and spiritual chaos.

As Iago continues to build an anecdotal case against Desdemona and Cassio, Othello, believing he has lost possession of his wife, returns to the theme of honor, which remains under his control, and groans, "[Her] name, that was as fresh/As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black/As mine own face" (3.3.387–88). Iago's false report of Cassio's dream and the missing handkerchief sends Othello into the abyss of hopelessness where his ostensibly Christian nature is overcome by a fiendish hatred that invites the very perdition Othello has twice warned of:

> Arise, black vengeance, from the hollow hell!
>
> Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne
>
> To tyrannous hate! Swell, bosom, with thy freight,
>
> For 'tis of aspics' tongues!
>
> (3.3.447–50)

The vengeance Othello calls upon is portrayed by his own words a damnable thing, yet it may well be in line with his confused spiritual values and a (mis)understanding of Sharia.

Another manifestation of Othello's shifting religious identity occurs when Lodovico summons Othello to Venice, an announcement which grants Desdemona relief because Cassio is reinstated as her husband's replacement in Cyprus. However, Othello mistakes her relief for love of Cassio, and enraged, strikes her publicly (4.1.231–41). When Lodovico protests, Othello accuses Desdemona of immorality in slanderous terms: "Sir, she can turn, and turn; and yet go on / And turn again" (4.1.253–54).

His repeated use of "turn" refers to her accused sexual promiscuity. Lodovico, Iago, and "Attendants" are shocked by Othello's strange behavior, but we ought to remember that Sharia law dictates that the charge of adultery must be supported by four reliable witnesses. Here, Iago, Lodovico, and "attendants" (two or more) fulfill this criterion loosely, as adultery must be witnessed as it occurs; perhaps for Othello, Desdemona's declaration of "the love I bear to Cassio" (4.1.233) is sufficient testimony of her infidelity. Othello's violent response may represent Shakespeare's (or Othello's) imperfect understanding of Sharia. According to the Qur'an, adulterers, if convicted, may be whipped by 100 lashes. On the other hand, Sharia may be locally and individually applied according to the dictates of the presiding "judge"—in this case Othello, since there is no local Islamic court. Othello's single slap to Desdemona could symbolically represent the 100 lashes. The other Qur'anic response to adultery is to confine the erring wife at home. Othello orders Desdemona away twice, and she obediently returns to the citadel (4.1.258–60). These actions hint at Othello's beginning to transition to Muslim identity and application of Sharia law, for there is no attempt to logically discuss the problem with his wife or to woo her romantically away from the perceived rival, Cassio.

Lodovico remarks on the dramatic change in Othello's character, recognizing the "chaos" that has overwhelmed him and implicitly recognizing the identity shift he now displays:

> Is this the noble Moor whom our full Senate
>
> Call all in all sufficient? Is this the nature
>
> Whom passion could not shake? whose solid virtue
>
> The shot of accident nor dart of chance
>
> Could neither graze nor pierce? (4.1.264–68)

Iago responds, "He is much changed" (4.2.268).
Lodovico continues: "Are his wits safe? Is he not light of brain?" (4.2.269)

Returning to the citadel to confront Desdemona, Othello demonstrates again the confusion of his struggling identity. Vacillating between love and loathing, Othello calls his wife a "public commoner" (4.2.73), seemingly alluding to incidents in which Desdemona was ushered to their elopement by the unknown gondolier, and later, unchaperoned, met with Cassio. Trivial as these actions may seem, compounded, they build on Iago's accusations to render Desdemona unchaste in Othello's imagination and loom all the more significant in light of Othello's implicit return to Muslim beliefs about honor. Following Othello's interrogation of Desdemona in the citadel, Emilia—like Lodovico—notes with surprise his fluctuating nature, declaring, "Here's a change indeed!" (4.2.106).

Upon his return to the citadel, Othello again demonstrates his alternating character. In his initial words to Desdemona, he articulates a kind of twisted Christian grace when he urges Desdemona to pray, offering her soul a chance of redemption before he kills her body (5.2.25–32). At the same time, Othello articulates Sharia-like concerns with honor and societal cleansing. Her death, he believes, will free his reputation from the stain of her immorality, and will free society from her immoral influence. He states: "Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men" (5.2.6).[5]

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[5] Dennis Britton observes how "If romantic love can cement a religious identity, Iago shows that dissolving the relationship between Othello and Desdemona can undo Othello's Christian identity, transforming him into a 'turban'd Turk' at the end of the play" (Britton 2014, p. 34).

His accusations and threats reveal a cold and legalistic approach to enacting justice against his seemingly erring wife. He accuses Desdemona of giving Cassio her handkerchief, which she truthfully denies (5.2.48-50). Othello's response hints at his problematic application of Sharia to his judgment of his wife, whom he has already pronounced guilty:

> O perjured woman! Thou dost stone my heart,
>
> And mak'st me call what I intend to do
>
> A murder, which I thought a sacrifice. (5.2.63–65)

Othello's accusation of Desdemona "stoning" his heart, although referring to his heart turning cold because of her denial of wrongdoing, also calls to mind traditional Sharia stoning of adulterers under conditions that are not precisely met in this case. However, as the lone "judge" of the crime, according to some hadith interpretations of Sharia, Othello may impose the punishment for adultery he feels is suitable based on his application of hadith traditions given by Islamic scholars, which vary widely (Fatoohi 2015)[6] In killing Desdemona, Othello undertakes the Sharia mandate to restore honor to his name and justice to society. Wounded by the belief that his bride has sexually betrayed him, Othello turns to Sharia for authority to administer his notion of justice that the Christian legal system cannot provide.[7]

Othello also attempts to define his murder of Desdemona as a personal "sacrifice" rather than a crime of passion, denoting his actions as a religious duty rather than a civil felony, a notion more in keeping with Sharia than the Christian idea of relational justice. Smothering her, he claims to be "merciful" in not letting Desdemona linger (5.2.88), recalling the Qur'anic Bismillah: "In the name of God, the merciful and compassionate," a blessing frequently used by Muslims (*Free Dictionary*).[8]

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[6] *Qur'anic Studies* claims that the noun form of "hadith" occurs twenty-three times in the Qur'an, while the plural form ("ahadith") appears five times; there are also variations in eight other verses of the Qur'an. The term generally refers to a story, speech, or news, not necessarily religious:

> Any hadith consists of two parts, the first is known as "isnad" or "sanad," and the second is known as "matn" ... in the terminology of hadith it refers to the chain of transmitters of the hadith ... and support the historicity of the hadith. The interpretation of Islamic law pertaining to a wide range of behaviors, including adultery, may be gleaned from numerous sources and scholars. (Fatoohi 2015)

[7] Amid our discussion of Othello and Sharia, we do well to recognize that Islamic scholars are careful to explain that the Qur'an typically advocates mercy for adultery:

> ... one fails to find a single verse of Qur'ān ordering the penalty of death by stoning—as if by its absence, Allah were saying this is a punishment only for the most extreme cases of flagrant and wanton sexual activity in public, actions which will eventually destroy the moral fiber of the community. (Kabbani 2007)

At the same time, in some judgments of adultery, lashes are the penalty, as explained by Islamic commentators like Yusuff (1999):

> The Qur'an mandates: *"The adulteress and the adulterer, flog each of them (with) a hundred stripes, and let not pity for them detain you from obedience to Allah ... "* (24:2)

Moreover, some argue that 100 lashes are tantamount to a death penalty. Others suggest that the Qur'an stipulates the death penalty for societal corruption. As discussed earlier, since Othello claims to kill his wife before she can defile more men, he could justify her death to protect society at large. It can also be argued that Othello's striking of Desdemona in public with Lodovico and at least three other witnesses serves as the symbolic "lashing" prescribed by Sharia, along with sending his wife home for confinement. (Significantly, however, Othello has no optical proof—as required by Qur'anic law—except for the circumstantial handkerchief.)

[8] Cyndia Susan Clegg has recently explored the spiritual meanings of Othello's killing of Desdemona and resulting self-judgment based on two warring religious systems in Othello's character. She argues that Othello is "a tragic figure driven more by law than lust, and more by justice than passion" while she references early modern Islamic and Middle Eastern strong stands against adultery (Clegg 2019, p. 2). Clegg also points to the Church of England Book of Homilies that addresses "whoredome and adultery" (Cramner 1547, sig K3) and explains that it praises the "godlie statutes" of Islam that punish adultery by death (Cramner 1547, sig L4). Clegg states that "Islamic law ... would have been part of Othello the Moor's experience" (Clegg 2019, p. 3).

When Emilia knocks at the chamber door, Othello ponders his response as his realization of his divided nature dawns:

> If she comes in, she'll sure speak to my wife.
>
> My wife! My wife! What wife? I have no wife.
>
> Oh, insupportable! Oh, heavy hour!
>
> Methinks it should now a huge eclipse
>
> Of sun and moon, and that th' affrighted globe
>
> Should yawn at alteration. (5.2.96–101)

Othello blames his actions on the moon, the Islamic symbol:

> It is the very error of the moon;
>
> She comes more nearer earth than she was wont,
>
> And makes men mad. (V.2.109–11)

The "huge eclipse" of sun (Son) and moon depicts the split in Othello's identity as he struggles between Christianity—the sun, and Islam—the moon. The Bible contains numerous sun or light images to represent God or Jesus, as in "the lord God is a sun" (Psalm 84:11, KJV) and "the sun of righteousness" (Malachi 4:2, KJV). Thus, the two religious systems symbolically war within Othello.

Emilia recognizes the gaping spiritual void between the spouses and her personal espousal of Christianity, with Desdemona "the more angel" and Othello "the blacker devil" (5.2.130, 131). Growing awareness of the true nature of his actions begins to horrify Othello as he recognizes the ramifications of his descent into spiritual chaos. Tension increases when Gratiano, Iago, and Montano arrive while Emilia informs Othello of his wife's innocence. Furious, Iago stabs Emilia and escapes temporarily while Othello soberly confronts his guilt as a citizen of a Christian society that will neither understand nor approve his Sharia code of honor. He surrenders his judicial role, stepping back into his former Christian identity or possibly eschewing both faiths: "But why should honor outlive honesty? / Let it go all" (5.2.245–46). To Lodovico, Othello terms himself an "honorable murderer" (5.2.294) and offers the chilling defense: "For naught I did in hate, but all in honor" (5.2.295). However, earlier, as if recognizing his huge mistake in logic, he retreats from reality to speak of himself in third person: "Man but a rush against Othello's breast, / And he retires. Where should Othello go?" (5.2.270–71). Accepting guilt from the Christian perspective of the murder, Othello pronounces self-condemnation to everlasting hell as the spiritual consequence of his gravely mistaken identity: "Blow me about in winds! roast me in Sulphur! / Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!" (5.2.280–81). Perhaps recognizing that he has failed in both his Christian faith and Sharia ideals, he abandons his identity altogether, saying, "That's he that was Othello" (5.2.284).

However, in suicide, Othello reclaims his role of judge and executioner—this time as a Christian—and takes his life in a way that seeks to obfuscate the damnable sin of self-slaughter by presenting the act as the lawful Christian execution of a criminal Muslim foe. Immediately before he stabs himself, he seeks to distinguish his Christian and Muslim identities by eliding his suicide into an earlier heroic military exploit in which he defended "a Venetian" and "the state" from "a malignant and turban'd Turk" as follows: "I took by th' throat the circumcised dog / and smote him—thus" (5.2.354, 356–67). Collapsing on the bed with the bodies of Desdemona and Emilia, Othello becomes a victim of the chaos that has ensued from his shifting religious identities, his own duplicity, and his misguided role of avenger.

Lodovico's directive of "Let it be hid" directs the bed curtains to be drawn to veil the deceased, permanently sealing Othello's final identity as a man deluded and destroyed by confused beliefs. Dennis Britton believes the tragedy "dramatizes the elusive interplay between Othello's Moorishness and his infidelity to Christianity" (Britton 2014, p. 112). He argues that "it is the very ambiguity of

Othello's identification that ought to command our attention" (Britton 2014, p. 126). Othello's final words illustrate his dual nature divided between competing beliefs as he dictates his message for Venice in a final summary of his character.[9]

In self-murder that simultaneously poses as the expected military execution of a Muslim foe, Othello's allegiance to Christian society replaces his earlier Muslim obligation to protect his honor. He had first turned Christian, then turned back to Islam, and now finally turns again to Christianity, a bizarre parallel to his earlier accusation of Desdemona's repeated turning in his diatribe to Lodovico. Patently accepting Iago's false witness of Desdemona's adultery, Othello imposed Sharia to kill his wife. As Othello now shrinks from his crime into his former identity as the Christian defender of Venice, Christian law must be meted by and to the murderer. Ironically, Othello's final act of shifting religious identity, in light of the Catholic Christianity he now claims to again champion, serves to indeed lead him to the perdition he had previously warned of, for his mortal sin of suicide, in light of contemporary Catholic theology, places him among the damned.

Also complicating Othello's final act is that, in killing himself even as he announces the death of the Muslim "circumcised dog" whom he slew, he implicitly identifies himself as Muslim, demonstrating that the confusion of Othello's shifting religious identities is never resolved. This lack of resolution is suggested by Julia Reinhard Lupton:

> In his suicide speech, Othello's drawn sword at once points outward to circumcision as the trait identifying the object of his scorn, and reflexively returns it onto Othello's own body as the very means of death, a final stroke that cuts off his life by turning the Turk into and onto himself" (Lupton 1997, p. 83).

In his death, Othello confirms his Muslim identity even as he extinguishes it.

In the end, Othello is a man conflicted in his religious identity, struggling to sort friends from enemies and truth from lies. From orphan to slave, from general to murderer, Othello's character plays a range of roles to fascinate theatre audiences and readers. His character is imbued with multiple layers of meaning explored by critics, viewers, readers, and Othello himself, as noted by Emily Bartels, who offers an impression of Othello as an incarnation of Venice: " . . . in the end, we cannot really tell where Venice's story stops and the Moor's story begins, so seamless and boundless is the cross-cultural exchange that Shakespeare stages" (Bartels 2008, p. 190). Ultimately, Othello's identity is rich and mysterious, replete with its own magic paralleling that of the handkerchief. Lacking friends, family, or faith, Othello turns inward and finds his hidden identity to address a crumbling marriage and damaged reputation. As his character desperately "turns," Othello tries to redeem his once-good name for posterity and seeks to confirm a final religious identity, as Daniel Boyarin points out:

> The reason that Othello wants his Aleppan exploit spoken of is not to extenuate his circumstances but only to make us understand that he dies a Christian, a proper Venetian–he is not a circumcised pagan murderer but a Christian who killed his wife for honor. (Boyarin 2011, p. 258)

However, as we have already discussed, Othello's stated intention to die as a Christian also implicitly confirms that he dies as a Muslim. In the turmoil of his final days, Othello shifts from Christian protector

[9] More completely, Othello's final words are as follows:

> Set down this;
> And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduc'd the state,
> I took by th' throat the circumcised dog,
> And smote him—thus. [He stabs himself] (5.2.351–56)

of Venice and his marriage to Muslim defender of society and his honor to one who desperately and dubiously seeks to reaffirm his status as a respected Venetian Christian. Thus, conflicting roles and religions destroy the Moor whose regret and self-punishment balance Desdemona's condemnation and murder by paying for her life with his.

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That Suggestion: Catholic Casuistry, Complexity, and Macbeth

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Abstract: In a keeping with the view that Shakespeare harbored a sympathetic attitude to Catholic ways of seeing, this essay argues that Macbeth is a study in the dangers of oversimplification and certainty. In contradistinction to how Spenser's Redcrosse Knight escapes the Cave of Despaire, Macbeth would benefit greatly from probing, questioning, nuancing, and sifting through ambiguity. He needs to examine the particular attenuation of his own moral thinking, and needs to engage equivocation, in the forms of both amphibology and mental reservation.

Keywords: Macbeth; conscience; casuistry; equivocation; Protestantism; Catholicism

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One remarkably tenacious view of *Macbeth* is that of its titular character as overwhelmed by the power of his own imagination; A. C. Bradley once isolated as "the key to Shakespeare's conception" Macbeth's possessing "the imagination of a poet" (Bradley 1926, p. 352), and much more recently Harold Bloom mentions this idea as if it were a given, calling Macbeth "profoundly and engagingly imaginative," his imagination being his greatest strength and his destructive weakness (Bloom 2010, pp. 1–2, 4). Thus for John Wilks, Macbeth's descent into crime is attributable to "a disordering of the imagination capable potentially of seducing the will" (Wilks 1990, p. 21). In a similar vein, I think, despite a much different take on conscience, is Abraham Stoll's account of Macbeth as confused and haunted by his sensitivities to the uncanny signs around him indicative of a bygone but still lingering "animistic" moral universe (Stoll 2017, pp. 79–106).[1] If we briefly recall the play's signature set–pieces, like the "dagger" speech (2.1.32–63),[2] it is easy to imagine how the imaginative Macbeth got traction. And yet, it is also hard not to concede the point of Robert Hunter—who also stressed the importance of imagination in assessing Macbeth—regarding the curiousness of Macbeth's lack of picturing himself enjoying any part of being crowned: "the oddity is rationally inexplicable." In fact, Hunter went far in identifying the strangely unimaginative tenor of Macbeth's initial reaction to the Witches' accuracy in naming him Thane of Cawdor, and noted how, despite how *he* feels called and prompted to regicide, actually "there has been no soliciting and no suggestion" (Hunter 1976, pp. 165–66). In this essay I shall explore further this sense of Macbeth's radical limitedness of thinking, and propose that it can explain much both about what happens to Macbeth, and about the play's line of religious inquiry. In brief: Macbeth is a study in the dangers of moral, logical, and spiritual oversimplification, and this bent for oversimplifying is aligned by Shakespeare, here as elsewhere in his work, with the deterministic Protestantism hegemonic at this time in England. Using Spenser's Despaire episode for contrast, I hope to show that the concentrated, bluntly logical, assured, and certain conscience that saves the Redcrosse Knight could

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1 Stoll (2017) is referring to Freud here on pp. 98–99.
2 All references to *Macbeth* are from Muir's edition (Shakespeare 1962); references to other plays are from Riverside (Shakespeare 1974).

never ameliorate Macbeth's predicament; far from offering a solution, certainty and simplicity reinforce the problem for him. By presenting him as constantly truncating his own incipient interrogative and interpretive processes, Shakespeare insinuates that Macbeth would benefit from a basically Catholic frame of mind—a mind addressing the inner and the outer worlds with a casuistical reasoning attentive to questions, subtleties, and open possibilities. Specifically, Macbeth would with a more Catholic sensibility be much better equipped to understand his own particular psychological situation, and to handle the equivocations thrown his way. Because of his oversimplifying, a non-suggestion is made over into *that* suggestion, a suggestion so irresistible there seems to him no possible alternative to it. For Macbeth, nothing is but that suggestion, and since it's a non-suggestion, nothing is but what is not: nothing exists for him but the self-conceived and non-necessary idea that he *must* and *will* murder his way to the throne. But the *play's* suggestion is that this thought-trap isn't the only way to think.

My discussion is grounded on arguments I've previously made concerning Shakespeare's affinity for Catholic ideas and systems—not that he was a recusant or a Catholic in any confessional sense, but that he shows signs of missing the philosophies and ways of seeing allowed for by the old religion. With *Hamlet* and *Othello*, especially, I find Shakespeare implying a sharp criticism of multiple aspects of Protestant theology, which come off collectively as far too narrow, rigid, and constricting.[3] With *Hamlet*, I argue that Shakespeare courts our disapproval of Protestant determinism and over-simplicity by shoving the Catholic-minded Prince, who poses questions of being and not being and would posit things not dreamt of in our philosophy, into a starkly deterministic world, to which he finally accommodates himself in Act Five, with "to be or not to be" yielding to "let be" (5.2.224); with *Othello*, I argue that with marriage theology in particular, Shakespeare creates a world alive with open possibilities and contingencies,[4] and a world, therefore, much more in line with Shakespearean typicality than the anomalously horrific, claustrophobic confines of *Hamlet*-world. In each case, conscience, and the processes of moral reasoning which conscience entails, is part of the picture. Hamlet feels that the how and why of his revenge need to be carefully "scann'd" (3.3.75) for their juridical, existential, and soteriological ramifications, until in Act Five when he achieves an assured "perfect conscience" (5.2.67) bizarrely incongruous with the conditions of his life; meanwhile Othello has a patient conscience recognizing hasty judgment, predicated solely on jealousy-enflamed doubt, as immorally irrational (3.3.176–92), until suddenly bereft of any working conscience whatever, so that when Iago advises him to "scan this thing no farther; leave it to time" (3.3.245), we are aware of a fast-hardening incapacity in him to scan or leave anything. In each case, scanning, the analysis of complication and ambiguity, appears much preferable to oversimplifying—in the latter case, to an extent both absurd and horrific. And if Hamlet goes from scanning to a troublingly perfect conscience, and Othello goes from an ability to scan to an inoperative, even absent conscience, Macbeth, condemned by his conscience nigh immediately in the play, is marked by never being able to do any scanning: when he says "Strange things I have in head, that will to hand,/Which must be acted, ere they may be scann'd" (3.4.138–39), he describes a more frantic translation of thought to action, but hardly a new mode of thought. His thought always "o'erleaps itself" (1.7.27). This pattern is one of many factors which make James Calderwood look at *Macbeth* as a kind of counter-*Hamlet*: Macbeth becomes habituated to saying "yes," while Hamlet tries to respond with a "maybe" (Calderwood 2010, pp. 23–26). What I am doing here is laying out the religious significances at play with this kind of insight.

First, we need to address whether Shakespeare would have been apt or able to make this sort of distinction between Protestant and Catholic philosophies, especially with regard to concepts of conscience. As for Shakespeare's own religious orientation, I think securest the approach

[3] On the general argument on *Hamlet* see (Curran 2006, pp. 1–17, on logic and conscience pp. 49–63, 201–18); on *Othello* and marriage theology see (Curran 2014, pp. 48–64, on conscience pp. 186–202).

[4] For an interesting opposing view, that Shakespeare pejoratively aligns Catholic marriage theology with paganism, see Tiffany's (2018) article in this issue.

Peter Iver Kaufman crisply articulates: the controversy's scholarship "suggestively identifies what Shakespeare *explores*; much of it ... unconvincingly details what Shakespeare *endorses*" (Kaufman 2013, pp. 87–88). Kaufman does well to be cautious, for his interest in the impact of Protestantism on Shakespeare would seem outweighed by the tide of scholars pushing the playwright's Catholicity. Though such scholars lack conclusive proof, it is a short step to Catholicism from the Thomist-style Natural Law framework many readers have persuasively found in Shakespeare,[5] and indeed Father Beauregard, for example, has taken that step.[6] For my part, I suggest only that Shakespeare if not Catholic harbored sympathy for Catholic philosophical provisions, and disliked the Calvinistic Protestantism so prevalent in his day. However, there is one important corollary of this position that seems too often overlooked: this prevalence, of predestinarian theology, would have been easy to accept for many of Shakespeare's countrymen, making his apparent aversion to it all the more significant. It is a cliché we commonly fall into, attaching negative connotations to such a theology and envisioning it conducing mostly to terror and despair.[7] Kaufman himself has done much to correct this prejudice, examining how Protestant preachers modeled the tribulations of attaining assurance (Kaufman 1996, pp. 32–36; Kaufman 2013, pp. 129–32), and Leif Dixon has refuted it authoritatively: far from instilling anxiety, especially in troubled times, "Predestination is, in many ways, a doctrine of comfort and contextualisation," and moreover it was preached as such, with the intent "to create a generation of self-confident and assertive everyday saints" (Dixon 2014, p. 7). If we detect Shakespeare's disliking of Protestant thinking, then, we are not detecting anything necessarily unlikable about it. On the contrary, I would say he seems to object, in *Macbeth* as in *Hamlet* and *Othello*, to strains in Protestantism unpalatable mostly from a Catholic or Catholic-sympathizing perspective.

One such strain is the Protestant emphasis on assurance and certainty of salvation, which was to be gained by means of a conscience made clean and firm interiorly, via repentance and faith, rather than externally, via validation from the Church and its quasi-legalistic mechanisms. By Shakespeare's time, a version of this strain had been refined into what scholars term "experimental predestinarianism," but such ideas had deep roots in Protestant tradition and were manifestations of Protestantism's fundamental simplifying tendencies. The interiorizing of conscience, and the setting up of an imperative for assurance next to a removal of exterior markers and signs thereof, has often been featured in discussions of early Protestantism and its anxiety- and alienation-ridden effects, recently by Stoll, who calls the Protestant conscience "destructured," exchanging the syllogistic application of clear moral standards for a nebulous introspection.[8] But while certainly the Protestant conscience could be seen this way, it also had the entirely opposite potential: to inculcate a sense not of the nebulous but the rigidly structured and easily understood and purchased, the moral and spiritual truth expressed in the incontrovertibly logical proposition corresponding seamlessly to objective reality. In pointing to this side of the equation (Curran 2014, pp. 141–48), I have in mind the researches of Dennis Klinck, who does nod to the increasing subjectivism entailed in Protestant casuistry, but also explains its countervailing force; says Klinck:

> Protestantism's celebrated individualism notwithstanding, the Reformers' account of conscience remained insistently objective .... While ascertaining what conscience requires is the responsibility of each person, it is not a matter of opinion, probability, or conjecture,

[5] For discussions of *Macbeth* by major proponents of Shakespeare and Thomist Natural Law, see (Herndl 1970, pp. 48–50; Wilks 1990, pp. 17–23, 125–43; Beauregard 1995, pp. 130–38). For a targeted analysis, see (Hibbs and Hibbs 2001). For a discussion along similar lines see also (Cauchi 2015).

[6] See (Beauregard 2008) for his full case for a Catholic Shakespeare.

[7] For an emphatic example see (Stachniewski 1991, pp. 1–14, passim). For the application of this view to *Macbeth*, finding it anomalously deterministic and pessimistic for Shakespeare, see (Stachniewski 1988). For a more recent discussion of Macbeth's terror at a Protestant universe, see (Gleckman 2013).

[8] For Stoll, the Protestant concept of conscience, in contrast to the Thomist one, is alogical; see (Stoll 2017, pp. 41–43, 121–24). For the Protestant emphasis on assurance, and its conceptual and pastoral problems, see for example (George and George 1961, pp. 61–62, 101; Shuger 1990, pp. 78–87; Stachniewski 1991, pp. 32–33). For this in relation to experimental predestinarianism, see also (Kendall 1979, pp. 42–66; Marshall 2003, pp. 126–35).

> but ... something to be measured insofar as it is *right* .... Among the aspects of Protestant conscience that conduce to its objectivity are its ruledness, its being a function of knowledge or understanding, and its involving a set, syllogistic form of reasoning, leading to "inevitable" conclusions. (Klinck 2010, p. 114)

Thus we have good reason to see a figure like William Perkins, the pioneer of Protestant casuistry, in a much different light from the purveyor of solipsism he is sometimes made out to be,[9] as both Kaufman (1996, pp. 51–62) and Dixon (2014, pp. 61–122, esp. 91–93) have shown.[10] His doctrine urged the believer to perceive the condition of the conscience interiorly, but objectively, at the same time.

Perkins in one treatise after another[11] stresses the need for the individual believer to apply the gospel promises to the self particularly. But some aspects of this process, the inserting of the self as the minor premise of the "practical syllogism," deserve a closer look. Perkins insisted that Catholic concepts of practical piety were fatally flawed in depriving the believer of a pacified conscience; for that, saving doctrine needed certainty, simplicity, *and* logic. In both *Assertion: A Papist Cannot Goe Beyond a Reprobate* and *Reformed Catholike*, Perkins attacks the Catholic allowance for uncertainty and doubt in spiritual life, in the former work using it to exemplify how Catholicism lacks cohesion and logical consistency, being "*contrarie to it selfe*" while cluttering up theology with human-made categories and levels of sin, and in the latter work defining faith as "both an vnfallible assurance and a particular assurance," and casting it as logically made irreconcilable with doubt, since "doubting is made a fruite of vnbeleefe" (Perkins 1600, pp. 642–57, 918–25). *A Discourse of Conscience* elaborates on such points. "Papists" admit only "Coniecturall" certainty, which if not a blatant contradiction is overly nuanced, and unworthy of God; for, God's promises of salvation are to be applied not generally but by particular persons each to her or himself, "much as if euery mans particular name had beene put in the promise," and with such application "certaintie is by little and little conceiued in a forme of reasoning or practicall syllogism framed in the mind by the holy Ghost, on this manner: *Euery one that beleeues is the childe of God:/But I doe beleeue:/Therefore I am a child of God*." A person who has undergone this procedure, moreover, is likewise given the gift of knowing she or he has undergone it, for though thorough particular self-knowledge were impossible—"no man can search his heart to the very bottome, to see all and euery want, infirmitie, and wicked inclination that is therein"—we know that we have sins, and therefore we know when we have God's "principall" graces belonging to the elect (Perkins 1600, pp. 872–73, 879, 883–84). What this amounts to is a peculiar understanding of the particular: the individual person is a self-contained spiritual entity, but one shorn of the particularities of life experience and merits and demerits, lending significance to which would only result in despair: "in respect of our owne vnworthines, we are not to doubt of our saluation, but to be out of all doubt, yea to despaire before the iudgement seat of God" (ibid., p. 880). The particular person was to conclude, by using the practical syllogism, that she or he was a child of God, but the uniqueness of the person's life, and its unique living up to and falling short of a bevvy of standards set by the Church, could add only distraction and confusion. Far from affording an objectivity against which a person's conduct might be measured, the particularities of Catholic systemization, much like the particularities of an individual's own moral track-record, could only impede the desired syllogistic conclusion, and would probably even generate doubts enforcing the opposite one: damnation. Objectivity was to be conferred by the syllogistic certainty accessible solely through a total reliance on God's absoluteness.

We ought at this point to recognize, however, that Perkins was not offering much of anything novel. Melanchthon, as serviceable a writer as any to represent boilerplate Protestantism, has this to say in the first version of the *Loci*:

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9 See the discussions of how Perkins problematizes and subjectivizes assurance see (Rose 1975, p. 199; Kendall 1979, pp. 67–76; Keenan 2004; Stoll 2017, pp. 39–46).

10 For my own remarks on this, see (Curran 2014, pp. 145–46).

11 Cited works by Perkins (1600) are included in and cited from the *Golden Chaine*, which treatise gives its name to the compendium.

detorserunt ad sua somnia sophistae, et ad carnalem illam opinatiunculam, quam fidem vocarunt ut plane nihil Apostdicae sententiae intelligeretur. Pro inde nos simplicissima verba simplicissima sententia referemus. Fidem esse certitudinem eorum quae non adparent. Obsecro quid est certitudo? at divinarum ac spiritualium rerum nihil certo tenet natura, nisi per spiritum sanctum illustrate . . . . Non credunt igitur, qui non expectant promissam salutem. At dices, credo promissam salutem, sed aliis obventuram. Sic enim sentit caro. Sed audi, An non haec tibi quoque promissa sunt? An non in omnes gentes praedicatum est Evangelium? non credis igitur ni tibi quoque salutem promissam credas.

[the sophists twist what they term faith to their own fantasies, and to that fleshly little supposition, so that nothing of the Apostle-said concept can be understood. For thence we will restore most simple words with a most simple reading. Faith is certitude for things which are not apparent. I ask, what is certitude? Nature holds nothing certainly of divine and spiritual things, unless revealed by the Holy Spirit . . . . They do not believe, therefore, who do not anticipate the promised salvation. But you will say, I believe the promised salvation, but that it is to come for others. Thus the flesh thinks. But hear: are not these promises also to you? Isn't the Gospel preached to all peoples? Therefore, not unless you believe it's for you do you believe in the promised salvation.] [12]

And in the second *Loci*, he adds that Catholic, Scholastic over-sophistication, binding up faith with human merits, virtually *commands* doubt: and the invariable result is either contempt of God or despair. But then, what was the nature of the certainty the believer was personally supposed to feel? Though personally felt, it needed to be impersonally understood: "Si quis ex universali particularem velit efficere, is reddet simpliciter incertam promissionem et tollet fidem" [if someone wants to make a particular out of a universal, he will simply find an uncertain promise and uproot faith]; in fact, the devil has no more powerful tool to agitate consciences ("perturbant conscientias"), than "imaginatio illa, quae efficit promissionem particularem" [that delusion which turns the promise particular] (Melanchthon 1963, pp. 168–69, 424, 429, 451–52).

How such a despairing conscience would set in as a result of merit theology, and how grace-inspired logical certitude would be the only cure for it, is what Spenser represents in *The Faerie Queene*'s Despaire episode.[13] Despaire is first astonishing and then compelling to the Redcrosse Knight because he increasingly harps on Redcrosse's particular personal history, applying it, with formidable soundness, citing specifics, to the general proposition that the unfolding of life means the accumulation of sin ("The lenger life, I wote the greater sin" (1.9.43.1)). Life has only piled up reasons for God to hate Redcrosse—as Andrew Escobedo notes, while suicide might not seem rationally to follow from this realization, an inability to discern any alternative to self-loathing is understandable (Escobedo 2017, pp. 150–51). For, Redcrosse cannot deny the major premise that God punishes sin, and he cannot deny the minor that his resume is streaked with sin—Despaire's case against *him* in particular is acquiesced to by his own conscience, because corroborated, brutally, by his own memory ("And in his conscience made a secrete breach,/Well knowing trew all, that he did reherse,/And to his fresh remembraunce did reuerse/The vgly vew of his deformed crimes" (i.9.48.3–6)).

And yet, Despaire's general and special premises are conspicuously vulnerable if interrogated more, with further factoring in of complexity, particularity, and ambiguity. In the first place, Despaire is, rather unsubtly if we consider it, equivocating on at least two levels, amphibology and mental reservation. One amphibological move, for example, is the play with what it means to "die": "Let euery sinner die:/Die shall all flesh?" (1.9.47.5–6). Conflating the biological

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12 Translations mine.
13 References are to (Spenser 2007). For a breakdown of how the episode invokes the problems in the doctrine of assurance see (Skulsky 1981). For accounts of Redcrosse's lack of agency, see (Moss 2008; Escobedo 2017, pp. 143–57). For his escape from Despaire as representing not assurance but a step toward it, see (Kaufman 1996, pp. 71–79).

fact of death with the theological principle of death as the wages of sin, Despaire twists mortality into desert of punishment, making the latter seem as inevitable as the former. The mental reservation is more blatant: your sin disgusts God . . . and is forgiven, in Christ. It is a single proposition, but only half of it is expressed, the other, critical half—God's mercy—withheld. In the second place, Redcrosse has been sinful—but not ONLY so. To retrace his steps is to see mitigating circumstances and *mostly* good intent and *some* good deeds, with each discreet adventure having its own dynamics, frustrating any easy judgment of the whole. But Redcrosse escapes suicide neither by picking the equivocations apart nor by taking inventory of his life and evaluating it more closely. However questionable Despaire's attack is, Redcrosse never questions it. Instead, Una, the Truth, intervenes and asks, purely rhetorically, "Why shouldst thou then despeire, that chosen are?" (1.9.53.5). Redcrosse's ordeal isn't nearly over—experimental predestinarians like Perkins would always affirm as much, that assurance goes along with tribulation and disallows security. But Redcrosse's new life is hinged on this moment, the descending on him of simple, syllogistic assurance: those chosen will be saved, and he is chosen. Indeed, it seems implied that deeper engagement with the content of Despaire's speech were disastrous for him; "Arise, Sir knight arise, and leaue this cursed place," enjoins Una (1.9.53.9), and Redcrosse obeys without comment.

By making clear that the practical syllogism alone can save Redcrosse, Spenser highlights the dichotomy between Protestant and Catholic theories of what causes and what cures despair; Shakespeare plays a similar game with *Macbeth*, but from the other direction and for the other side. Macbeth like Redcrosse misses opportunities to engage complexity and ambiguity, in that, like Redcrosse, despite being virtually cued to it he refrains from delving and probing into his own particularity and circumstances, and from reading into and unraveling equivocations. But the mental work, the delving and probing and the reading and unraveling, that would most likely further entangle Redcrosse in despair would most likely save Macbeth from it, if anything could. And here we can observe a resonance with Catholic critiques of the Protestant theology of conscience.

As Elliot Rose and after him many other scholars have noted, with proliferating innovations in casuistical thinking, such as probabilism—the theory making any probable moral decision acceptable, rather than only the more or most probable—Catholic moral theology became increasingly theoretically complex, and in the process increasingly attentive to human complication, especially as contrasted with concurrent Protestant formulations.[14] At times, English Catholic polemic couches objection to Protestantism in just such terms, that it lacks responsiveness both to human diversity and to the many fine, subtle distinctions necessary to apply precept to human life. That assurance was not to be had in this life was standard Catholic dogma,[15] and such a position went with an approach to reading self and world predicated on the more provisional and multi-layered. For Richard Bristow, Protestants like William Fulke failed to appreciate the multiplicity and idiosyncrasy of individuals' goodness and badness, the fact that with sinners, "some go wider then some, with infinite varietie," just as with the pious, "some go narrower then some, with infinite varietie likewise" (Bristow 1970, p. 158); for Thomas Hill, one of the consequences of the Protestants' "Negatiue Doctrine," their stripping-down and dismantling of the whole Church apparatus—"they doe nought but destroy, pull downe, and denie many pointes of Religion"—was a stripped-down, dismantled, and ineffectual casuistry: whereas Protestants do not "meddle with these matters of Conscience," and in their incuriosity remain "vtterly ignorant" about the galaxy of sins, among Catholics "there are taught *Cases of Conscience*, in which is set downe, what is sinne, and what is not: the differences of sinnes, which great, which lesser, &c.," and the whole of moral philosophy is "much studied" by Church authority and taught to the people (Hill 1972, pp. 69, 79). Such careful, granular study lies behind the

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[14] See (Rose 1975, pp. 71–102 for Catholic casuistry, esp. pp. 72–73, and pp. 185–212 for Protestant casuistry, esp. p. 186). On probabilism as an address to the variety and uncertainty of moral situations, see also (Jonsen and Toulmin 1988, pp. 164–75; Zagorin 1990, pp. 159–63; Gallagher 1991, pp. 1–13; Stone 2004, pp. 1–16).

[15] For official statements see (Canisius 1971, pp. 468–69; Bellarmine 1858, pp. 542–44).

theory and practice of equivocation, as we see in Henry Garnet's *Treatise*, the furor over which, in its association with the Powder Plot, has long been tied to *Macbeth*.[16] For Garnet, the permission granted to Catholics interrogated unlawfully by Protestant persecutors to equivocate was fully justifiable, but the justification called for the drawing of many fine lines, in accordance with the probabilism Garnet subscribed to, itself a product of nuance. To understand how equivocation, in particular mental reservation, was not a lie—for lies were everywhere unlawful—one needed to understand how logicians had included mixed proposition among the four proposition-types (mental, vocal, written, and mixed), how Aristotle had located the essence of a truthful proposition in the speaker's mind and intent, and how completely the question depended on "the circumstance of place, tyme, and person" (Garnet 1851, pp. 44–46, 8–10, 12, 18). Asked by government officials if he was a priest, a Jesuit missionary like Garnet could say, "I am not a priest," and withhold but keep in mind, "insofar as I am bound to tell *you*."

Garnet also puts some onus on the hearer of the equivocation—"And the judge, if he be wise, hath cause alwayes to vnderstand these particles" (ibid. p. 18)—and this point is driven home by the prolific Catholic controversialist, Robert Parsons: there is no lie when, intending only self-defense against an unlawful judge, "I speaking a truth in it selfe according to my meaning, though he taking it otherwise is deceaued therby, but without fault of mine"; after all, "God doth permit men to be deceaued, and to be deliuered ouer into a reprobate sense for their sinnes" (Parsons 1977, pp. 346, 401). Macbeth can be assessed in much this way, as a hearer who makes insufficient effort to understand particles and who, as a bad interpreter making unjust queries, is given over to a reprobate sense. For many readers, Macbeth's confusion is of a piece with the atmosphere of his world, in which interpretive chaos, registered in the theme of equivocation but at work in many other ways, is endemic[17]; but some others have found that Macbeth fails at reasoning and interpreting when failure is by no means necessary. For William O. Scott, it's noteworthy how, at the Witches' first appearance, relatively uninquiring Macbeth is compared to Banquo—he's "much narrower in his scrutiny of the truth"—and how much his fixation on the prophecy involves suppressing his misgivings, both moral and intellectual, since it cries out for questioning: "the circumstances of the speaker are a sufficient clue to the presence of equivocation." *Macbeth* foregrounds the issue of interpreting a device like mental reservation with the resources available—but Macbeth has more resources than he avails himself of (Scott 1986, pp. 163–64, 169–72). With an eye toward conscience and casuistry, Camille Wells Slights (1981, pp. 109–21) and Wilks (1999, pp. 185–86) similarly trace how Macbeth becomes increasingly unresponsive to paradox and complexity, and perhaps even from the start resistant to them: he "draws all the unnecessary inferences," observes Wilks. Such readings anticipate my own, in their sense that the Witches' puzzles are not overwhelmingly difficult to penetrate—they are amenable to being dissected and probed by an adequately analytical and self-aware conscience. This is not to say that equivocation is approved of,[18] or that the Weird Sisters are other than evil. But their power might be nullified with a more Catholic mode of thinking—a more deliberate, a more particularistic and interrogatory, mode of thinking, one more comfortable dealing with a lack of assurance or certainty.[19]

Let us examine Macbeth's thought-process as he reacts to having been named Thane of Cawdor:

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[16] For equivocation theory and uproar over it, including Garnet, see (Zagorin 1990, pp. 186–220; Covington 2003, pp. 143–49; Marotti 2005, pp. 132–47). For the impact on *Macbeth* see (Huntley 1981, pp. 40–47; Scott 1986, pp. 161–63; Zagorin 1990, pp. 193–94; Wills 1995, pp. 93–105; Childs 2014, pp. 313–15). For a full and more recent account of equivocation theory and its ramifications, factoring in *Macbeth*, see (Butler 2012).

[17] For a book-length study arguing this see (Kinney 2001, esp. pp. 239–42 for equivocation as the central conceit). For *Macbeth*'s world of ambiguity and chaos, as esp. conveyed with equivocation, see (Mullaney 1980; Coddon 1989; Jacobus 1992, pp. 113–23; Cavell 2010; Zukerman 2013).

[18] The condemnation of equivocation might be qualified, however, as with the play's anti-Catholicism; see (McCoy 2004; Hunt 2005; Baynham 2006). Also interesting for our purposes here is the argument for a Catholic Shakespeare signaling, via the vilifying of equivocation, a dissociation with the Powder plotters, in (Wilson 2004, pp. 186–205).

[19] For an interesting attribution of Macbeth's early oversimplifying to a Ramist logical paradigm—Ramism being aligned with Protestantism—see (Jacobus 1992, pp. 115–16).

> Two truths are told,
> As happy prologues to the swelling act
> Of the imperial theme . . . .
> This supernatural soliciting
> Cannot be ill; cannot be good: —
> If ill, why hath it given me earnest of success,
> Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor:
> If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
> Against the use of nature? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings.
> My thought, whose murther yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man,
> That function is smother'd in surmise,
> And nothing is, but what is not. (1.3.127–42)

Occupying the position of Thane of Cawdor has led thought to o'erleap itself in a squeezing out of all the great body of fluid middle matter in between this new reality of the thaneship and the prospect of regicide. Othello while still lucid is mindful of the dangers of such leaps, springing from mere unknowns: given the flux of human relations, baseless doubt itself is to be guarded against, and so doubly to be avoided are "exsufflicate and blown surmises" extrapolated merely from such doubt (3.3.182). Insecurity must not slip into suspicion, for suspicion is apt to seek relief by twisting the categorically uncertain into the certain, into inflated surmises. For Macbeth, this has happened already—the surmise, blown up by his own thought working on nothing but air (i.e., constituted of and inflated by what is not), is so exsufflicate that it suffocates, smothers, all other thought-avenues (i.e., nothing is but what is not).

But in the meantime, Macbeth's thought has gestured toward what these other avenues might and should be. The illness of the suggestion, as brought out in its visceral symptoms, is duly perceived, and this in the interrogative mood; not only are the good and the ill parceled out and their mutual exclusivity understood, with greater weight given, accurately enough, to the ill, but the thought is also directed in an exploratory vein, as though, despite his agitation, he is perceiving his perceptions and questioning them. Whatever his current, real-world fears now, for example, the idea of usurpation, metastasizing (swelling) in his fantasy and imagination, appears much more horrid, and the fact of this metastasizing even more so—there is *some* self-reflecting here. And yet, embedded in the perception/question is that it has been preempted, the suggestion already yielded to, utterly. This striking juxtaposition, between the interrogatory and the certain, between a line of questioning opening up and a hard-fast conclusion becoming cemented, with the latter undoing the former, creates a sense of Macbeth being hopeless when he ought not to be. That is, as the question-asking sparked by the new information—the thaneship of Cawdor—continues even as it gives way to horror at the already-decided, we are enabled to notice the gaps in the thought-stream, feel the contours of what has been leapt over.

There are at least two strands of this effect. First, we must wonder about the nature Macbeth references, and wonder too why he doesn't wonder more about it. He separates ill and good in the proper use of nature; but what about *his* nature might make him susceptible or inclined toward ill thought deleterious to that proper use? He asks, "why do I yield"—why not therefore ask, "why do *I* yield"? Second, we must wonder about his manner of separating the good and ill: the swelling act of the imperial theme *never* seems good, for it is never not equated with murder, and the Witches never mentioned murder. Only the vague idea of a future "King Macbeth" has been presented to him: the assigning of "good" to it and the attaching to it of the "ill" of murder both come from his own interpretive embroidering. His inquiry about good and ill proves him capable so to inquire, but also

dreadfully superficial in it, and for more profound inquiry, it would help him mightily to be able to frame the Witches' discourse as possible equivocation. He could then turn over what they may have withheld, by amphibology or mental reservation, and what he has mentally inserted in its place. Are not their few words cryptic? Can those few be unambiguously good? And, especially given Banquo's perpendicular future as an ancestor of kings, what are they not telling about the particulars enfolded into their bare "shalt"? Each strand, looking into his own nature and looking into equivocation, is made possible within a basically Catholic purview. In taking the Witches' prophecy as *not* prophecy but "supernatural soliciting," Macbeth has placed himself in a case very close to that of someone confronting a spirit and having to gauge its good or ill provenance and intent, as Noel Taillepied sets down: it is paramount "to consider whether the apparition says or suggests . . . anything in fine contrary to faith and morals." Such investigation may well get tricky, explains Taillepied, for the devil could dissemble ill intent, and even a good spirit, truly that of a benign departed soul, might complicate the matter by enjoining something dangerous or only good ambiguously. Taillepied thus treats ghost encounters as highly situational affairs, dependent on the specific person, and on the specific apparition's appearance and behavior. If there's "no actual suggestion" contrary to faith and reason, but something problematic about the solicitation, the best course would be careful questioning, ideally with the consultation of authority (Taillepied 1933, pp. 163–64). Unlike Hamlet's case, in which an honest ghost makes just such a problematic suggestion,[20] in Macbeth's an extremely strange and mysterious apparition makes no suggestion at all. But what the "imperfect speakers" (1.3.70) do say can hardly be simply forgotten, and surely warrants that study which Taillepied advises, and which the Protestantism of Shakespeare's time had obviated. From a Catholic standpoint, in a particular case of conscience circumstances matter, and ambiguities are worth teasing out.

Regarding the first strand, for instance, for Macbeth to look into his own nature would amount to engaging his own particularity, precisely whither Despaire invites Redcrosse to turn his thought in order to compound his desperation. Why does he yield to that suggestion? The play gives us just enough clues to suppose that he has already been suggesting kingship to himself and that his conscience, while striving against that suggestion, has not been able to do so very robustly. The suspicion that he had been thinking of seizing the crown for some time before the Witches' appearance has a long history in the criticism, with many deriving his horror from his suddenly being exposed to his inner desires, as they have now been expressed, and the trajectory of events—I am Thane of Cawdor—seems to be manifesting them.[21] But not often remarked on, in my reading, is that Macbeth might have and should have noticed this about himself. His single state of man, his proper psychophysiological function, is shaken because he recoils from the wrong of murder, but then, also because his conscience has not been able to obstruct the gluing of murder and kingship together. He fears his sinful thought but his thought far too swiftly flows in a sinful channel. And key to this too-swift flow is his tendency to dilute or even displace morality with practicality and practicability. Soon after this admission to himself that he has yielded to that suggestion, he makes an attempt to divert the stream of thought: "If Chance will have me King, why, Chance may crown me,/Without my stir" (1.3.144–45). In a way, this thought is a crucial opening up of possible alternatives for him, as he contemplates how regicide might not have to be, and such is indicative of some redemptive impulse to heed his reservations; and yet, the thought is still being smothered by the surmise, for it maintains the premise that he will and must be king, and further maintains the buckling of kingship to murder: accident might exempt him from having to act, but it is not in doubt what "stirring" would mean. It were a relief not to have to crown himself via murder—but that is assumed to be the track he is on,

[20] For commentary on Hamlet's Catholic-oriented and probing encounter with what appears to him as his father's purgatorial ghost, enjoining a uniquely just and memorializing revenge, see (Curran 2006, pp. 78–83).

[21] Walker is an eloquent early example: "The experience was the shock of hearing spoken in his ear the very thoughts of kingship that were stirring within him" (Walker 1949, p. 44). For other prominent examples see (Ornstein 1960, p. 231; Huntley 1981, pp. 43–44; Wilks 1990, p. 130).

and on it he will stay unless Chance intervenes and sets him at the end of it. No notion of getting off the track, or that there might be other tracks, or that there's something besides tracks, ever takes hold.

This inability to shake off the practical—his idea of the one determined temporal sequence and the mechanism by which it will fall out—or rather this centripetal force that always steers thought back to the practical, at the expense of the moral, is repeatedly shown to control his mind's "function." One word crackling with this centripetal energy is "success," as it appears in the speech (1.3.132). "Success" here is automatically troubled by referring to a "good" outcome, an imperial theme, thoroughly and undeniably integrated with ill means.[22] But further, "success" excludes a sense of judgment on that outcome, privileging the sheer sense of one-event-following-another, in succession. Being Thane of Cawdor is taken not merely as evidence for the Witches' credibility but as "earnest of success"—a sign that being king will *happen*,[23] a marker along a temporal progression. For, an "earnest," as per the OED, is, more than a sign of the future, an "instalment" of something "to be received in greater abundance."[24] Part of a line of events has been fulfilled, and thus we must look toward the line's remainder, as with someone awaiting the repayment of a loan after a partial payment has been tendered. And this is to contextualize everything he is responding to as purely a matter of what happens. "Success" connotes here nothing beyond the unfolding of time along a certain vector: his conscience alerts him to the ill entailed in that vector, absent the intervention of Chance, but it doesn't allow for any other contexts for thought-generation. The new thaneship is related to the possible kingship, then, solely on the level of events, on the same level as the "success" of winning a battle (1.3.90)—in his missive to his wife, Macbeth himself makes this connection, with the "earnest of success" seeming all the more resounding for arriving "in the day of success" (1.5.1). The riffing on "success" is consolidated in his "if it were done" speech, which is the closest his conscience comes to waylaying him, as thoughts of Duncan's mildness and generosity, and his own obligations, occur to him, only to be outflanked by how the murder will alienate the populace[25] (1.7.12–25). Here, Macbeth acknowledges himself as at a moral precipice, fully responsible for the action he takes in this extravagantly clear case of conscience ("in these cases,/We still have judgment here" (1.7.7–8)). But the case is never truly opened up, for his revulsion to regicide is at once subordinated to the scenario of his being able to be excused from committing it: how much better "if th' assassination/Could trammel up the consequence, and catch/With his surcease success" (2–4). Here again, he is yielding to the suggestion even as he feels the illness of it, and this largely because his mind centers on success, and thence, to compunction that only regards the succession after success, the consequence of the crime. The deed's illness yields to the deed's relation to the sequential, so much so that he personifies the deed capturing success and preventing contingencies attending it. Murder becomes an agent acting in time, setting off how little it's thought of as a question of timeless morality.

This same foregrounding of the practical and sequential, and marginalizing of the moral and non-sequential, recurs with other common but pointedly used terms, such as "way" and, as at the famous opening lines of this speech, "done"[26]: Malcom's elevation a new obstacle, "For in my way it lies," Macbeth envisions already-accomplished usurpation somehow eluding his own perception, "yet let that be,/Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see" (1.4.49–53); in the dagger speech, then, the prospective collapses into the relentlessly directed, the thought-dagger turning into the real one and leading him "the way that I was going" (2.1.42), until the tolling bell clinches the inaccessibility to him of another way, and confirms that "I go and it is done" (2.1.62)—this even despite the known fact that nothing's actually happened yet and a whole array of other possibilities substantively exists

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[22] Somewhat related is the discussion of (Hibbs and Hibbs 2001, pp. 281–83 on success, pp. 283–87 on practicality).
[23] Somewhat related is the observation that Macbeth consigns himself to passivity here; see (Blits 1996, pp. 30–31).
[24] For this sense OED cites *Cymbeline* 1.5.65–66: "It is an earnest of a farther good/That I mean to thee."
[25] For an interesting argument that conscience in *Macbeth* is generally a matter of concern for others' opinion, see (Tilmouth 2009, pp. 510–14).
[26] See (Slights 1981, p. 116). Also, we should note how Macbeth eventually refers back to this thought-pattern with "The way to dusty death" (5.5.23).

("he lives"). In each contemplation, terror at an idea of crime morphs into terror at the *way*, the path he's on, along which he moves leap by leap with each action done and finished, the real-world deed and its consequences felt, before they occur, the coldness of Lady Macbeth's comfort—"what's done is done" (3.2.12)—felt before any doing. This is to deprive himself of agency, for it is effectively to preclude decision-making power in the interim, but more important for us here is that it reveals the flatness and thinness of his moral thought.

It's important, this thought-pattern of practicality and sequentiality overbalancing morality, in that it is an intrinsic part of his inner-life history, one he'd do well making an effort to understand—for his wife understands and exploits it with the utmost perspicacity. That attack which targets his masculinity in 1.7 berates him not merely for cowardice but for cowardice in having no stay against regicide *except* cowardice, in "Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'/Like the poor cat i'th'adage" (1.7.44–45).[27] In considering how he has no "spur" but "Vaulting ambition" (1.7.25–27), he has just been thinking how he has insufficient good to motivate him, and this goes along, we see, with an insufficiency of scruple to dissuade him from egregious ill. The disgust at the ambition is weak. And yet, it seems to be gaining momentum when Lady Macbeth's entrance interrupts it. The ambition overleaps itself "And falls on th'other—" ... *what*? Where might this thought-thread about the emptiness of ambition take him as he begins to look within, to his own drives? Lady Macbeth pounces on him before any such thought can germinate. Since the regicide's ill is mentally purchasable only in the realm of essential ideas, where his thought does not easily go, his wife shoves the discussion back into the realm of the practical and practicable and successive. She boxes his thought into a kind of infernal practical syllogism: since your desires are unfettered by principle, the only variable is opportunity; opportunity is here; ergo. And so she wins his feeble, practicality-mired, last-ditch question, "If we should fail?" (1.7.59), which she easily resolves. The difference between no conscience and an attenuated one is well recognized by Lady Macbeth, and she makes sure it is never recognized by her husband.

For, her receipt of his letter captures how his attenuated conscience has long been his mind's mode of operating. Despaire would have Redcrosse face his personal sinfulness and imagine that it renders him peculiarly odious to God, but the self-destruction Lady Macbeth draws Macbeth into requires keeping him from awareness of his particular inadequacy. Her soliloquy characterizes a man a deal more complicated than the cat in the adage:

> Yet I do fear thy nature:
> It is too full o'th' milk of human kindness,
> To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great;
> Art not without ambition, but without
> The illness should attend it: what thou wouldst highly,
> That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
> And yet wouldst wrongly win; thou'dst have, great Glamis,
> That which cries, "Thus must thou do," if thou have it;
> And that which rather thou dost fear to do,
> Than wishest should be undone. (1.5.16–25)

Her Macbeth is a study in a shallow conscience, but one still existing within normal human moral parameters (the "milk of human kindness"[28]). It has not been nearly strong enough to quell sinfully ambitious thought of a categorically violent stamp. As borne out in his notion of Chance perhaps crowning him without his stir, she divines that his dislike of the "way" to kingship and of what can't go "undone" to get there is much less intense than it ought to be, and that it comes with grievously

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[27] See Muir's note here (Shakespeare 1962), citing a work by Heywood: "The cate would eate fyshe, and would not wet her feete."

[28] For this I follow (Wilks 1990, p. 21). Muir's note (Shakespeare 1962) presents the case for this reading and does not discount it, but seemingly prefers others.

small antipathy to that outcome itself. She correctly sees his vision as functioning horizontally, toward practical success, and not vertically enough, toward the morally abstract. And yet, as she says, though his rejection of "illness" is inadequate, he has a baseline concept of good versus ill, which we have likewise heard from him. That the suggestion is wholly ill eludes him, but that what is ill cannot be good, ill and good being opposites, does not. And it's just this inkling of moral reasoning that she must drown out in him, replacing what is lame compunction at a murderous "way" with what is nothing more than a predatory cat's hydrophobia. Lady Macbeth's speech proves the value of fine distinctions, both conceptual distinctions, and distinctions about kinds and degrees of culpability within oneself. Her insights into him, though tortuous and knotty—"art not without ambition"—are knots worth untying, for they hold power to aid him. She invokes infernal aid to help her keep them from him.

Regarding the second strand, the amphibology and mental reservation Macbeth falls prey to are insidious, but not insurmountably so. Such is the significance, I think, of the Porter interlude referencing equivocation as a topical issue (2.3). The Porter unequivocally aligns equivocation with evil, useful for the committing of treason, but incapable of fooling heaven's judgment. And yet, while he locates hell within the murder-stained castle, he locates the equivocation outside, with the knocking that turns out to be that of Macduff: the relationship between equivocation and hell is jumbled here. The extra-topical symbolism of this could work in any number of ways, of course; equivocation is both the hellish inside, pertaining to Macbeth's duplicity, and the unknown outside, pertaining to how the Witches' "imperfect" statements have gained admittance into his mind, when his psychic defenses might have shut the door to them. Then again, such interpretive moves merely reinscribe our need to fill in the gaps ourselves, super-imposing logic and leaving out inconvenient snags like the presence of Macduff. This is indeed epistemologically scary. But it grows less so if we back off from strictly logical and literalist frameworks. That the Porter's treasonous equivocator "could not equivocate to heaven" (2.3.11–12) makes him all the more menacing, for then the civil, human authority has been powerless against his obfuscations; and yet, at that heart of Catholic casuistry's sanction of equivocation was this idea that God cannot be fooled by it. Since God judges intent, a well-intended thought, vocally expressed or not, clarified or not, could not be sinful.[29] Just while we're reminded of equivocation's conduciveness to ill, then, we are also reminded of the principle justifying it *in particular cases*. Into the Porter's overall association of equivocation with the diabolic creeps a sense that its illness depends on the use of it, and perhaps that its dangers depend largely on its audience's gullibility—for, the equivocator swearing in both scales against either scale doesn't seem to have gotten away with it at all, and indeed, the topical valence, pointing to the apprehended Garnet, adds to the hint of equivocation's toothlessness. Though the diabolism isn't dissipated, it does increasingly come accommodated with other, less threatening ways to conceptualize equivocation, as with the Porter's lecture on drink (2.3.25–37). Drink is an "equivocator with lechery," working to humiliate the unwary via amphibology and mental reservation: it's a signifier with a double-meaning for the libido, both enhancing and diminishing it; and its consumption issues a proposition with a missing premise, wherein it "persuades" the drinker of his potency but then cues him to suggest to himself that more drink will make him more potent, and, "giving him the lie, leaves him." The pun on "lie" conveys how the withheld premise—while some alcohol has invigorated more will incapacitate you—has tricked the now passed-out, prostrate would-be amorous drinker into generating the lie himself as to alcohol's effects. There is a sinister shade here, Lady Macbeth having given drink a demonic aspect (2.2.1),[30] but too, there is also a comic shade of quite avoidable stupidity.

Amphibology becomes more evident later in the play, the Witches deploying it, through the spirits they've conjured, with Macbeth's conscience a non-issue, he knowing himself steeped in blood and

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[29] See esp. (Navarrus 1584, pp. 3–4); but also (Garnet 1851, pp. 16–17, 75; Parsons 1977, pp. 344–47).

[30] That the diabolic aspect of drink cannot be ignored is also clear from *Othello* 2.3.281–83.

unable to turn back as he resolves to confer with them again (3.4.131–37). Still, 4.1 dramatizes the difference being a smarter, more inquiring interpreter might have made. His literalist, one-dimensional reading of "none of woman born" (4.1.80) and "until/Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane hill/Shall come" (4.1.92–94) echoes the plight of the Porter's impotent drunkard in his being misled by a mixed signal, but one that might have been pegged as such. For the drunkard, drink portends nothing else but amorousness, and so for Macbeth here: each phrase is plain and can mean only one thing, impossibility of defeat ("That will never be" (4.1.94)). Drink facilitates this interpretive tunnel-vision, and so do the apparitions, each advising him to be proud, bold, and secure—the perceiver is nudged toward a single reading and simultaneously toward the existence of only a single reading. In neither case, however, does the mixed-ness of the signal seem imperceptible, and with each, in fact, willful ignorance seems at play. Alcohol's double effects are well understood by the Porter, who's indulged anyway and makes fun of himself for having fallen into a wrestling match with booze (2.3.38–42), and Macbeth in order to ratify his invincibility has to block out the implications of both the warning about Macduff and the line of kings issuing from Banquo. Such silly difficulty handling handle-able doubtful speech is exactly the charge Parsons lays at the door of Protestants like his sparring partner Thomas Morton: "HOMONYMIA" being an officially designated species of "ambiguity of speach"—a device repeatedly used by Jesus himself—for Morton to deem it hateful is ridiculously to prohibit "all Rhetoricall tropes, and figures," an exercise in "childish vanity"; Morton's childish interpretive obtuseness—"very fond, simple, and vntrue"—resembles that of Christ's befuddled hearers, frustrated in solely "vnderstanding the one sense" of his sayings (Parsons 1977, pp. 315–19). Macbeth cannot imagine how Birnam Wood would show up at Dunsinane, but with some small imagination he could guess there's multivalency afoot; that it takes report of moving trees to make him "begin/To doubt th' equivocation of the fiend" (5.5.42–43) is grimly absurd, for he has ample cause to doubt here in 4.1. Equivocation seems fiendish, but it also seems able to be short-circuited with doubt and questioning—its power comes from its hearer's certainty in the affixing of a single meaning.

Amphibology is of some relevance to the original case of conscience, though, when he yet has the possibility to be saved. The Witches clarify their meaning in proclaiming Banquo "greater" and "much happier" than Macbeth—begetting kings versus reigning (1.3.65–67)—but each term remains packed with double-senses. Whereas in Holinshed the Witches spell out that King Macbeth is bound for "an vnluckie end," and that Banquo's royal line will stretch deeply and gloriously into history, "by long order of continuall descent,"[31] *Macbeth*'s Weird Sisters offer only comparative greatness and happiness. The comparative hides though it does not erase the sense of Macbeth's abject polar opposition to Banquo: Banquo will be greater than Macbeth, in that Macbeth will be loathed by all posterity, and much happier, in that Macbeth will be wretchedly miserable and soon die in that condition. To gain access to this hidden sense, we need to be able to play with meanings of "great" and "happy"—and implied here is that in his inability so to do, Macbeth is rather dull. For, how alternative meanings of the Witches' "greater" and "happier" foreshadow his downfall is not obvious—but *that* they are speaking in paradoxes is all too obvious (lesser and greater, not so happy yet much happier). His reading of the prophecy is relegated to "vnderstanding the one sense," in this case to ideas of relative elevatedness of position and preeminence of title[32]; the speakers are "imperfect," to him, mostly for not explaining clearly why they call him Cawdor when the current occupant of that thaneship, as far as Macbeth knows, still "lives/A prosperous gentlemen" (1.3.72–73). What more they might mean by quibbling on such already loaded terms as "great" and "happy" goes unentertained.

What surely ought to be entertained, moreover, is that the speakers have indeed been imperfect; just as with the topical storm over equivocation, here with the Witches' initial prophecy mental reservation is the main form of equivocation providing the stumbling block for the interpreter.

[31] See Muir's Appendix A (Shakespeare 1962, p. 178).
[32] Macbeth's letter to Lady Macbeth shows this same limited understanding of "greatness" as pertaining only to station (1.5.12–13); a similarly limited understanding of "happy" resounds in his "happy prologues" (1.3.128).

The Witches hail Macbeth "that shalt be King hereafter" (1.3.50); they do not say he shall be king hereafter *because* of how he will take this very prediction as a supernatural soliciting, that suggestion which he feels is so certain it must be bloodily forced to materialize. They say "shalt," but they do not say "you shall" as a result of being transfixed—"rapt" (1.3.57, 1.3.143)—with this their "shalt," for that is what induces him to confuse the present with the future, and see only one possible future, to see nothing but what is not. This is not to assert that the play's mystification of agency can be solved, for indeed it cannot.[33] I am asserting, however, that there's one thing Macbeth *can* be blamed for here: he's guilty of bad interpreting, of negligence *and* abuse in the apprehension of the equivocal, in insisting an incompletely expressed proposition is utterly complete. He reacts to the utterance as "imperfect" but then assumes its absolute perfection and its cancellation of all other possibilities. The news that he *is* Thane of Cawdor when it ought to illuminate the proposition's imperfection—prove there's much left out of it—merely locks the assumption immovably into place. Ironically, and damningly, the missing premise *is* this very insisting and assuming: what's left out is that the "shalt" shall be a "shalt" as a product of Macbeth's own absolutist and literalist and unimaginative, even anti-imaginative interpretation.

The Witches cannot be thought parallel to the persecuted Catholic justifiably practicing equivocation, but Macbeth, with this interpretive negligence and abuse, has much in common with the Protestant investigator deemed, by Catholics, blamably closed-minded about words and meanings. Morton, for example, argued *all* mental reservation to be plain lying, no matter how Catholics tried to defend it with circuitous "Sophistrie," and to deny that it met the two qualifiers of lying, speech contradicting knowledge and an intent to deceive; for Morton, to concede any such utterance lawful were to doubt the consistency of God himself, and to deprive humanity of the capacity to repulse the suggestions of Satan (Morton 1606, pp. 53–63). But for Catholics, such an all-encompassing stance, in addition to violating the rule of charity, both defied philosophical precision and unreasonably posited responsibility to an unjust interrogator. On mental reservation both Garnet and Parsons were influenced by Martin of Azpilcueta,[34] whose carefully documented, scholarly treatise, drawing fine, subtle distinctions backed by authority, established that the hearer's understanding was immaterial; if, with good cause, the speaker spoke, or was silent, according to her or his own intent, then the interrogator's intent, and comprehension, did not need to be accounted for (Navarrus 1584, pp. 15, 23). Accordingly, Garnet holds that "it skylleth not, whether those which I speake to vnderstand it amisse or no, as long as vniustlye and rashely and wickedlye I am asked by them" (Garnet 1851, pp. 16–17). Parsons is incisive on both points. He schools Morton on the nature of equivocation according to Aristotle, and later logicians such as Occam, affirming that a grasp of mental reservation requires a more than elementary conversance with logic—"it serueth to discerne captious and sophisticall sillogismes, from demonstratiue and dialecticall"—and claims support from the long Church tradition of painstaking interpretation of the many obscure passages of scripture: as modeled by the Fathers, interpretation is arduous, demanding "labour by examination of the circumstances," and "labour ... to find out the secret meaning, and reserued sense." Furthermore, as the truth of a proposition depends not on whether "the hearer vnderstand it or no," if that hearer is with no proper jurisdiction pressing for answers, still less is the speaker bound to his comprehension: "if the Iudge be not lawful or competent," the speaker "hath no necessary reference to him at all, nor to his demaundes, questions, or speach, but that he may frame to him selfe any proposition that is true in it selfe, and in his owne sense & meaning," though the hearer "be therby deceaued" (Parsons 1977, pp. 324–26, 312–14, 376, 388–89, 329, 342). Such arguments need not have persuaded Shakespeare to embrace equivocation to impress him with a sense that the principles governing

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33 On the many sides of this mystification Hunter remains the authority; see (Hunter 1976, pp. 167–69).
34 For the controversy over mental reservation, esp. as influenced by Navarrus, see (Huntley 1981, pp. 41–42; Zagorin 1990, pp. 163–81; Gallagher 1991, pp. 63–75).

truthful expression are intricate, that circumstances—who's demanding the truth and why—inflect them, and that outright disregard for them is imprudent and self-deluding as well as illogical.

Macbeth's being deceived by mental reservation is in this light of little exoneration for him; his bad interpreting is much his own fault, for he is both slack in his logic and hyper-logical, the moral reasoning of his conscience invalid for skipping steps and for brutal tautology. In order to read a mixed proposition, one withholding a premise, as a fully expressed one, he has translated it bluntly into a simple demonstrative syllogism admitting no qualification or inflection (if I am Thane of Cawdor, I shall be king hereafter; "I am Thane of Cawdor"; ergo). Just as Morton would turn the mixed proposition "I am not a priest" into a bare lie, eschewing all the refinements of Scholastic logic, for Macbeth, "commencing in a truth" leads straight to *the* truth and nothing but. At the same time, his thought glosses over how its ironclad conclusion is based on its own working; for, how can the Witches be absolutely correct about the future when it takes Macbeth's own "stir" to bring that future about? The circularity that ought to disprove merely reinforces the conclusion. However, that conclusion is indeed ironclad; a mere surmise, it nevertheless smothers everything else. Not only is there no labor on or examination of secret meaning; there is a kind of ideational tyranny, the mind elevating its own fallacious creation to the highest height of truth—all the more so in that the creation is predicated on murder. For Catholics, Protestants conducted their persecutory investigations in much this spirit, unthinkingly asking their unjust questions and convincing themselves of their simplistic, cruel conclusions, heedless that, as heretics, their self-made premises made the process unsound to begin with. As such, they were justly fooled, or, more precisely, justly allowed to fool themselves.

Again, this is not to say that Shakespeare admired equivocation or was a crypto-papist, and still less to imply that he wished the Powder Plot a success. It is to say that he preferred the complex, the particular, and the open to the oversimplified, the generalizing, and the closed, and he found the state religion of his time too bent toward the latter. In these cases of conscience, indeed, we still have judgment here; Shakespeare has his Macbeth grossly fail to harness the potential of that judgment. Coordinately, with Macbeth the playwright presents us with a case of the perils of too-easy certainty.

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Article

Lear, Luke 17, and Looking for the Kingdom Within †

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Abstract: The ending to Shakespeare's *Tragedy of King Lear* has generated much debate. Performance history and critical interpretations of the conclusion of the Folio version of *Lear* have been pronouncedly divided into readings intimating the tragic hero's redemption and readings averring his ultimately bleak condition, whether of delusion or despair. Recent attempts to describe Shakespeare's use of scripture in this play have offered more nuance, acknowledging the play's blending of pagan and Christian elements. While *King Lear* has extensively been compared to the book of Job and to apocalyptic passages in Revelation and Daniel, allusions to the gospel narratives and to Luke in particular raise the thorny question of Cordelia's role as a Christ-figure. This essay argues that the ambiguous and suggestive nature of Lear's final words ("Look there, look there!") is both preserved and illuminated when read as an allusion to Jesus' words in Luke 17:21. This previously unexplored allusion not only offers guidance for responding to Lear's exhortation to "Look there" but also resonates within Shakespeare's play through shared themes of apocalypse, kingdom, sight/insight, and the importance of the heart.

Keywords: Shakespeare; King Lear; Cordelia; gospel of Luke; kingdom of God; look there; icon; image

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> "What gestures shall we appropriate to this? What has the voice or the eye to do with such things?" —Charles Lamb, *On the Tragedies of Shakspere Considered with Reference to Their Fitness for Stage Representation*, 1811

> "We wish that we could pass this play over, and say nothing about it. All that we can say must fall far short of the subject; or even of what we ourselves conceive of it."—William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*, 1817

Among the famous last words of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, King Lear's "Look there, look there!" is perhaps the most controversial.[1] Part of the controversy is due to textual discrepancies between the 1608 Quarto (*True Chronicle Historie of the Life and Death of King Lear*) and the 1623 First Folio (*The Tragedie of King Lear*). Variations in the final scene in particular, and even more particularly in the king's last words, have led one scholar to assert that *Lear* "presents the most fascinating, important, and contentious textual issues of the entire Shakespeare canon" (Ioppolo 2016, p. 1380). In the *Historie* (Q1), after requesting another to "undo this button," Lear cries out, "O, O, O, O," and, after Edgar says that the king faints and attempts to recall him, Lear's last words are "Break, heart, I prithee break" (*Historie* 5.3.306–8). In the *Tragedie* (F), this line is given to Kent after the king speaks these final, troublesome words:

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[1] The lines contend only with Hamlet's "The rest is silence." Hamlet's last words may be read in light of his earlier statement that "the readiness is all," which in turn bears fruitful contrast with Edgar's "the ripeness is all." See (Frye 1963, pp. 137–39).

Lear. And my poor fool is hanged. No, no, no life?

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,

And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,

Never, never, never, never, never!

Pray you, undo this button. Thank you, sir.

Do you see this? Look on her! Look, her lips,

Look there. Look there! (*Tragedie* 5.3.281–87)[2]

There are scholarly arguments for Q1 being based on Shakespeare's foul papers, for many variations in Q1 being attributable to the inexperience of printer Nicholas Okes and his compositors in typesetting drama, and for some eliminations in the Folio resulting from cuts made to the play in performance.[3] Nevertheless, since Q1 has approximately 285 lines not found in F, and F has over 100 lines not found in Q1, "cutting the text to shorten the play for performance cannot have been the sole or main purpose for revising the text" (Halio 1994, p. 24). Textual issues provide matter for debate even in the question of whether it is best to think of *Lear* as essentially a single play (albeit one undergoing transformation in print and performance) or as two distinct versions.[4] The extent to which Shakespeare had a hand in the changes between Q1 and F is also uncertain. Despite Q1's title page, there is some question about whether or not the earliest printed version of the play accurately reflects the version "as it was played before the Kings Maiestie at Whitehall"; the Folio title page declares the volume "Published according to the True Originall Copies," and John Heminge and Henry Condell's letter to the readers promises Shakespeare's words "as he conceived them." Scholarly consensus favors the carefully prepared Folio as the more authoritative version, although it does not indisputably represent Shakespeare's own final word on the play.

The significance of these questions is heightened by an ongoing dispute about the ultimate tone of the play, and whether or not Lear's final words in the Folio indicate a potentially redemptive moment. In both Q1 and F, the word *redeem*, after all, occurs twice at important moments in the play, both in connection with Cordelia. In Act 4, Cordelia's Gentleman says to Lear, "Thou hast one daughter / Who redeems nature from the general curse / Which twain have brought her to" (4.6.201–3). The two bringing the curse in the immediate context are Goneril and Regan; through allusion they are also Adam and Eve, responsible for the original sin whose curse is inherited by and taints all humanity. The analogy then puts Cordelia in the role of Jesus Christ, the second Adam, come to redeem humanity from that curse.[5] From the opening scene, Lear expresses his hope that Cordelia will play a central role in his old age and in the transference of his kingdom. In Act 4, as Lear recognizes Cordelia's true worth,

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[2] Quotations of the 1608 Quarto text of *The History of King Lear* are taken from Jay L. Halio's edition for The New Cambridge Shakespeare (Shakespeare 1994). The Folio text above is taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed. (2016). Elsewhere, if not otherwise noted, quotations from *Lear* correspond in act, scene, and line number with the text of *The Arden Shakespeare* (Shakespeare 1997a, Third Series, edited by Reginald A. Foakes) which favors the Folio text but gives clear, comprehensive indications of variants among Q1, Q2, and F (corrected and uncorrected). Quotations from other works by Shakespeare follow *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed. (2016).

[3] See (Vickers 2016; Halio 1994, p. 4; Carson n.d.; and Ioppolo 2016).

[4] See, for example, (Vickers 2016); (Taylor and Warren 1983); and T. H. Howard-Hill's essay, "The Two Text Controversy," in (Ogden and Scouten 1997, pp. 31–44).

[5] Most annotated editions of *Lear* identify the "twain" as both Goneril and Regan and, more remotely, Adam and Eve (e.g., Shakespeare 1997a, pp. 342–43). The contrast of Adam and Christ is traditional. Romans 5:14–19 and 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45–49 connect Adam, the first man and the one whose first disobedience of God's law brought sin into the world, with Jesus, the second Adam, who lives sinlessly and whose death and resurrection redeems humankind. The pages for chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians in the 1595 Geneva-Tomson are among those that feature more commentary than sacred scripture, marking a significant and well-known portion of scripture on the essential Christian doctrine of the resurrection. The Book of Common Prayer's Order for the Burial of the Dead includes a "lesson" explicating the chapter, including assurances of the resurrection of the dead at the second coming of Christ and the contrast of Adam with Christ as the Second Adam. As the lesson was in the 1549, 1552, 1559 and 1604 versions of the Book of Common Prayer, anyone attending an Anglican burial service in Shakespeare's day would hear it. The reference to apocalyptic trumpets is there, as are references to the kingdom of God. Indeed, one might benefit from reading the whole of the Anglican Order for the Burial of the Dead alongside *King Lear*.

the significance of her life or death intensifies for him. She is his salvation; she or what she represents may serve to save his whole kingdom. Yet at the second occurrence of the word *redeem* (again in both Q1 and F) Lear is holding Cordelia's corpse in his arms. In a moment when he allows himself to entertain thoughts of her revival, he says (in delusion, or sarcasm, or hope) "This feather stirs, she lives: if it be so, / It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows / That ever I have felt" (5.3.263–65). Both Q1 and F uphold the living Cordelia as the *sine qua non* of Lear's redemption at a moment when she is already dead, and moments before Lear's own passing. The Folio's "Look there!" may signify the delusional belief that Cordelia yet lives—one final cruel trick of the universe, or considered more cynically, its last best gift, the coup de grâce. Contradistinctively, these words might indicate Lear's true moral or spiritual progress, pointing to an authentic if limited redemption for the old king.

Understandably, there is scholarly resistance to readings of the play that support a non-ironic introduction of hope in Lear's final moments, especially given the glib moralizing of two alternative Lear stories that bookend Shakespeare's Jacobean play, and are distinctly not Shakespearean. The first is one of Shakespeare's main sources, the anonymous *True Chronicle History of King Leir* (1605), which is set in Christendom and is filled with expressions of piety and moral sentiment made easy by a happy ending. The second bookend is Nahum Tate's version, which bluntly alters Shakespeare's tragedy with its own happy ending and pious pronouncements, and effectively replaced Shakespeare's version on stage from 1681 until 1845.[6] Shakespeare's drastic divergence from the *Leir* story to his tragic narrative, and subsequently Tate's warping of Shakespeare's play into an audience-pleasing happy

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[6] In the anonymous *Leir* play, Gonerill and Ragan live to escape with their husbands, the Kings of Cornwall and Cambria (respectively), put to flight by Mumford and the troops of the King of Gallia, Cordella's spouse. King Leir survives to give a final speech praising his faithful nobleman Perillus (Kent's analog) and to provide a final speech on true love, modest words, and reward for those loyal through hardship.
In Nahum Tate's version, Edgar and Albany step in at the last minute to prevent the deaths of Lear and Cordelia, Lear is restored to his throne, and Cordelia and Edgar are married. Kent gains the long-awaited reward of Lear's recognition and approbation: "Why here's old Kent and I, as tough a Pair / As e'er bore Tyrant's stroke." The gods fare better in this play, too. Edgar assures Cordelia of his role as divine agent of justice:

> "My dear Cordelia! Lucky was the Minute
> Of our Approach; the Gods have weigh'd our Suff'rings;
> W'are past the Fire, and now must shine to Ages." (Bonheim 1960, p. 4)

Cordelia describes Albany as a *deus ex machina*: "Speak, for methought I heard / The charming voice of a descending God"; and when Albany returns a kingdom to Lear, Cordelia concludes, "Then they are Gods, and Virtue is their Care." Lear is heroically forgiving and sentimental enough to feel some pangs at the news of Goneril's and Regan's deaths, and his bestowing of the kingdom and his daughter's hand on Edgar is accounted overcompensation for present virtue and past sufferings:

> Edg. The Gods and you too largely recompence
> What I have done; the Gift strikes Merit dumb.
> Cord. Nor do I blush to own myself o'erpaid
> For all my Suff'rings past.

Peace and Plenty are immediately restored, and Edgar's final thought pins the happy ending on Cordelia's goodness: "Thy bright Example shall convince the World / (Whatever Storms of Fortune are decreed) / That Truth and Virtue shall at last succeed."
For most readers and critics today, this version smacks of sentimentality, cheap poetic justice, and tired piety, although modern audiences have well received the Tate version when revisited as a curiosity (Ristad 1985, p. 8). The happy ending dissatisfied Joseph Addison and August Schlegel; it was excoriated by Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, and Anna Jameson—yet this was the version dominating the stage until 1838 (Wells 2000, p. 63). Samuel Johnson sided with the general public in his preference for a happy ending where virtue is rewarded, and he defended this impulse with a personal anecdote: "And, if my sensations could add any thing to the general suffrage, I might relate, that I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor" (Bonheim 1960, p. 12). It was the Tate version of *Lear* that David Garrick played to much acclaim; William Charles Macready is lauded today as the actor who made the successful return to Shakespeare's tragic ending in 1834 (after Edmund Kean's unpopular attempt to do so in 1823), although the full restoration of Shakespeare's text on stage was not complete until Samuel Phelps's performance in 1845 (Wells 2000, p. 69). In the United States, Tate's version remained standard until Edwin Booth's performance in 1875. Now the whirligig of taste has turned to find the comic ending laughably unconvincing.

ending, might make one wary of any apparent attempt to cram Shakespeare's majestic tragedy into the (apparently) smaller world of tragicomedy.

It would be unfair to lump all scholarship and performances that seek to illumine the potential for redemption in Shakespeare's play with the moralizing and comic impulses that shaped *Leir* and the Tate version. Even readings that argue for parallels between Lear and the medieval mystery or morality plays are careful to distinguish their approaches from such impulses.[7] Sensitive resistance to the darkest of interpretations of *Lear* still remains and even may have its origins in Shakespeare's lifetime. In fact, some scholars have recently suggested that the changes between First Quarto and First Folio indicate revisions in response to audience demands, designed to affect the play's general outlook and ultimate effect. For example, Grace Ioppolo argues the difference between the Quarto and Folio texts "seems to suggest a carefully planned attempt by Shakespeare to alter the play's theatrical impact" (Ioppolo 2016, p. 1381). Christie Carson presents the matter more boldly: "[T]here is strong evidence the changes between the Quarto and the Folio were made as a result of the audience response to the play during Shakespeare's lifetime. The ending, in particular, is altered to change it from a scene of absolute despair to a scene of possible redemption and rebirth. Hope is reintroduced into the Folio ending of the play, something that makes this tragedy more poignant but also more bearable in its Folio form" (Carson n.d.). Carson acknowledges that this possibility for a "more bearable" tragedy may or may not be actualized on stage: "The reintroduction of hope in Lear's last line can be performed either as redemption and absolution or delusion. As is true of so much of Shakespeare's work, these lines are ambiguous."

In any interpretation of *Lear*, much depends on what is done with Lear's last words; much also depends on what is made of the biblical allusions throughout the play, including but not limited to the passages suggesting Cordelia's role as a Christ-figure. The present essay addresses both of these critical tasks, reviewing the performative and critical history involving Lear's final moments, and positioning these moments within the larger context of the play's environment and its characters' attitudes toward the gods and matters pertaining to the philosophy of religion. Ultimately, it argues for a previously unexplored allusion to Luke 17:21 in Lear's last line, an allusion which supports the play's ambiguity—and both its pagan setting and its Christian context—while emphatically redirecting the reader to a central concern of the play: the spiritual realm of the heart.

1. "Look There!": Examples from Performance History

Theatrical performances and cinematic productions of *Lear* customarily base their script off of the Folio text or a conflated text that is itself based off of the Folio; as a result, Lears tend to die saying, "Look there!" Yet even if after considering all textual variations one settles on the Folio ending, an astounding range of performative and interpretive options remain.[8] In his extensive compilation of major interpretations of the play by actors, directors, and critics, Marvin Rosenberg reflects, "Much critical interpretation of *Lear* pivots on [Lear's last] seven lines [in F], and indeed almost entirely on the last two"—lines that "have been seized upon by 'redemptionists' as casting a warm and hopeful glow over the dark and deadly scene" (Rosenberg 1972, pp. 318–19). Where Lear looks, how he looks, and what he sees or thinks he sees affect the final and overall impression of the play.

Consider first the question of *where* Lear so urgently requires his audience's attention. While some performances and productions have featured the aged king speaking his last words while looking distantly up or out, the consensus is supported by context—Lear is looking down at the body of Cordelia and seeking to draw the attention of all to her. It is possible for Lear's attention to shift between "Do you see this? Look on her! Look, her lips," and his next and final line, although the

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7 See, for example, (Guilfoyle 1989, pp. 57, 66; Campbell 1948, pp. 93–109).

8 This examination of a few key examples is necessarily limited. For a guide to further reading that examines problems faced by the theatre historian and provides a list of notable performances and scholarly approaches to the performance history of *Lear*, see (Smith 2006, pp. 35–38).

pattern in Lear's final utterances is one of temporary distraction and then emphatic return to Cordelia. Indeed, Cordelia is Lear's utmost and ultimate concern; others may be presented to him only to become foils to offset the true jewel of his eyes. Faithful Kent seeks recognition as Caius; Lear brushes him off: "I'll see that straight" (5.3.285). The deaths of Goneril and Regan are revealed; Lear numbly assents: "Ay, so I think" (5.3.290). Albany observes, "He knows not what he says and vain is it / That we present us to him"; the ensuing announcement of Edmund's death Albany dismisses as "but a trifle here," and Albany's own underdeveloped plans for restoring justice are cut short as his "O, see, see!" gives way to Lear's last speech (5.3.291–92, 294, 303).[9] "[P]oor fool" in the first line of this speech is a term of endearment referring to Cordelia, although some have inferred that here the aged king distractedly reveals the manner of his Fool's death.[10] Even if Lear's Fool is recalled here, there is little cause to doubt that the king's attention is ultimately, exclusively fixed upon Cordelia, that his attention does not waver between "Look on her: look, her lips" at the end of his penultimate line and "Look there, look there!" in his last one. Even the undoing of a button is only superficially a distraction.[11] The interruption of the mundane is here a reminder of Lear's bodily frailty at a moment of psychological intensity, as he once more struggles to keep down "this mother" that "swells up toward [his] heart," "*Hysterica passio*" (2.2.246–47); Wittingly or not, Lear prepares his heart to expand, and thence to break. With Cordelia's corpse in his arms, what could make Lear desire to be stretched out longer upon the rack of life?

Yet within this dismal scene, Lear vacillates between expressions of certainty at his daughter's death and expressions of hope that she is yet alive. When he enters the scene carrying Cordelia's corpse, his howls are both cries and commands, onomatopoetic and imperative.[12] He rebukes the stunned observers ("O, you are men of stones!") and then announces, "She's gone forever. / I know when one is dead and when one lives; / She's dead as earth" (5.3.257–59). Nevertheless, soon afterward,

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[9] Of Albany's final attempt to restore justice, Greg Maillet remarks, "The blindness of this comment is so obvious, the sentiment so clearly untrue and particularly unfair to Cordelia and Lear, the imagery so contrary to the blindness/sight paradox developed so clearly to this point in the play, that there can be no question that Shakespeare is again using Albany to express an at best naïve and at worst obtuse sentiment about suffering" (Maillet 2016, p. 116).

[10] Yet even here commentators resist expressions of certainty, for the affectionate tone "does not force a choice between Fool and Cordelia" (Rosenberg 1972, p. 318), and the name recalls not only the disappearance of the Fool after Act 3 scene 6, but also the tenderness and compassion Lear learns to express toward his companion on the heath (3.2.68–73; 3.4.26). Marvin Rosenberg records that the actor John Gielgud "speculated that Cordelia and the Fool were probably much alike because played by the same actor" (Rosenberg 1972, p. 318), and it has become a conventional theatrical option to have the same actor play both roles.
The moniker may serve as a reminder that, even as the purported fools of this play have proven themselves quite wise in retrospect, such wisdom is no security against earthly vicissitudes. The purported fools include the Fool, Cordelia, Kent, Edgar, Albany, and Lear. The Fool offers Kent his coxcomb for faithfully attending the disgraced Lear in 1.4.93–100 and directly calls him Fool in 2.2.276. Kent says he is treated as a fool by Cornwall in 2.2.80. Outside the hovel, in the company of Lear, Kent, and Edgar in the guise of Poor Tom, the Fool says, "This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen" (3.4.77). Edmund scorns Edgar for his "foolish honesty" in 1.2.179, and upon meeting his blinded father, Edgar remarks, "Bad is the trade that must play fool to sorrow" (4.1.40). Directly and indirectly, Goneril calls Albany a fool five times in Act 4, scene 2 (28, 38, 55, 59, 62). The Fool calls Lear foolish several times, beginning at 1.4.104, and Lear assumes this title in repentance and in preparation for the restoration scene with Cordelia (4.6.187, 4.7.60, 84). For wisdom in foolishness, compare Paul's assessment of the Christian faith in 1 Corinthians 1.
For the scholarly consensus supporting the primary sense of "my poor fool" as a reference to Cordelia, see, for example, editorial notes for this line in *The Norton Shakespeare* (Shakespeare 2016, p. 1460), David Bevington's edition of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Shakespeare 2014, p. 1254), *The Riverside Edition* (Shakespeare 1997b, ed. Baker et al., p. 1343), Russell Fraser's edition of *King Lear* for the Signet Classic Shakespeare (Shakespeare 1998, p. 144), and R. A. Foakes's edition of *King Lear* for the Arden Shakespeare (Shakespeare 1997a, ed. Foakes, p. 390).

[11] The button is generally understood to be Lear's, although in performance the button is sometimes Cordelia's; in Shakespeare's time Cordelia would have had laces instead (Craik 1981, p. 173 n. 2). Cf. Paulina in *The Winter's Tale*: "Oh, cut my lace, lest my heart, cracking it, / Break too" (*Winter's Tale* 3.2.170–71). Lear has already set a precedent in unbuttoning himself to symbolic effect in the storm on the heath (3.4.107). Granville-Barker sees in Lear's "call for a looking-glass, his catching at the feather to put on Cordelia's lips, the undoing of a button" a "tragic beauty" and "the necessary balance to the magniloquence of the play's beginning and to the tragic splendor of the storm" (Granville-Barker 1940, p. 160). See also (Rosenberg 1972, p. 319); (Bradley 1991, p. 270).

[12] Benedict Nightingale lists several options for these howls from performance history: "Sinden, Church, Olivier on television, and Stephens transformed the repetitions of 'howl' into a long animal wail of grief. With Michael Redgrave ... [1953], the words were a kind of exhausted baying. Scofield invested them with a terrible rage as well as with pain. With Cox and Gambon, they were more obviously an order to the stunned spectators" (Ogden and Scouten 1997, p. 242).

Lear seeks some visible sign of Cordelia's breath in the fogging of a glass or the "stain[ing] of a stone" (5.3.259–60).[13] At the stirring of a feather, he briefly entertains hope she yet lives; it is the "chance that does redeem all sorrows" (264). Kent's cry of pity at his master's struggle to confront unbearable sorrow only causes Lear to turn on his attendants: "A plague on you murderers, traitors all; / I might have saved her; now she's gone for ever" (5.3.267–68). This second outburst and confirmation of Cordelia's death immediately reverts to uncertain hope as Lear again fixes his attention upon his daughter: "Cordelia, Cordelia, stay a little. Ha? / What is't thou sayst?" (269–70). The breath he wishes would "stain the stone" is especially precious to him as evidence of her communicative powers, for he has finally learned to listen for, value, and respond to Cordelia's voice, "ever soft, / Gentle, and low, an excellent thing in woman" (5.3.270–71). From the opening scene, Kent had advised Lear that Cordelia's refusal to participate in the contest of love speeches was a sign of her virtue, not her lack of love: "Nor are those empty-hearted, whose low sounds / Reverb no hollowness" (1.1.154–55). From Lear's tempestuous dismissals of Kent, Cordelia, and the wisdom within their unadorned speeches, the king must spend much of the rest of the play learning the hard way to esteem Cordelia properly, to recognize, value, and accept a love that quietly and stubbornly confronts folly, flattery, and falsehood. The awful tragic irony is that just as Lear learns this, Cordelia is silenced in death. He staggers between agony and denial. With Lear's final command—"Look on her: look, her lips, / Look there, look there!"—one may reasonably assume Lear dies looking for life on the lips of his beloved child—perhaps even for a word of truth and love, soft, gentle, and low (5.3.309–10). Whether his final exclamation should be interpreted as evidence that he ultimately sees or thinks he sees a sign of such life are additional matters for dispute.

The critical and performative controversy consequently includes the question of *how* Lear looks in these last moments. On stage, in film, and in critical analyses, a panoply of Lears have died in delusion or in wizened disillusion, invigorated or enfeebled, with keenness or with dullness of vision, with acceptance or with defiance, with utter grief, dementia, illumination, horror, ecstasy, stark despair, or apparent hope, whether within this world, or as if looking beyond a mortal vale of tears to solace or peace or redemption or beatitude in an afterlife. Thus, Rosenberg reflects: "What does Lear see? Let the argument over its meaning wait: for the perception itself, it may be: an ecstatic illusion that Cordelia is alive, that at last she speaks the words he wants to hear; a vision of some supernatural aura about her, presumably beatific; even an apparent glimpse of her spirit, rising toward heaven; or a horror of the ultimate silence that has stilled her" (Rosenberg 1972, p. 319). Performance history supports these options. "Possible modes of Lear's dying" include, as Rosenberg summarizes, that of "Gielgud [1940], dying grandly in joy at his perception of apotheosis in Cordelia; Forrest, frankly hallucinating her reviving, staring vacantly into space; Carnovsky, shocked to death at the horror of Cordelia's stillness" (Rosenberg 1972, pp. 319–20).[14] Major theatrical performances since Rosenberg's

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[13] As the Norton Shakespeare glosses it, Lear's hope that Cordelia's breath might "stain the stone" refers to "Mica, or stone polished to a mirror finish" (Shakespeare 2016, p. 1459). The OED records (*sv. stain, v.*) the possibility that *stain* and *stone* have shared linguistic roots: "Some of the English senses, both of *stain* and *distain*, are difficult to account for; it is possible that in Anglo-Norman the prefix *des-* in *desteindre* may sometimes have been taken in the sense 'diversely, differently'; it is also possible that the verb of French origin may have coalesced with an adoption of Old Norse *steina* to paint, <*stein-n* paint, probably identical with *stein* stone." A pun here would then be etymological as well as aural. "Stain the stone" could be understood in light of a couple of archaic senses of the verb: "†1.b. Of the sun, etc.: To deprive (feebler luminaries) of their lustre. Also *figurative* of a person or thing: To throw into the shade by superior beauty or excellence; to eclipse. *Obsolete*. (Very common in the 16th cent.),"or "†1.c. To obscure the lustre of. *Literal* and *figurative*. *Obsolete*." Shakespeare uses these related senses of the word when writing of the Fair Youth in Sonnet 33: "Yet him for this, my love no whit disdaineth: / Suns of the world may stain, when heaven's sun staineth" (13, 14); (Shakespeare 2001, p. 177). In *Lear*, a sign of Cordelia's life might not only fog the mirrored glass; it would obscure the lustre of any shiny object; it would eclipse any other luminary on stage. Put another way, Cordelia's death permits Lear to retain the role of tragic hero—for who would pity the man if his greatest hope were realized in his final moments of life?

[14] The performances mentioned are those of John Gielgud (1940, dir. Lewis Casson, Harley Granville-Barker, The Old Vic); Edwin Forrest (1836); Morris Carnovsky (1963, Stratford Shakespeare Festival, CT, dir. Allen Fletcher).

wide-compassed work naturally expand the repertoire, from James Earl Jones to Glenda Jackson.[15] Performance historians and critics have compiled other lists of possibilities for how to "Look there!" Here is Benedict Nightingale:

> Richard Briers's inconsolable Lear simply pointed at Cordelia's lips to show that there was no life there at all. On the other hand, Gielgud [1955] died in joy at what he interpreted as evidence of her revival. Stephens, somewhat eccentrically, looked not at her lips but at a point offstage where, as he explained in an interview, he was seeing Cordelia in one of those point-of-death experiences the survivors of which have described as going through a long golden tube into paradise. Scofield died sitting up, staring vacantly into the vast empty universe that had left him such a ruin. (Ogden and Scouten 1997, p. 243)[16]

And here is yet another compilation from Greg Maillet:

> Welles does not speak the Folio's final lines at all, dying after the "Never, never ... " line. Olivier clearly sees something, and seems to die at peace, head in Cordelia's bosom, but McKellen's Lear dies clearly deluded, head snapping back and hardly looking at his daughter. Holm's Lear effectively alternates appearing mad and saner than those around him, while his 'look there' to whomever unbuttons his tight shirt convincingly claims sight of Cordelia's breath, or at least her spirit. (Maillet 2016, p. 118)[17]

However, Lear's final moment is performed, Nightingale assumes "the precise state of Lear's mind at this point need not ... be of overwhelming significance. Whether he dies 'happily' or not, he is dead and so is Cordelia. A few moments after he has been filled with joy and hope of reconciliation, the cruelty of men, of the universe or of both, has been devastatingly demonstrated" (Ogden and Scouten 1997, p. 243). Lear may die in ecstatic joy or insistent hope, but seen as symptomatic of delusion, such joy and hope might rather serve to increase the devastation of the tragedy's final effect. Maillet proposes a quite different response: "Regardless of what one sees in the theater ... we should be open to the possibility that [Cordelia is alive], and open to the corresponding potential for joy rather than sorrow being our dominant concluding emotion" (Maillet 2016, p. 118).

Among 'redemptionist' interpretations of Lear, Gielgud's 1940 performance at the Old Vic may be considered a focal point in performance history. This particular Lear reflected the coaching of Harley Granville-Barker, whose grand influence is partly captured in Gielgud (1963) *Stage Directions*, where some of Granville-Barker's notes appear in appendix.[18] Barker's note for Lear's "Look on her" was simply annotated "Joy," associating Lear's last emotion with the first pet name the audience hears

[15] Performances mentioned are those of James Earl Jones (1973, New York Shakespeare Festival, dir. Edwin Sherin) and Glenda Jackson (2019, Broadway, dir. Sam Gold). Jones played Lear's final scene as "a walking dead man," his howls barely audible, his physical strength eroded, his attitude conveying helplessness and resignation, and his death accompanied by a "long shuddering exhale—a great sigh of relief at being done with the agony he had suffered" (Jorgens 1973, p. 425). Glenda Jackson imperiously appeared on a set most reviews have not failed to associate with Trump Tower, herself "towering even in Lear's infirmity" (Soloski 2019). Her commanding presence was said to have drawn on "supernatural reserves of stamina" as "the sharp shock of Cordelia's death ... [was] presented [onstage] with a brutality that amplifie[d] the pathos of the broken king," whose "abject diminishment seem[ed] all the more powerful given the steely authority that precede[d] it" (Rooney 2019).

[16] Performances mentioned are those of Richard Briers (1990, dir. Kenneth Branagh, Renaissance Theatre); John Gielgud (1955, dir. George Devine); Robert Stephens (1993, dir. Adrian Noble); Paul Scofield (1971, dir. Peter Brook).

[17] Performances mentioned are those of Orson Welles (1953, dir. Peter Brook); Laurence Olivier (1983, dir. Michael Elliott), Ian McKellen (2008, dir. Trevor Nunn); Ian Holm (1998, dir. Richard Eyre).

[18] The program for the 1940 Lewis Casson production announced a performance "based on Harley Granville-Barker's 'Preface to *King Lear*,' and his personal advice besides," and, despite Barker leaving London before opening night, there is strong evidence of the intensity and thoroughness of Barker's coaching, and that "the production was essentially [Granville-Barker's]" (Leggatt 2004, p. 25). The production emphasized Lear's "constant variety" and took for granted, as Alexander Leggatt reflects, "a Lear capable of growth and change, of new insights and new experience," but whose "progress was not easy or glib" (Leggatt 2004, pp. 29–30). The crowning effect of this progress, which was "for many observers the most important effect of Gielgud's performance," was real and substantial moral, intellectual, and spiritual

Lear give Cordelia—"Now, our joy" (1.1.80) (Leggatt 2004, p. 29; Gielgud 1963, p. 129).[19] The thought of Cordelia alive—the chance that does redeem all sorrows—becomes the final joy of Gielgud's Lear.

Chief among the bleaker sort of *Lear*s is Peter Brook's 1962 stage production with Paul Scofield in the title role, described by Jonathan Croall as "iconoclastic" and "the watershed moment in the play's more recent stage history" (Croall 2015, p. 2). Brook's version was hailed as representative of the modern world, bleak, absurd, and grotesque, considered culturally and historically significant, and influenced by Jan Kott's 1962 essay "*King Lear*, or Endgame."[20] The production became a paradigm for the nihilist/absurdist/existentialist camp, as did the 1971 film version [again with Paul Scofield as Lear] which developed from it. Roger Ebert described the film as occupying "a barren kingdom frozen in the middle of a winter that chills souls even more than bodies," at the end of which, "[b]urdened by senility and a sense of overwhelming futility, [Lear] collapses gratefully into death" (Ebert 1972). This is "Brook's Lear, ... not Shakespeare's," Ebert emphasizes, and "interesting precisely because

growth (Leggatt 2004, p. 30). See also Leggatt's comments on "Player in Action," Hallam Fordham's manuscript in the Folger Library (Leggatt 2004, pp. 25–35).

From Granville-Barker's *Preface to Lear*, one may trace the redemptionist influence further back to A. C. Bradley. The *Preface to Lear* engages frequently with Bradley, and not uncritically. In particular, Granville-Barker finds Bradley's apparent desire for "a single performance to make a clear, complete and final effect on the spectator" to be "too sophisticated," too critically removed from the variety and unruliness of the theater (Granville-Barker 1940, pp. 136, 138). Gielgud's 1940 Lear reflects Barker's insistence that "variety and inconsistency gives great vitality" (Granville-Barker 1940, p. 93), for dramatic art should seek to imitate life's complexity, and "the immediate effect" of a great work of art "will be made a little differently upon each of us, and for each of us may differ from time to time" (Granville-Barker 1940, p. 138). Nevertheless, the dynamic Lear of Gielgud and Barker ends up where Bradley's does. Granville-Barker points to Bradley's "admirable note" upon Lear's final words, asserting that Bradley's suggestion that Lear dies of joy in the thought that Cordelia lives "a fine piece of perception" (Granville-Barker 1940, p. 185).

[19] Granville-Barker also notes the association of Cordelia and Joy in his *Prefaces* (Granville-Barker 1940, p. 165). The *Preface to Lear* emphasizes balance between the opening and final scenes (Granville-Barker 1940, pp. 154–55, 160, 184). The king has learned to hear her soft and low message of love.

[20] Brook's stage production was rehearsed as the Cuban missile crisis escalated fears of nuclear destruction, and "Brook associated the play with current anxieties about the hydrogen bomb, the Cold War and the concept of mutual assured destruction" (R. A. Foakes in Shakespeare 1997a, p. 32; see also Croall 2015, p. 44; Leggatt 2004, pp. 59–60). Charles Marowitz, Brook's assistant director, observed that during rehearsals "the frame of reference was always Beckettian"—although both Scofield and Brook later downplayed this influence, and Leanore Lieblein has defended Brook's *Lear* as "dynamic and independent in its relation to Kott" (Croall 2015, pp. 40–41; Leggatt 2004, p. 55; Lieblein 1987, p. 46; cf. Kott 1974). Ken Tynan's influential review captured the production's "revolutionary" decisions: Kent was a "ruffian," Gloucester was "shifty," and Lear, no longer the "majestic ancient," "deserves much of what he gets" (qtd. in Ogden and Scouten 1997, p. 188). His knights were vandals. The sympathetic servants at the blinding of Gloucester and the last-minute reform of Edmund were cut. Cordelia was more stubborn than saintly, and, as Carol Rutter has elucidated in detail, Goneril was emotionally retracted, "drain[ing] sympathy from the scene," refusing to offer "a reaction that would absorb the damage Lear was doing." Paralleling Lear's disowning of Cordelia and his cursing of Goneril, "Brook's direction bid for continuity" between the eldest and youngest daughter (Ogden and Scouten 1997, p. 190). The elder daughters were no longer fiends; Lear, not Goneril, had bemonstered himself (Ogden and Scouten 1997, pp. 188, 191). Edmund Gardner described Lear's final moments as "horribly moving. 'Howl, howl, howl!' freezes the blood, while his sorrow over the dead Cordelia packs ice into the bones" (qtd. in Leggatt 2004, p. 59). So different in his own approach, John Gielgud saw the production in Philadelphia and spoke graciously of it to Irene Worth, who played Goneril: "One cannot hope in such a mighty work to achieve more than two-thirds perfection—and that I think this production does" (Croall 2015, p. 46).

Film has additional resources for revealing or hiding that which may be seen—by introducing hallucinations of the living Cordelia, for example, or cutting out of the frame the very object upon which the dying Lear's attention is fixed. Carol Rutter analyzes these decisions in Peter Brook's 1971 film version. The final scene denies the viewer a glimpse of Cordelia's body from "Had I your tongues" forward, introduces hallucinations of Cordelia, puts the camera in the corpse's position, and ends with a closeup of Lear in which his "eyes, like his hand, travel upwards" enigmatically—perhaps because he sees Cordelia above him, perhaps because his head is tilting back in death, slipping out of the frame, leaving only a "gray expanse of sky" (Ogden and Scouten 1997, p. 211). The viewer neither sees signs of life in Cordelia's corpse nor is given the dismal satisfaction of seeing that there are none. This version, Rutter observes, "denies the audience the grim pleasure of spectating on Cordelia's body" and "refuses to indulge our cultural fascination with female victimization represented on film" (Ogden and Scouten 1997, p. 211).

The 2018 film adaptation for Amazon Studios (dir. Richard Eyre) offers a different take on limiting the audience's vision of Lear's final moments. There, apocalyptic, washed-out grays set the mood for a grim military environment. Sir Anthony Hopkins's Lear reveals Cordelia's death with a sharp, curt, and vigorous "She's gone," whence a thin cloak of emotional control is dropped to expose trembling rage and grief. Between Hopkins's Lear's final expressions of sorrow at Cordelia's death and the close-up on his countenance at the agonizing moment of his own passing, the camera angles change to show Lear's hand pointing to the still corpse of his daughter; the frame denies the viewer any revelatory glimpse of Lear's face during his final gesture and command—as if paying tribute to the lack of consensus on how Lear ought to look at this enigmatic moment. Any mystery or curiosity shifts from the dead Cordelia to the dying Lear.

it contrasts so firmly with Shakespeare's universe; by deliberately omitting all faith and hope from Lear's kingdom, it paradoxically helps us to see how much is there."

For each performance or production, one might further consider how the *spectator* is invited to view Lear's death. Are we asked to imitate Lear in his grief, as he commands onlookers to howl with him at the entrance of Cordelia's corpse (5.3.255)? Are we invited to a position of dramatic irony, where we may take refuge in a superior vantage point and the superior knowledge it affords? Should we join Kent, who [in the Folio] prays for the broken heart, or Albany, who offers verbal assurances of distributive justice to come, or Edgar, who says he must obey "the weight of this sad time" and "speak what we feel, not what we ought to say," and who, as a young man, separates himself respectfully from the experience of the old (5.3.301–3, 311, 322–25)? Does the play encourage one perspective more than another? Rosenberg asserts, "The facts of the text are that Cordelia is physically dead, and that all about her—except possibly Lear—see nothing to alleviate a sense of absolute woe" (Rosenberg 1972, p. 319). But even if this statement adequately describes a shared perspective of the characters on stage, should it be the audience's and the reader's, too?

Fashions change, but the debate and the theater's indebtedness to past interpretations continues. Bradley's perspective has retained its influence, as has Brook's.[21] Each position has a distinguished pedigree. Brook's approach is often presented as an intriguing historical artifact, yet audiences continue to find the bleaker Lears compelling; conversely, the Gielgud-Barker-Bradley approach, in which the dying king seems to envision the living Cordelia as the alpha and the omega of his joy, is not quite dead.

2. The Christianizers and the Existentialists

The play's ability to support widely varying performances is greatly due to its consideration of enduring religious and philosophic questions. A play with a pagan, pre-Christian setting but designed for a culturally Christian Jacobean audience, *King Lear* raises questions of divine justice, fate, predestination, redemption, despair, sin, suffering, inner spiritual worth, altruism, and sacrificial love. The varied performance history is matched by starkly opposed readings in the criticism; the play and readings of the play have been described as existentialist, absurdist, nihilist, Marxist, pagan, Christian, neo-Christian, and post-Christian—all terms unavailable to the eighth century B.C.E., the

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[21] Bradley's persistent influence is captured by Christopher Plummer, who had played Lear in Ontario's Stratford Festival under Sir Jonathan Miller's direction in 2002. In a 2015 interview, Plummer reflects,

> The extraordinary thing about that scene—is it despair at the end? No, it's not. It's ecstasy. It's a sublime death that Lear is experiencing, and it really—it really is the happiest of all deaths. . . . [H]e now knows what love is, really. Cordelia has to sacrifice herself in some way. She has to go. She has to die to make him see . . . . But I think he's not just found Cordelia. I think he's found everything in life that he missed, and the beauty of it that he longed for. The tragedy of the play is that it's too late. ("King Lear with Christopher Plummer." 2015. Shakespeare Uncovered Season 2, episode 2. Public Broadcasting Service)

On the other side, English actor Tobias Menzies, who played Edgar at the Young Vic in 2009 under Rupert Goold's directorship (and later Cornwall in the 2018 Amazon Studios production), associates existentialism with the "Dover Cliff" scene in particular. After asserting "There is nothing elegiac or redemptive about the end of *Lear*," Menzies connects this to the Gloucester plot:

> Edgar is trying to lead his father out of despair, but rather than using kindness he uses a rigorous existentialism. Edgar does not comfort his father; he does not say, 'Dad, don't worry, I'm here. I'm your son. Everything's going to be fine.' Instead he says, 'You want to die, and rightly so. Terrible things have happened to you.' The proposition is that the only real cure is to actually look at what it is to die, and so Edgar creates this existential experiment. (Carson 2013, pp. 73–74)

Interestingly, Menzies adds, "There's something in it that's quasi-religious, in a way. 'Thy life's a miracle' (4.5.65), says Edgar. To live is to endure, to suffer, and at the same time it's also a blessing" (Carson 2013, p. 74). In performance, the joyful interpretations of the end of *Lear* tend to retain something poignantly tragic, while the existentialist productions are often blended with something at least quasi-religious.

presumed historical setting for the legendary king of Albion—and all but two terms unrecognizable within Shakespeare's own milieu.[22]

Scholarly debate on the extent to which the dying king demonstrates any ultimate insight, moral progress, or redemption has been especially active from the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1904, A. C. Bradley argued the play's "final and total result is one in which pity and terror, carried perhaps to the extreme limits of art, are so blended with a sense of law and beauty that we feel at last, not depression and much less despair, but a consciousness of greatness in pain, and of solemnity in the mystery we cannot fathom" (Bradley 1991, p. 257). Bradley's description of this effect upon the audience correlates with what he understood as an effect upon Lear himself: "The old King . . . sees at last how power and place and all things in the world are vanity except love, [and] tastes in his last hours the extremes both of love's rapture and of its agony, but could never, if he lived on or lived again, care a jot for aught beside—there is no figure, surely, in the world of poetry at once so grand, so pathetic, and so beautiful as his" (Bradley 1991, p. 262). For Bradley, the dying king's final experience of love is connected with the expectation of redemption, with little room for ambiguity:

> He is sure, at last, that she *lives*: and what had he said when he was still in doubt?
>
> She lives! If it be so,
>
> It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows
>
> That ever I have felt!
>
> To us, perhaps, the knowledge that he is deceived may bring a culmination of pain: but, if it brings only that, I believe we are false to Shakespeare, and it seems almost beyond question that any actor is false to the text who does not attempt to express, in Lear's last accents and gestures and look, an unbearable joy. (Bradley 1991)

A. C. Bradley's summative challenge—"Should we not be at least as near the truth if we called this poem *The Redemption of King Lear*?"—fueled a persistent and heated debate regarding Lear's final perspective and the tragedy's final perspective on the human condition more generally (Bradley 1991, p. 262). Sharp division among critics contributed to what Helmut Bonheim in 1960 called the "*King Lear* Perplex," a series of interpretive cruxes that lead beyond scholarly debate to aporia or stalemate. Following a season favoring Jan Kott's approach as popularized by Brook's productions, and a reaction to the same, in 1975 John E. Van Domelen could indicate two interpretive camps, "the Christianizers and the existentialists": "those who see Lear as depending on a Christian framework of values for its meaning," reading the play as "a terrible theodicy," and "those who see Lear deriving its values solely from the choices of the characters," resulting in a "profoundly pessimistic view of the human condition" (Van Domelen 1975, p. 132). The identifiers shift, the arguments grow increasingly sophisticated and qualified, and the debaters have generally become more comfortable with uncertainty, yet the interpretive camps—the "nihilistic and Christian," the "atheistical and Christianizing," the "neo-Christian [and] historicist"—remain (Shell 2010, pp. 186, 195; Hamlin 2013, p. 332). Categorizing

[22] In Geoffrey of Monmouth's 12th-century account, after the deaths of King Leir and Cordelia, her nephews Margonus and Cunedagius engage in war ending in Cunedagius gaining the throne. Geoffrey then contextualizes these events: "At that time Isaiah was making his prophecies; and on the eleventh day after the Kalends of May Rome was founded by the twin brothers Remus and Romulus" (Geoffrey of Monmouth 1966, p. 87). This puts the reign of Leir's nephew in the middle of the eighth century B.C.E. In Shakespeare's play, the characters' naming of Roman deities and the Fool's statement that he lives before Merlin's time (3.3.95) suggest that Shakespeare did not intend the chronological specificity of Geoffrey of Monmouth's account, and support interpretations of *Lear* as archetypal and mythic (see R. A. Foakes's comments in Shakespeare 1997a, pp. 30–32). All the gods mentioned in *Lear* are classical pagan. The *OED* dates the use of *pagan* in the sense of "non-Christian" from the 4th century; the earlier classical Latin term referred to a country rustic or, more commonly, to a non-militant, a civilian. The OED offers three potential explanations for the transference of meaning after Christianity: (1) The rural areas were not as quick to receive Christianity as major cities; (2) the Christians considered themselves soldiers of Christ as members of the 'church militant'; (3) the Christians thought of themselves as members of a community, with non-Christians 'rural,' outside this metaphorical city (*sv. pagan*).

and labeling are useful yet dangerous human impulses that are never entirely successful. Dichotomies tend toward oversimplification; with varying success, critics have sought two mutually exclusive terms that are together inclusive enough to represent the bulk of criticism in this debate. With regard for the "two camp" tradition on this topic, one might turn to G. Wilson Knight, Paul Siegel, and Greg Maillet to represent the "Christianizers," to William Elton, Roland Mushat Frye, and Joyce Carol Oates to represent the more active resistance to such "Christianizing."

"Shakespeare and the Bible" (and minor variations on this phrase) is probably the most reused title in the history of literary criticism in English; the question of what to do with Shakespeare's biblical allusions throughout his works has generated persistent interest and dispute.[23] In *The Bible in Shakespeare*, Hannibal Hamlin summarizes the ongoing critical debate between what William Empson contemptuously called the "neo-Christian school" and its opposers. This "neo-Christian school" is represented by G. Wilson Knight, whose critical approach to *Measure for Measure* in particular, Hamlin cautions, is problematic in that his identification of biblical allusions is "largely subjective," and "his interpretation of them is skewed by his reading of the play as a Christian allegory." While Hamlin readily agrees Shakespeare works with familiar Christian metaphors, "Knight is not interested in analyzing these passages in depth, considering the dramatic context, or in asking whether, if they do constitute genuine allusions, the effect is straightforward or ironic. Instead, they are meant to support his larger allegorical reading" (Hamlin 2013, p. 68). Yet Hamlin also cautions that Knight's detractors could also be biased: "Studies like Knight's generated considerable ire from critics, like Empson, who were unsympathetic or hostile to Christianity in particular or religion in general, as well as critics who were simply more skeptical about Shakespeare's religious beliefs and the implications of biblical allusions or echoes in the plays" (Hamlin 2013, p. 69).

For Roland Mushat Frye, particularly contemptible was the tendency of the "school of Knight" to find Christ-figures in Shakespeare's plays, "in such weltering profusion as almost to crowd out all other actors from the stage" (Frye 1963, p. 34). "Shakespeare's concerns," Frye argues, are essentially secular, temporal, non-theological" (Frye 1963, p. 7). For "theologizing analyses" of *King Lear*, Frye's target is Paul Siegel, who in *Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise* argued that "it is the analogy with the crucifixion which is the center of the tragedies and with the resurrection which is the center of the tragi-comedies" (Siegel 1957, p. 231; qtd. in Frye 1963, p. 5). Siegel then read the death of Cordelia as analogous to Jesus' death, and "the redemption of Lear for heaven, a redemption analogous to the redemption of mankind, for which the Son of God had come down to earth" (Siegel 1957, p. 186; qtd. in Frye 1963, p. 37). While some might see Lear's redemption as an earthly change of heart with no cosmic or eternal effect, Siegel makes the opposite concession: "It is for heaven that Lear has been redeemed, not for earth" (Siegel 1957, p. 180). Lear is too old and repents too late to have much earthly impact, yet the all-important transition occurs at his last breath: he dies gaining "the certitude that she is not dead in a binding flash that transfigures him with joy and makes his heart burst in an ecstasy" (Siegel 1957, p. 184). Lear dies believing in Cordelia. Siegel considered the association of Cordelia with Christ "unmistakable, although not crudely explicit" when in Act 4 she is described as one who "redeems nature from the general curse"; Frye reads the same passage and sees "no evidence that Elizabethans [*sic*] would have regarded Cordelia as a Christ-figure" (Frye 1963, p. 37).[24] Frye's broader conclusion is that, against "those who now try

[23] Note, for example, just a few of the book-length studies: (Eaton 1858; Colton 1888; Burgess 1903; Carter 1905; Coleman 1955; Shaheen 1999; Marx 2000; Hamlin 2013). See also Hamlin's survey of the "Bible and Shakespeare" tradition (pp. 51–59).

[24] Frye's demand for supporting evidence from sixteenth-century religious texts is a fair one, yet he neglects to mention that, directly after indicating the analogy between Christ and Cordelia, Siegel points the reader to the Elizabethan homilies for constant adjurations to "follow the pattern of conduct established by Christ" (Siegel 1957, p. 186), and it is rather surprising that a critic credentialed with the extensive theological readings Frye lists in his introduction would deny in the words of Cordelia's Gentleman a recognizable allusion to Christ, one that can be easily supported from the early modern religious texts Frye demands and Siegel must have thought unnecessary to specify. For particular evidence of the allusion as recognizable to Shakespeare's audience, one need look no further than the explication of 1 Corinthians 15 in the Geneva-Tomson Bible or The Order for the Burial of the Dead in The Book of Common Prayer (see note 5 above). Frye would have made a stronger

to convert his plays into Christian parables," Shakespeare's predominant dramatic concerns are "universally human," "equally accessible to Christians and to the virtuous heathen," and when he did make a character express Christian ideas, he made sure to use "terms which were readily recognizable by the standards of sixteenth-century theology" (Frye 1963, p. 272). For Frye, such terms are not present in the characterization of Cordelia, and *Lear* remains "a secular drama set in a pre-Christian and explicitly pagan world" (Frye 1963, p. 37).

In *King Lear and the Gods*, William Elton (among others) followed Frye in declaring the "optimistic Christian interpretation of Lear" as "probably invalid" and dependent on "unhistorical, a priori misreading" (Elton 1988, pp. 336, 337). Rather than painting Cordelia as a Christ figure, Elton assigned the major characters of *Lear* each a place within categories of pagan thought: Gloucester is the superstitious pagan, Goneril, Regan, and Edmund atheists, and Cordelia and Edgar exemplars of *prisca theologia*, demonstrating "pre-Christian purity" (Elton 1988, p. 171). Lear himself is "a serious representation of pre-Christian pagan belief of elevated mind and strength" who, over the course of the tragedy, "is shown to develop from pagan belief to disbelief" (Elton 1988, pp. 172, 336). Elton concludes, "(1) no evidence exists to show that Lear arrives finally at 'salvation,' 'regeneration,' or 'redemption,' and (2) the purported benevolent, just, or special providence cannot be shown to be operative" (Elton 1988, p. 336). While the sin-suffering-redemption pattern may seem to progress through the first four acts, "the devastating fifth act shatters, more violently than an earlier apostasy might have done, the foundations of faith itself" (Elton 1988, p. 336). While a "less speculative devout" in the audience might interpret this pagan chaos as preliminary to the triumph of his own religion, "more troubled and sophisticated auditors" could link the attack on heathenism to a "blow for Christianity" in the "unsteady new world of the later Renaissance" (Elton 1988, p. 338).

Similarly, for Joyce Carol Oates, Shakespeare's changes to the Lear story render the ending distinctly *not* redemptive: "Shakespeare himself invites us to question that ending, by daring to force it out of its natural curve toward redemption." (Oates 1974, p. 24). Neither is it "religious": "Great art usually allows the instinctive life its articulation on a high, aesthetically satisfying plane: In *Lear* the very life-force itself is denied, and it is impossible to see the work as 'religious' in any way" (Oates 1974, p. 24). It is worth noting, however, that in Oates's reading the question of redemption and religion in this play is bound, as it is for Bradley and "the Christianizers," to the question of what Cordelia can do to save Lear. It is a problem she articulates in Christian terms: "The play is so baffling, so unconvincing, and yet so unforgettable, precisely because there is no conclusion possible at all, given the premises of the problem Shakespeare set himself—that fallen nature somehow engender a being not corrupt and not fallen, a savior. It was an impossible task" (Oates 1974, p. 24).

To Greg Maillet, conversely, the task of saving Lear is not only possible—it is accomplished, even extended to the spectator, the play concluding with a "sustained effort to expand our vision beyond this life, this world of suffering and pain, in order to enable us to see clearly the soul's journey towards eternity" (Maillet 2016, p. 114). The tone of Maillet's theologizing reading is quite assured and evangelical: "If the characters of this play and its audience will but 'look there, look there' (5.3.285) as Lear directs, Shakespeare's drama enacts and thus encourages human souls to commune with the divine life of God that always already allows each individual person to exist" (Maillet 2016, p. 128). While careful to acknowledge repeatedly the compatibility of a Christian perspective and the genuine experience of suffering and grief at the loss of a loved one, Maillet concludes, "A Christian understanding of love thus can and should fundamentally influence one's evaluation of the conclusion of *King Lear*. It is clear at the end of the play that Cordelia and Lear share a great love, but what is its significance? The moments of death in *King Lear* are tragic, as beloved characters' earthly lives are over, but Lear's

case against Siegel had he objected to what was done with assumptions drawn from the analogy of Cordelia to Christ, rather than questioning the analogy itself. Later Siegel limited his argument for redemption in *King Lear* with a "perhaps" and for resurrection in the play to "a suggestion," but he insisted "this suggestion is Shakespeare's, not a product of critics' fancies" (Siegel 1968, pp. 120–21).

final command, "Look there, look there," does point towards the defeat of death itself, the 'last enemy that shall be destroyed' (1 Cor. 15:26) (Maillet 2016, p. 134). The only Love that truly conquers all is God's. Maillet's approach is sufficiently revealed in the title of his book, *Learning to See the Theological Vision of Shakespeare's King Lear*; Maillet would have the alert reader or spectator of *King Lear* at least reach after some eternal beatific vision intimated within the play, if not convert to Christianity.

To be fair, one may find nuanced and qualifying passages in the works of criticism that have served to represent each of these interpretive camps. As Joseph Summers points out, A. C. Bradley is best understood in context; Bradley's consideration of the redemptive potential in *Lear* is measured and qualified, while the boldest of his interpretive forays are often lifted out of this context for censure by "anti-Bradleyans" (Summers 1980, pp. 74, 77). G. Wilson Knight, so frequently lambasted as the easy target among the "Christianizers," lamented that Frye and "large sections of the literary public had failed to realize what [Knight's] forty years of Shakespearean labour was about" (Knight 1967, p. v); looking back on those forty years in an essay collection, Knight insisted that all along he had striven to show that "Shakespeare differs from orthodox Christianity not by being less, nor alien, but by a greater inclusiveness" (Knight 1967, pp. 24–25).[25] While Paul Siegel's interpretation of Lear's redemption depends on the protagonist's assumed entrance into heaven, he does acknowledge that "the afterlife of Christian religion acts in [Shakespeare's major tragedies] as an imposing but faintly painted and unobtrusive backdrop for the action," one that "does not become so dominant that the suffering of the good is made to seem unimportant in the light of eternity" (Siegel 1957, pp. 90, 91). Likewise, a key part of Maillet's project is to emphasize that Christian faith in divine providence is compatible with authentic experiences of suffering (Maillet 2016, pp. viii–ix, 114).

On the other side, William Elton deftly handles the various religious elements in *Lear*: "[T]he threads of the work's central sense merge, unwind, come together and apart, on more than one level. If therefore, among *King Lear*'s thematic preoccupations is belief, we might expect to find confluences and contradictions in belief, perhaps ambiguous, perhaps simultaneous," and that "if *Lear* is, as many critics hold, Shakespeare's most complexly symphonic work its protagonist might, in all probability, be approached as a microcosm of that complexity" (Elton 1988, p. 172). Such nuance allows Elton to acknowledge Shakespeare writes for a culturally Christian audience, and to grant Christian elements in this pagan play, even if he admits far fewer of them than the critics he opposes. Cordelia is associated with "relevant allusions which, taken in their entirety, form a meaningful pattern of pious and reverent belief," her actions anticipating the higher virtues of faith, hope, and charity" (Elton 1988, pp. 76, 79). Lear is not only a "'good' pagan," he is also "a more complex analog to the Jacobean Christian believer, the spectator of Shakespeare's play" (Elton 1988, p. 173). And while Oates finds the play utterly nonreligious and parenthetically asserts that "Shakespeare's atheism seems unarguable," she does see the play reaching after a substitute for God, dramatizing "the soul's yearning for infinity, the desire of man to reach out to a higher form of himself, if not actually to 'God'" (Oates 1974, p. 28). Similarly, the play provides a species of limited redemption: "In order to complete his soul and be redeemed (in psychological terms: to activate his fullest identity) the hero must unite with the element that seems to oppose him" (Oates 1974, p. 28). Cordelia's opposition does not preserve her father's life, but it does offer insight into "the value of experience, even if that experience is suffering and death itself" (Oates 1974, p. 28). Even Frye, so scathing in his criticism of the "supposedly theological analyses" of the "School of Knight," yet approves of Richmond Noble's thorough study of biblical allusions in Shakespeare, admitting, "While Shakespeare is patently not concerned with theology in any such

[25] In a 1928 essay on "The Poet and Immortality," Knight had considered *King Lear* dark enough, yet pointed to the comforts, not only of death, but of "another life-truth firm and based in eternity: in the mysterious eternity of value; the value of human aspiration and passion, unmoral, timeless, indestructible"; *Lear* is one step in the sequence of tragedies majestically culminating in *Antony and Cleopatra's* "vision and revelation of death joyful, immediate, and final" (Knight 1967, p. 45). Knight's "Christianizing" impulse is not so obvious here, as the small comforts of one pagan tragedy are seen in trajectory toward the ecstasies of another. And in his 1964 essay "New Light on the Sonnets," Knight observes that in *King Lear*, as in *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Macbeth*, "nihilism is barely controlled" (Knight 1967, p. 263).

way as are Spenser, Milton, and Bunyan, his plays do contain more theological allusions than have sometimes been recognized" (Frye 1963, pp. 5, 9). Shakespeare "seems to have known Christian doctrine intimately"; Frye assents: "That Shakespeare was quite literate in Christian theology, and easily conversant in its categories, seems to me indisputably apparent" (Frye 1963, pp. 9, 10).

The question then becomes not whether Shakespeare alludes to the Bible and Christian doctrine but what one should make of such allusions. Hamlin cautions the reader in the process of rejecting "the specious claims of Knight, Siegel, . . . and others" not to reject Shakespeare's use of biblical allusion entirely, for "Shakespeare does in fact create 'Christ-figures,' insofar as he uses biblical allusion to suggest comparisons, or, more often, contrasts between certain of his characters and Christ. Cordelia is one such, and so is Lear . . . " (Hamlin 2013, p. 71). It is possible, then, that the double occurrence of the word "redeem" in connection with Cordelia serves to present her as a potential Christ figure but also to underscore her limitations in that role. She cannot conquer death, but she can encourage Lear's moral development and his experience of transformative love.[26] Hamlin reminds us bluntly: "To see Christ-figures everywhere in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English culture is not a delusion nor the result of a 'neo-Christian' bias. Christ *was* everywhere, since everyone was (in some sort) Christian, and Christ was the essential model for living and essential to salvation" (Hamlin 2013, p. 71). While noting recent "persuasive arguments for a skeptical or even atheist Shakespeare," Hamlin's summative remark on the history of criticism on Shakespeare and the Bible is that "Shakespeare knew the Bible extremely well, and he alluded to it very frequently in the plays"—and that such allusions "deserve thorough, systematic, critical—and confessionally unbiased—study" (p. 76).[27]

Recently, scholars have attempted to syncretize these interpretive poles, acknowledging the ambiguity of the ending, the potential for redemptive readings, and the limitations of the realization of that potential.[28] The critical turn toward making qualifications and entertaining ambiguities in *Lear* may be represented by statements from Joseph Wittreich and Alison Shell. In considering the allusions to biblical apocalypse in *King Lear*, Wittreich keenly observed that the "apocalyptic framework in *King Lear* neither discredits a non-Christian, nor credits a Christian reading of the play; and rather than lessening, it complicates the problem of perspective in the play" (Wittreich 1984, p. 124). *King Lear*

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[26] For Harold Skulsky, "Cordelia imitates Christ in two primary senses. First, she has resisted strong pressure to blur the distinction between God and Caesar, dignity and price, inward and outward worth . . . . Second, she embraces a way of life that extends the loyalties of blood and bond to all humanity" (Skulsky 1966, pp. 12, 13). Like Christ, she chooses being over seeming, and she widens the duty of loving one's neighbor to include stranger and enemy (Cf. Matthew 5:44, 22:17–21, 36–40, 23:25–28; Luke 10:26–38; Galatians 3:28).

[27] Hamlin's call for confessionally unbiased scholarship may be regarded as a reasonable reaction to a sizeable quantity of writing on Shakespeare not by the serious scholar but by the "religious enthusiast exploiting Shakespeare for his own purposes" (R. W. Zandvoort's phrase appropriated by Elton in *King Lear and the Gods*, p. 6). The quest for objectivity in criticism might be balanced by the words of Stephen Greenblatt in *Hamlet in Purgatory*: "I know, in any case, that I am incapable of simply bracketing my own origins; rather, I find myself trying to transform them, most often silently and implicitly, into the love I bring to my work" (Greenblatt 2013, p. 5). Speaking for myself, a confessional Christian raised in a Christian family, teaching at a Christian university where many of my colleagues share a keen interest in early modern theology, I consider myself culturally equipped to discover biblical allusions in early modern literature; given the heated critical controversy regarding what *Lear* does and does not do with biblical allusions, I also recognize the need to be aware of the temptation to too readily see what may not be there.

[28] While in 1979 T. W. Craik speculated that for Richard Burbage there must have been some clarity about the ending in its original performance (Craik 1981, p. 172), Joseph Summers judiciously cautions: "It is easy to go wrong—to push for a kind of clarity and finality that Shakespeare could have provided but surely did not; and the results of such interpretations can be fairly disastrous in attempts to produce the play on the stage or screen: final concentration on the group of survivors watching the soul of Lear ascend to heaven may be even more distracting than a final lingering on a landscape full of corpses and burning desolation—the world as hell" (Summers 1980, p. 79). For Michael Holahan, Lear is indeed transformed in learning to attend and respond to Cordelia's gentle voice. In Lear's final words, "Beholders are asked to see what may not exist, for this is and is not Cordelia" (Holahan 1997, p. 412). Upon hearing Lear's "Look there," Holahan warns, "we run the risk of becoming what we see, of speaking for ourselves the voice that we long to hear. There is, nevertheless, a greater risk: that of refusing sight and of regarding silence as if it means nothing at all" (Holahan 1997, p. 430). For Harold Fisch, "Lear is not redeemed but he sees the phantom of redemption, he hears the echo of a different myth," and the play's "two opposing models of dramatic action, the biblical and the Pagan, are each shadowed by the phantom of the other"; "The result is a work of art that is neither pure tragedy nor pure salvation-history; it testifies rather to the phenomenological dualism that is at the heart of our culture" (Fisch 1999, pp. 148, 149).

"presents a counter-assertion for each of its assertions" and "draws its life from the conflicts it explores, that even if it does not resolve those conflicts powerfully expresses them and persistently uses them to comment on one another and on the world of which they are a sometimes shivering reflection . . . . A criticism faithful to *King Lear* will put the mind on the stretch and encompass the dynamic of contradiction that the play itself contains" (Wittreich 1984, p. x). For Alison Shell, "part of the play's fascination is that, while inviting both atheistical and Christianized readings, it resists a totalizing explanation" (Shell 2010, p. 186).[29] She reflects, "Nothing in *King Lear*, in fact, is incompatible with the Christianity of the place and time it was written. But that being so, why has it so often been read as a play which calls the very existence of God into question? And why, conversely, have the play's redemptive elements been overstressed to an extent which cheapens its irresolvable sadness?" (Shell 2010, p. 194). The questions are well asked.

A sensitive and robust scholarly reading of *King Lear* will not explain away its ambiguities or its sorrow. Hamlin notes a significant tension between head and heart in audience and reader response to the play:

> *King Lear* is as many faceted a play as has ever been written, and Shakespeare's audience was probably not homogeneous in its response to these interpretive options . . . . The closing lines of the play . . . urge us to 'Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say' (5.3.323), and this point might be applied to the play's fundamental questions about God's justice and providence. What a good Protestant Christian 'ought to say' in response to *King Lear* has been voiced by a number of critics, whether Christian, neo-Christian, or historicist. What we may feel, though, is that all such readings are inadequate to the tragic power of Shakespeare's play. No theological argument proves convincing in the face of innocent suffering. (Hamlin 2013, pp. 332–33)

Such was Arthur Kirsch's conclusion in 1988:

> We can spend much time gauging the level of irony in the endings of the tragedies, but when we see or read these great plays we do not construe the endings, we feel them, and what we feel is a paramount sense of suffering and loss. The distinction of *King Lear* is that the death of Cordelia compounds that feeling and focuses on it. All of us are pagan in our immediate response to dying and death. The final scene of *King Lear* is a representation—among the most moving in all drama—of the universality of this experience and of its immeasurable pain. (Kirsch 1988, p. 170)

Kirsch's conclusion is moving but not entirely just in implying that only paganism, and not Christianity, can provide the tools to respond authentically and sensitively to suffering. Within Christianity, one might find a robust awareness of and sensitivity to human suffering that is not simply dismissed by a doctrine of divine providence and sovereignty. Since the Protestant Reformation

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[29] Reading *Lear* in light of early-seventeenth-century English Calvinist beliefs about divine providence, Shell argues that in the play "the word 'redeem,' with its Christological overtones . . . points to the idea that contingency can have a place in an overarching providential scheme" (Shell 2010, p. 193). The comfort of the existentialist—the freedom to choose to continue in the face of apparent absurdity and deep suffering—is not incompatible with the Christian threads presented in Shakespeare's "nuanced understanding of providence" (Shell 2010, p. 193). Shell suggests a playgoer in Shakespeare's day, lacking modern notions of fairness influencing both the "nihilistic and Christian" critical camps, might be less personally concerned with the cosmic situation and more with the protagonist's reaction to it: "For many critics of the last few generations, perhaps the majority of them, King Lear sets out a world where no god alleviates suffering. To an early-modern viewer the play is more likely to have played to fears about one's own imperfection: how, even when the hand of God was manifested, one might not react appropriately to it" (Shell 2010, pp. 96, 195). Shell emphasizes that Lear himself might not act appropriately in his final response to suffering, for his comfort and illumination are only partial: "[T]he fact that Lear remains fixated on his own desires and sorrows suggests that he perceives redemption in a dangerously limited manner, as only operating through an ending that he himself would find happy" (Shell 2010, p. 193). Divine providence is bigger than any one person's idea of happiness—even a king's—but is not this one of the very statements existentialists and individual sufferers find objectionable? It is very human to reject the question "Why seems it so particular with thee?" as an adequate response to personal grief. For an essay on early modern Calvinist notions of Providence influencing Hamlet, see (Lander 2018).

one version of this Christian understanding of suffering has been called the theology of the cross, and it depends on human humility and divine grace.[30] This is not far from what Lear experiences in Act 4, scene 7, the reconciliation scene where Cordelia comforts and forgives her father. Lear's humiliation leads to humility, and his suffering mind and body are strengthened with those two great Shakespearean restoratives, forgiveness and sleep. Too well Lear knows the forgiveness is undeserved. To be fair, there is room within paganism for humility and grace, too, and room for believing in life beyond life. The typical pagan is just as unlikely to say "She's dead as earth" as is the Christian, although for different reasons (5.3.259). Such a beautiful reconciliation as Lear experiences with his daughter does not negate his final sorrows, any more than conversion to Christianity or any other faith renders one invulnerable to suffering and mortality. But in what sense might death be a passage to life in this play? The physical "crosses" of Lear's exertions at the end of the play are futile and enfeeble him, even if his ability to kill Cordelia's murderer is wondrous. But what of the psychological or spiritual crosses or exertions of this play?[31] Does the suffering of Lear improve him in any way? Is the suffering of Cordelia absurd and meaningless, or is this a sacrifice, a result of the hazards of authentic and active love, eventually leading not merely to death but to some ultimate (even if ambiguous and incomplete) redemption? Lear's encounter with death and dying may be pagan, may be Christian. Kirsch is right that it is universal. Here is Harold Skulsky, coming from a rather different argument about *Lear* from Kirsch's or Hamlin's, and yet reaching a similar conclusion regarding one's appropriate emotional response: "In the midst of this horror, there is great love, and knowledge, and much praise. But to the torment itself, the only decent response is compassion, not hosanna; compassion, bewilderment, and mourning" (Skulsky 1966, p. 17). Whether or not our reading of the play effects a cathartic fear in response to a staged image of existential horror, the call to pity and sensitivity to others pervades the tragedy and extends to the audience. Let us then examine the play more closely. If there is any vision of redemption within *King Lear*, we must see it feelingly.

3. "No Good Divinity": Ambiguity and Absent Gods in *King Lear*

When a maddened Lear and a blinded Gloucester meet at Dover, Lear rails against the flatterers who have encouraged him in his folly. Among other bitter reflections he muses, "They flattered me like a dog and told me I had the white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there. To say 'ay' and 'no' to everything that I said 'ay' and 'no' to was no good divinity" (4.6.96–100). This is the emendation as found in the Norton Shakespeare and the Arden Shakespeare, and it emphasizes Lear's grief that his fiat was so seldomly challenged (Cordelia's and Kent's remonstrances being notable exceptions). His flatterers' verbal compliance was "no good divinity," not only because flattery ill becomes the theologian or the godly layman, but also because such flattery encouraged Lear to see himself in a divine, not human, position: "Go to, they are not men o'their words. They told me I was everything. 'Tis a lie. I am not ague-proof" (4.6.103–5). The First Quarto and Folio texts, however, feature spelling and punctuation variations that permit a different meaning, as rendered, for example, in the Riverside

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[30] See Luther's Theses 16–21 from the 1518 Heidelberg Disputation in (Grimm and Lehmann 1957, pp. 35–70, esp. p. 53). Of course, human humility and divine grace also have a place in pre-Reformation Christian traditions.

[31] The immediate context of Lear's "these same crosses spoil me" relates to sword parry (hence Lear recalls his "good biting falchion" in the previous line (5.3.274–75). I agree with R. A. Foakes's note in the Arden that Lear "refers generally to all his afflictions," and this primary sense of Lear's crosses conforms best with *OED sv. cross*, definition 10b: "a trouble, vexation, annoyance, misfortune, adversity ... "; and def. 27: "A crossing or thwarting," which cites *Much Ado about Nothing* 2.2.4: "Any barre, any crosse, any impediment ... ." In my reading these senses are not incompatible with definition 10a: "A trial of affliction viewed in its Christian aspect, to be borne for Christ's sake with Christian patience; often in *to bear, take (up) one's cross*, with reference to Matt. x.38, xiv.24, etc." This use of the word is found as early as Wycliffe's translation of the Bible and was common in early modern religious writings. Here is the 1595 Geneva-Tomson translation of Matthew 10:38–39: "And he that taketh not his crosse, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that will finde his life; shall lose it: And he that loseth his life for my sake, shall finde it." (Geneva-Tomson Bible 1595). Tomson's marginal gloss for verse 39 explains, "They are sayd to finde their life, which deliver it out of danger: and this is spoken after the opinion of the people which think them cleane lost that die, because they thinke not of the life to come." See note 34 below for Richmond Noble's argument for Shakespeare's use of the Geneva-Tomson Bible and its marginal notes.

Shakespeare: "To say 'ay' and 'no' to everything that I said! 'Ay,' and 'no,' too, was no good divinity."[32] This rendering shifts Lear's emphasis from exclaiming against his flatterers' superficial compliance, to exclaiming against their readiness both to assert and to deny at once any statement Lear might make. Such flatterers are like the equivocator Macbeth's porter welcomes to hell, their sophistry and seemingly pious rationalizations reminiscent of the unhelpful theological mazes that medieval scholasticism was known for in Shakespeare's day (cf. *Macbeth* 2.3.7–9).[33] In his own mad search for answers, Lear stumbles upon contradictions and circumlocutions; little does he anticipate his imminent restoration to sanity through the plain, emphatic, and sincere speech and actions of Cordelia.

His reference to the ayes and noes used in bad theology bears a biblical allusion; most modern editions point the reader either to Matthew 5:36–37 or to its echo in James 5:12: "Let your yea, be yea, and your nay, nay."[34] Lear's reference to white and black hairs (*Lear* 4.6.97–99) particularly refers to Jesus' words in the Matthew passage: "Neither shalt thou swear by thine head, because thou canst not make one haire white or blacke." In their own contexts, both the Matthew and James passages are concerned with swearing—not with equivocation or flattery. Shakespeare's use of biblical allusions adds ambiguity and further layers of potential meaning here. His pre-Christian king echoes a New Testament allusion, applying it to a context quite different from that of its source, and conveying a moral observation quite different from the correlative concerns of Matthew or of James. Yet the opposition of hypocrisy is certainly not foreign to the gospel of Matthew, and in the *Tragedy of Lear* Kent twice implies the reckless futility of swearing by the gods. In a play full of textual variants and interpretive ambiguities, the master playwright of ambiguity himself has his tragic protagonist rail against not only flattery, but also equivocation and conflicting, sophisticated statements.

There is no need, of course, to equate Lear's concerns with Shakespeare's own, nor to hold Shakespeare's play to its protagonist's standards for "good divinity." The law of noncontradiction does not apply here; within the golden world of poetry, the realm of *Lear* may be both pagan and Christian. Layers of new and old meanings and the interpretive ambiguities the playwright courts add to the richness of his language. Cordelia may be presented as a model of pure plainness, but Shakespeare is not. Beyond the basic step of distinguishing character from author, the key difference between the doublespeak of Lear's flatterers and the equivocations of Shakespeare's pen may lie in the heart of the communicator. Theirs is motivated by selfish aggrandizement and exploitation of weakness and folly; the poet's is a gift of rich, if not infinite, variety—food for heart and mind that strengthens the receiver, through catharsis if not through the comforting introduction of hope. In *King Lear*, nowhere is this rich variety more evident than in the investigation of the play's own theological layers.

Shakespeare's characters in *Lear* entertain varying and competing assumptions about the role of gods, fate, and astral influences in relation to human suffering. None of these assumptions is

32 The Arden Shakespeare records the early textual variants of "everything . . . was" thus: euery thing I saide, I and no toe, was *Q*; all I saide: I and no too was *Q2*; euery thing that I said: I, and no too, was *F* (Shakespeare 1997a, ed. Foakes, p. 334). Emendations are thus necessary in editions seeking the clarity of modernized spelling and punctuation.

33 For an intriguing argument that Macbeth would have intellectually, morally, and spiritually benefited from the type of equivocation associated with early modern Roman Catholic casuistic reasoning, attentive to subtleties, open to possibilities, and resistant to oversimplification and determinism associated with Protestant theology, see (Curran 2018). For key examples of early modern reactions against scholasticism, one may turn to the fifth rule of Erasmus's 1503 *Enchiridion* (Erasmus 1983, esp. pp. 63–64), Erasmus's 1511 *Praise of Folly* and its augmentations (see esp. Erasmus 1993, pp. 86–95, but see also the caveat in A. H. T. Levi's introduction, pp. xx–xxi); Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516, published in English in 1551; see esp. More 2003, pp. 120–24) and More's October 21, 1515 letter to Maarten van Dorp (Nauert 1998); Philip Melanchthon's 1518 inaugural address to the faculty of the University of Wittenberg (see Christian Preus's introduction in Melanchthon 2014, pp. 11–12), and John Webster's 1654 *Academarium Examen*.

34 Except where otherwise noted, quotations from the Bible are taken from a 1595 Geneva Bible with Laurence Tomson's revisions of the text and annotations for the New Testament. I have emended frequently interchanged letters (i/j, u/v) to conform to modern usage. The choice of a Geneva-Tomson Bible follows Richmond Noble's extensive work in identifying the versions Shakespeare used, which concludes that "the evidence is in favour of Shakespeare's possession of a Genevan Old Testament bound up with a Tomson New Testament, and there is also an indication that he may have been influenced by a Tomson marginal note" (Noble 1970, p. 58; cf. p. 8). This revision of the Genevan Bible with Tomson's extended notes was "the most popular Bible of the day" (Noble 1970, p. 92). Shakespeare's use of the Bishop's Bible and the Book of Common Prayer as well as the possibility of other versions of the Bible has also been established by Noble (1970, pp. 58–89).

established as true or dominant to the exclusion of all others within the play. For example, Edmund scoffs at Gloucester's attribution of political and social unrest to lunar and solar eclipses, and he scorns the general shrugging off of human responsibility as if all were subject to the "enforced obedience of planetary influence" or a "divine thrusting on" (1.2.104–6, 118–26). Edmund fails, however, to disprove this influence or thrust, for he chooses the path of villainy, one that merely supports society's expectations and his horoscope's prognosis, both based on something outside of his control: the circumstances of his birth. Noting the chasm separating the way Lear's two eldest and his youngest have treated their father, Kent concludes, "It is the stars, / The stars above us govern our conditions, / Else one self mate and make could not beget such different issues" (4.3.33–36). And Lear's first words of anger against Cordelia make it clear that in this pagan world, the celestial bodies to which Gloucester and Kent refer are metonyms for the gods themselves: "For by the sacred radiance of the sun, / The mysteries of Hecate and the night, By all the operation of the orbs / From whom we do exist and cease to be, / Here I disclaim all my paternal care . . . " (1.1.110–13). For Gloucester, Kent, and Lear, the stars are gods, and astrology is divinity. Edmund scoffs at this, but his villainy does not refute it. Only his attempt to do "some good" in his final moments, to save Lear and Cordelia from the death he has plotted for them, bears some evidence against the influence of the stars. Cordelia is hanged, and Lear, who kills her murderer, does not improve his lot a whit based on Edmund's late good intentions. If any good is accomplished by Edmund's last effort, it is found in the heart, not the stars.

The play's references to fate and fortune are similarly complex. A maddened Lear on the heath makes the single direct reference to fate in this play: "Now all the plagues that in the pendulous air / Hang fated o'er men's faults light on thy daughters" (3.4.66–67); but this is joined with a curse and with reference to "men's faults," thus muddling ideas of fate with those of human control and responsibility (3.4.66–67). The references to Fortune are many, and most often unpromising; it is as if being "sick in fortune" (a condition Edmund describes as "often the surfeits of our own behavior") is the most natural relationship one might have with the goddess in this play (1.2.107–8). Edmund invokes "Briefness and fortune" in his plot to sever the bond between his father and his brother (2.1.18). The Fool calls Fortune "that arrant whore" who "Ne'er turns the key to the poor" (2.2.242–43). A maddened Lear, misinterpreting the approach of one of Cordelia's Gentlemen as hostile, considers himself "The natural fool of fortune" (4.6.87).

Yet Kent and Edgar believe Fortune has an uncanny habit of raising the destitute. Kent in the stocks bids "Fortune, good night: Smile once more; turn thy wheel" (2.2.171); Edgar offers himself this solace: "To be worst, / The lowest and most dejected thing of fortune, / Stands still in esperance, lives not in fear. / The lamentable change is from the best, / The worst returns to laughter" (4.1.2–6). With such optimism Edgar can say to Albany, "Fortune love you" (5.1.47). And Cordelia, self-assured in her own integrity and powers of endurance, feels Fortune's blows only as they affect her father: "We are not the first / Who with best meaning have incurred the worst. / For thee, oppressed King, I am cast down; / Myself could else outfrown false fortune's frown" (5.3.3–6). Fortune is indeed "false" to many in this play. Cordelia may be bested by the Stoic, but in this tragedy pity for others is a higher calling than stoic resolve.[35]

The ambiguous roles of fate, fortune, and heavenly influence are further complicated by the simple fact that the frequently invoked gods of this play never show up. Considered alone, this absence does not distinguish Shakespeare's *Lear* from most of his other plays—although the appearances of Hecate in *Macbeth*, Hymen in *As You Like It*, Diana in *Pericles*, and Jupiter in *Cymbeline* (to say nothing of ghosts, spirits, and fairies) are reminders that he could have included gods in *Lear* as well,

[35] Oscar James Campbell argues that Lear is a supremely un-Stoic man who learns Stoic insights but is ultimately redeemed by the "healing power of Christian love" through Cordelia's example (Campbell 1948, pp. 100, 106). For a concise examination of early modern theological perspectives on faith in Providence as the appropriate Christian replacement of pagan resignation to Fortune, and for a reading of Christian pity and mercy surpassing a "religion of paganized self-sufficiency" in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, see (Urban 2019, esp. pp. 7–14).

at least as speaking apparitions, had they served his dramatic purposes. *Lear*'s characters swear by the gods, allege their malevolence, absence, apathy, or justice, or insist that the gods assist them in cursing others. In the opening scene, Lear's enraged "Now by Apollo—" is promptly met with Kent's "Now, by Apollo, King, / Thou swear'st thy gods in vain" (1.1.161–62).[36] The superstitious, sightless Gloucester assumes divine malevolence: "As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods; they kill us for their sport" (4.1.38–39). The moralizing Albany, learning of Cornwall's death after the blinding of Gloucester, assumes divine retribution: "This shows you are above, / You justicers" (4.2.79–80). But, of course, the death of Cornwall has a human explanation. His servant opposed him in defense of Gloucester. The earl's cry, "Give me some help!—O cruel! O you gods!" is otherwise met with *dei absconditi*.

In the opening scene, the King of France ponders how divine silence can inspire new human bonds: "Gods, gods! 'Tis strange that from their cold'st neglect / My love should kindle to inflamed respect" (1.1.256–57). In context, this "inflamed respect" is clearly for Cordelia, who inspires in France a stronger ardor after he learns that Lear has disowned and disinherited her for no good reason. "She is herself a dowry," France observes, and he seeks to ease her departure from Albion and her family with this assurance: "Thou losest here a better where to find" (1.1.263, 243). For a Jacobean audience, one of the many uncomfortable sorrows of this tragedy is that France, not England, becomes Cordelia's promised land, her superior kingdom, her "better where." Spectators resisting such an interpretation might see France's words as more symbolic or spiritual, intimating a familiar biblical allusion: "And [Jesus] sayd unto them, Verely I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children for the kingdome of Gods sake, Which shal not receive much more in this world, and in the world to come life everlasting" (Luke 18:29–30). The "better where" may allude to some kingdom of the heart, the spiritual realm of personal integrity Cordelia may keep intact even as Lear's disownment of her severs the heart of his own kingdom.

Over the course of the tragedy, Cordelia becomes a central figure of innocent suffering, but she also becomes the figurative heart of the play's thread of hope in two major senses. She is the representative of both integrity and compassion, of both truth and love. She is first a model of inner strength and substance, of the truth that Shakespeare consistently wants to find in beauty. Hers was to be the middle portion of the kingdom, and her governance its core strength. Her refusal to play the game of flattery is essentially a sign of her awareness of the value of her personal integrity in comparison with the externals of territory and state. But more importantly, and to effects that will be explored in greater depth in the concluding sections of this essay, Cordelia is a model of love that expresses itself through compassion and sacrifice. Her words and actions on behalf of her father in Acts 4 and 5 contextualize and soften the stubbornness and insensitivity that may be read into her refusal in Act 1 to gratify an aged father's ear. While this refusal too may be motivated by love, it is her later return to, forgiveness of, and fighting for Lear that make the compassionate aspect of Cordelia's heart unmistakable. Her intervention, not the gods', brings new life to Lear, making Lear's world not only liveable, but joyous. Cordelia's example teaches Lear to value the integrity of the inner self over the accumulation of external accommodations, and to treasure her genuine love and compassion over anything her sisters could say to humor him, or any retinue, regal garb, or courtly ritual that might preserve his accustomed self-regard. The path to learning from her example, however, involves first

[36] Similarly, in Act 2 Lear's "By Jupiter I swear no" can do nothing to change the fact that his daughter Regan and her husband have put Kent in the stocks; again Lear's passionate swearing by the god is met with Kent's dry rebuttal: "By Juno, I swear ay" (2.2.211–12). Kent's choice of a lesser deity is pointedly inconsequential if neither god listens; it cannot be blasphemy if neither god exists. This returns us to *Lear* 4.6.96–100 and the allusion to Matthew 5:36–37, for Kent's rejoinders are a sarcastic version of "Let your communication be Yea, yea: Nay, nay." In the biblical source, the reasons Jesus gives for not swearing are associated with God's sovereignty and connection to the world: "Sweare not at all, neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God: Nor yet by the earth, for it is his footstoole: neither by Hierusalem: for it is the citie of the great King" (vv. 34–35). By contrast, Kent's indirect reproof of Lear's swearing by the gods comes from the unsettling thought that such invocations are "in vain." Lear still needs to see better as he swears by the God of sight; his swearing by the king of the gods in disbelief that Regan and Cornwall ignominiously put his servant in the stocks does not change that it is so.

facing the fact that he wronged her, and then not letting his conviction of wrongdoing be diminished by that other fact—that he himself was wronged. His acute suffering on the heath, which could lead him outside of his mind's storm toward repentance and compassion, is in danger of being eclipsed by his acute indignation at the injustice of daughters or gods.

Thus, many readings of *Lear* emphasize the turn from disappointing metaphysical contemplations to the proactive ethical—from frustration about unresolved questions about divine justice, benevolence, and existence to a determination to do one's part to help one's fellow humans. This is advanced by a few transformative moments where once-empowered characters learn in their misery to pity and help the unfortunate. When Lear turns to consider the "houseless heads," "unfed sides," and "looped and windowed raggedness" of the poor, he implicates himself—"O, I have ta'en / too little care of this"—and then calls on the pompous to "shake the superflux to [the poor] / And show the heavens more just" (3.4.30–33, 35–36). It is up to humanity to make the gods look good. The current trend in interpreting this passage is to focus on shaking the superflux rather than showing the heavens more just—on the economic rather than the theological implications—but of course they go hand in hand. Lear's "superflux" speech can be performed as a prayer; it begins with Lear ushering the Fool into shelter and then announcing, "I'll pray, and then I'll sleep," and it has become customary for actors to kneel through the speech itself.[37] This kneeling and prayer could be perceived as indicative of Lear's newfound humility and religious contrition, but conversely it might serve to emphasize the substitution of the empathetic wealthy for the gods above. The addressees of this prayer are not the gods but first the "poor naked wretches," who receive Lear's sympathy, and then "pomp" or the rich, who might well receive his sermon (3.4.29, 33). The key moments of Lear's own moral progress are with the Fool in the storm, when Lear learns sympathy—"Art cold? / I am cold myself . . . . Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart / That's sorry yet for thee" (3.2.68–69, 72–73)—and then acts in kindness: "In boy, go first" (3.4.26). Russell Fraser argues that these four monosyllables mark the "hinge of the play," the moment when the downward path of Lear's physical fate touches the upward path of his spiritual or mental progress (Shakespeare 1998, p. lxiv). Gielgud once stated, "You have to decide from the outset whether Lear is a great man who loses his position, or that he acquires greatness and wisdom through suffering" (qtd. in Croall 2015, p. 24). Those who see the chiastic structure Fraser describes find no dilemma.

Fraser also sees this as a Marxist moment: Here is "Lear the Socialist, got up in a red shirt" (Shakespeare 1998, p. lxiv). So has Cicely Berry, Director of Voice at the Royal Shakespeare Company: "I think *King Lear* is probably the greatest play ever written; I am sure I am not alone in this. But to me it is also a great Marxist play . . . . I believe Lear goes on a journey from first being a ruler of a kingdom, then being rejected by his daughters, through madness on the heath, to finally realizing that he is but a man—like any other—and that he has not fulfilled his duty as a man (Carson 2013, p. 59). Fair enough—but the "Marxist" duty Lear learns on the heath is not separable from religion, from the aim to "show the heavens more just." It resonates with the second of the two summative commandments Jesus proclaimed: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Lear's new ability to treat others as he would want to be treated is not motivated by pious zeal, but neither does it indicate a rejection of the gods with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. The move from pity to purpose, from humane feeling to humanitarian action, even if motivated by the gods' silence, is not itself proof of *Lear's* world being nonreligious.[38]

Like Lear, Gloucester turns from importuning the deaf heavens to feeling intense personal suffering, to performing a simple act of compassion, to praying for more generalized action. Preparing for suicide, Gloucester sermonizes on altruism, which he models with a bequest to the "naked fellow" he does not recognize as his own disinherited son Edgar:

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[37] See note for 3.4.28 in the Arden edition (Shakespeare 1997a, p. 273).

[38] David Beauregard goes further, seeing in *King Lear* an "overall theological principle . . . that providential governance manifests itself through the mediation of virtuous human beings" (Beauregard 2008, p. 211).

Here, take this purse, thou whom the heavens' plagues
Have humbled to all strokes. That I am wretched
Makes thee the happier. Heavens deal so still!
Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man
That slaves your ordinance, that will not see
Because he does not feel, feel your powers quickly:
So distribution should undo excess
And each man have enough. (4.1.67–74)

Here Gloucester, like Lear, desires to see divine justice, even though he implicates himself. Fitting his own description of the "superfluous and lust-dieted man," Gloucester despairs of receiving any kindness from the heavens; yet he sees cosmic justice at work, inspiring him to bestow what little kindness he can upon poor Tom.[39] As in Lear's speech on the poor, feeling is an important step preceding action, but here the requested feeling is not humane empathy but a sense of divine power. This is fitting for Gloucester's character, for he has ever drawn connections between heavenly influence and earthly events. For Gloucester, it is a sense of the gods' powerful presence, rather than their absence, that spurs fear or generosity. As editors and critics have noted, behind Gloucester's reference to a divine "ordinance" are biblical injunctions: Mark 10:21, "Go and sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven" and the 1560 Geneva Bible's gloss (The Geneva Bible 1560) on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16.19–31: "by this storie is declared what punishment thei shal have, which live deliciously & neglect the poore."[40] The Tomson gloss for the same story also emphasizes the rich man's manner of dress: "very gorgeously and sumptuously: for purple garments were costly, and this fine linen which was a kinde of linen that came out of Achaia, was as deare as gold"; such a gloss connects the parable to Lear's concerns with gorgeous, costly garments (especially at 2.2.456–59 and 3.6.75–78). As with Lear, Gloucester has lived "deliciously," but, as with Lear, Act 4 grants him a fresh opportunity, where Edgar's staged miracle on the "Dover cliffs" reconciles Gloucester to life and to the gods. No longer the "wanton boys" who kill for sport, the "ever gentle gods" may be petitioned for strength against despair (4.6.213–15).

There is much one might say about the gods of *Lear*, even though they never show up. The grounds for any argument on this topic are unstable, but the debate itself is inescapable and pervasive. In this matter, as others, we may hear the Fool's challenge: "Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?" (1.4.128–29). For what sets the play in motion but Cordelia's own argument from silence, and the disruptive challenge that something significant—whether bounty or disaster—might indeed come of "nothing"?

4. Lear Unbound: The Pagan and the Christian in *King Lear*

The strongest arguments for the godlessness and devastation of Lear's world point to the play's ending, and yet that ending also contains evidence used in the strongest arguments for that world glimpsing the hope of redemption as presented in Christianity. The choices Shakespeare makes in reworking his historical sources suggest deliberate addition of both pagan and Christian material, and of both bleak and hopeful chords.

Notably, Shakespeare ignores the restorative ending of his source texts. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Higgins's *Mirror for*

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39 Gloucester's reputation for being "lust-dieted" is apparent in his ungentlemanly jests about Edmund's conception in the opening scene, in the Fool's reference to him as an old lecher (3.4.110), and in Edgar's assumption that Gloucester's blindness is the consequence of his adultery (5.3.168–71).

40 See notes for 4.1.67 in the Arden edition of *King Lear* edited by R. A. Foakes (Shakespeare 1997a, p. 309); cf. (Kronenfeld 1992, esp. pp. 763, 774).

Magistrates, and the anonymous *True Chronicle History of King Leir*, the Cordelia and Lear characters emerge victorious in battle, and the king's authority is restored for him to deliver to or bequeath on the deserving. In the 1605 *Leir* play particularly, the restorative end is associated with pious statements and pat moralizing. The whole play is set in an explicitly Christian environment, where Leir foolishly calls his eldest daughters "the kindest Gyrles in Christendome."[41] William Elton's assessment of it is fair: "Divine and poetic justice rule all; the anonymous play never questions them or allows them to be questioned, and the work ceaselessly drums its pious message" (Elton 1988, p. 70). By contrast, Shakespeare's play expunges the heavy didacticism of the *Leir* play and reverts to the pagan setting of Geoffrey of Monmouth's account.

Nevertheless, Shakespeare's *Lear* rejects the eventual suicide of Cordelia as presented in Geoffrey of Monmouth's and Holinshed's accounts. According to Geoffrey, after Lear's death Cordelia rules peacefully for five years until her nephews, "indignant at the fact that Britain was subjected to the rule of a woman," rose in rebellion, laid waste the land, and ultimately conquered Cordelia in battle and imprisoned her. Geoffrey has Cordelia die in despair: "There she grieved more and more over the loss of her kingdom and eventually she killed herself" (Geoffrey of Monmouth 1966, p. 87). Holinshed describes her suicide as a heroic pagan action in the line of Cato the Younger: "being a woman of a manlie courage, and despairing to recover libertie, there she slue hirselfe" (Holinshed 1587, vol. 2, p. 13). Shakespeare acknowledges the story of Cordelia's suicide through deliberate revision when he has Edmund plot to make the murder of Cordelia look like a suicide (5.3.250–53). This provides at once an explanation and a dismissal of the legend for his own purposes—ones that conform to the theology of suicide acceptable to his 17th-century Christian audience. For the social and religious consequences of suicide in a Christian context in Shakespeare, one need look no further than the debate over the death and funeral rites of Ophelia in *Hamlet*. Elsewhere, of course, Shakespeare was comfortable with poetic ecstasies adorning the suicides of Christian and pagan lovers, from Romeo and Juliet to Antony and Cleopatra. But, as R. W. Chambers has argued in an influential essay, to have Cordelia take her own life in despair would compromise her position as Christ-figure and model of Christian virtue (Chambers 1940, pp. 18–24). Had an unrepentant Edmund succeeded in staging her suicide convincingly, the result would have been the doubly villainous effect of murdering both Cordelia and her reputation (at least for Shakespeare's Jacobean audience). Instead, Edmund lives long enough to confess his plot, and Lear survives to reveal and avenge the murder. The intentional reversion from the Christian to a pagan setting is paired with an intentional revision of the early accounts of Cordelia's death by suicide to one acceptable for a Christ-figure to an early modern Christian audience. Shakespeare's further choice of Cordelia dying by being hanged rather than slain by the sword corresponds with Spenser's account against those of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Holinshed, etc. (Spenser 1987, p. 336), and further colors the presentation of Cordelia as a Christ figure (Campbell 1948, p. 107; Guilfoyle 1989, p. 62). Collapsing the story of Cordelia's death into the narrative of Lear's last moments of life is more than dramatic economy—it serves as one further way Shakespeare pins audience perception of the fate of Lear on the life or death of Cordelia, perhaps not unlike the way the whole of Christian faith is pinned on the doctrine of the resurrection.[42] Neither romance survivor nor stoic suicide, Shakespeare's Cordelia remains a victim, and potentially a martyr, a sacrificial lamb, whose death—and whose influence beyond her death—bears religious intonations.

While William Elton concludes that "*Lear*, in Shakespeare's hands, becomes a paganized version of a Christian play," it is more accurate to say that Shakespeare's play retells the legend with sensitivity to the problem of evil, the question of divine (in)justice, and the troubled demand for eschatological resolution. This makes *Lear* a far better play, and one could argue, even a far closer example of

[41] *The True Chronicle History of King Leir* was entered into the Stationers' Register in 1594 and published in 1605. It is widely considered to be one of Shakespeare's most important sources for his own version of the Lear tale. See (Stern 2003).

[42] For this, one may turn again to 1 Corinthians 15 (esp. v. 14) and its prominence in the early modern English Protestant mind, as captured in the Geneva-Tomson marginal notes and the Order for the Burial of the Dead (note 5 above).

a "Christian" one than the moralizing and neatly resolved *Leir* play.[43] J. C. Maxwell has said as much: *Lear* is "a Christian play about a pagan world" (Maxwell 1950, p. 142). As Grace Tiffany explains, Shakespeare "expressed Christian ideas through pagan situations throughout his entire career"; she also indicates "Shakespeare's career-long pattern of allusions to pre-Christian deities and devotional practices," adding that in "*King Lear*, and many other pre-1606 plays, Shakespeare accommodates references to pagan practices and beliefs to a dominant Christian perspective which is always powerfully present, if at times, only subtly alluded to" (Tiffany 2018, p. 1).[44]

The greatest of Christian ideas Shakespeare works with is the resurrection. For Sean Benson, "The sense of a resurrection or quasi-resurrection having taken place is a recurrent motif in Shakespeare's comedies and romances, while the countervailing frustration of a failed resurrection is a prominent feature in a number of his tragedies. ... Even his plays set in pagan worlds do not avoid the impress of the Resurrection; Shakespeare in fact cultivates the anachronism, yoking the pagan horror at the idea of resurrection to a beatific vision of the joy resurrection might bring" (Benson 2009, pp. 1–2). Benson firmly places *Lear* in the "quasi-resurrection" category, given the demands of tragedy (Benson 2009, p. 121). Nonetheless, lines with "biblical resonance ... increasingly dot the play's verbal landscape," and as these strands are interwoven "for aesthetic purposes, not didactic religious ends," Shakespeare "opens the pagan play to the illumination of Christian revelation, whether he personally considered it truth or otherwise" (Benson 2009, pp. 104, 105). Naseeb Shaheen notes that "*Leir* contains some thirty clear biblical references, thirteen possible references or passages with strong biblical echoes, and many religious images. Shakespeare borrowed none of *Leir's* references. In a few instances ... Shakespeare's references to scripture may have been suggested by a phrase or a parallel situation in the old play. But for the most part, Shakespeare's biblical references are his own" (Shaheen 1999, pp. 604–5). With this in mind, a closer investigation of a few such instances of biblical resonance may prove fruitful.

It is often observed that Shakespeare's *Tragedy of King Lear* shares themes with the Book of Job. Both texts feature the intense suffering of the protagonist, a crisis of existence and of theodicy, fear of Nature and the Divine, a climactic storm, and deeply significant yet troubling and debatable conclusions. When Lear claims, "I will be the pattern of all patience, / I will say nothing" (3.2.37–38), he is inserting himself into a role conventionally assigned to the biblical Job. To be sure, neither Lear nor the biblical Job is "the pattern of all patience." Job endures much but is not silent about his undeserved suffering. Lear is less so, as he exclaims against the gods in the storm without provoking a divine response to which he might listen. Job repeatedly attests his innocence and integrity (27:5–6; 29:14, 32:1) but ultimately submits to God's inscrutable wisdom and power: "therefore have I spoken that I understode not, even things too wonderfull for me, and which I knew not .... Therefore I abhorre my selfe, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:3,6). Lear protests in his rage, "I am a man / More sinned against than sinning," but he later implores, "I am a very foolish, fond old man ... Pray you now, forget and forgive; I am old and foolish" (3.2.59–60; 4.7.60, 83–84). For those reading *Lear* as potentially redemptive, a further parallel may be visible in Job 19:25; a passage that for many Christians connects the Hebrew Bible with the message of the gospel and the doctrine of the resurrection of the body: "For I am sure that my redeemer liveth, and he shall stand the last on the earth. And though after my skinne wormes destroy this body, yet shall I see God in my flesh." The Geneva gloss makes the

[43] So also Maillet argues, with a cue from Matthew 10:8, "it should be no surprise that the 'clearest gods' of *King Lear*, if in some sense they represent Christian divinity, similarly do not protect the major characters from great suffering. If this tragedy is avoided, as in Tate, this essential Christian meaning is lost" (Maillet 2016, p. 114). The position may be contrasted with Beauregard's argument that "a significant reason for Shakespeare's de-Christianizing of the old play is precisely that a pagan setting heightens the mystery and the tragedy, whereas explicit Christian themes of forgiveness, redemption, and a loving God would clearly weaken the tragic effect" (Beauregard 2008, p. 204).

[44] In England in the last half of the first decade of the seventeenth century, there were pragmatic as well as aesthetic reasons for subtlety: The 1606 Act in Parliament "to Restraine abuses of Players" imposed a fine for naming God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, or the Trinity on stage; even if laxly enforced, the law accounts for "Shakespeare's marked post-1606 turn to what were at least superficially pagan worlds" (Tiffany 2018, p. 1).

connection explicit: "Herein Job declareth plainely that he had a full hope that both the soule and body should enjoy the presence of God in the last resurrection." The passage is one of four scripture readings opening the Order for the Burial of the Dead in the Book of Common Prayer, and thus certainly recognizable in early modern England.

Of course, there are fundamental differences between the two texts. In the book of Job, the reader is given background information regarding the divine testing of Job and the reasons behind it, even if Job is never given this context from which he might better understand his suffering; in *Lear*, the gods are invoked, feared, and cursed, but neither character nor audience receives any solid evidence of their operations or even their existence within the world of the play. In the book of Job, God speaks in the storm; in Shakespeare's storm on the heath, Lear is the one speaking, and he cannot even be assured that he troubles deaf heaven with his bootless cries. Instead of divine affirmation of the righteousness of the human protagonist (cf. Job 1:8), the play is clear that Lear's folly is as good a cause as any for much of his suffering, even if he is "a man more sinned against than sinning." When Lear does bend in shame and repentance, it is in the restorative presence of Cordelia, rather than at the awesome display of divine creative power. *Lear* ends with the deaths of Lear and his irreplaceable Cordelia; in the coda to the Book of Job the patriarch enjoys another 140 years of life with new livestock and children enumerated as seemingly fungible and symbolic indicators of his replenished wealth. Shakespeare's refusal of such pat closing comforts can be read as a rejection of the Job coda's resolution as well as a rejection of the "Christianizing," moralizing sentiments of the *Leir* play. Despite Job's coda, the major parallels are strong, and the comparison "has become a critical commonplace," accepted and examined from different critical perspectives (Hamlin, p. 306).[45] At their core, both Job and *Lear* masterfully explore the question of what to make of human suffering, especially when one believes it is disproportionate with what one deserves.

Similar to the question of divine justice working in the midst of intense suffering as found in the Book of Job, the question of whether biblical apocalypse, with its horrors as well as its revelations, might provide a viable "big picture" of the human story, informs *King Lear*. Joseph Wittreich has written extensively on the apocalyptic references in *King Lear*, arguing for a Christian undercurrent supporting the pagan play through such references. Pointing out that the title page draws attention to the liturgical context of its first known performance (on St. Stephen's Day) and associating St. Stephen with the charity that characterizes Cordelia, Wittreich argues that "Christianity, thrust on to the margins of the play world by its title page but never silenced, reasserts itself as an ethical nucleus in the play's coda where we are brought to the recognition, so finely formulated in *The Tempest*, that 'The rarer action is / In virtue then in vengeance' (V.i.27–28)" (Wittreich 1984, p. 27). Wittreich's examination of Shakespeare's biblical influence focuses on the prophetic passages in the Book of Daniel, on Apocalypse (the Book of Revelation), and on early modern commentary on those sections of scripture. In Shakespeare's play, Gloucester's early fears of cosmic, terrestrial, and familial rupture (1.2.103–114), Lear's cries in the storm (3.2.1–9), and in the final scene Kent's question, "Is this the promised end?" with Edgar's addition, "Or image of that horror?" are at the heart of the issue (5.3.261–62). Literally meaning "uncovering," the theme of *apocalypse* is supported by the motif of clothing and nakedness, and thus to that associated pair of opposites, foolishness and wisdom. Wittreich asserts, "The apocalypse in *King Lear* is a mind-transforming event that culminates in a king's redemption," but he emphasizes the limitations of Lear's belated discovery of wisdom:

> [The play's] universe allows for no more than the resurrection of the spirit in this life; and this in itself is unhinging. There is a first resurrection that portrays man's release from spiritual

[45] Hannibal Hamlin's chapter on *Lear* in *The Bible in Shakespeare* is entirely devoted to the play's resonances with the book of Job, and he works with a range of scholarship on the subject. Key arguments may be found in (Holloway 1961, p. 85; Elton 1988, pp. 20–30, 68; Colie 1974, pp. 117–44; Muir 1984, pp. 289–90; Milward 1987, pp. 173–80; Bloom 1989, p. 19; and Marx 2000, pp. 59–78). Hamlin also points to (Rosenberg 1966), which associates the neo-Christian critics with Job's friends, "wishful-thinking but naïve" (Hamlin 2013, p. 307).

> darkness, as out of the grave; but whatever measure of self-understanding is achieved in that resurrection, man is still subject to the deceptions of this world. Nowhere is the irony of this predicament dramatized more poignantly than in the final scene of *Lear* where a regenerated man desists from his declaiming against the universe: 'Look on her, look, her lips, / Look there, look there!' (V.iii.310–11). (Wittreich 1984, pp. 33, 119–20)

Wittreich's strongest turn is ethical and earth bound:

> Shakespeare's strategy is to use apocalypse against itself, not to deny it as a possibility but to advance the consummation of history into the future. In *King Lear* apocalypse is not a certainty, nor even a likelihood, but only a *perhaps*—dependent not upon a divine hand to alter the course of history but upon individual men to transform themselves and then *perhaps* history . . . . The whole process of salvation involves an apocalypse of mind wherein man, instead of transcending his nature, improves himself through spiritual evolution. (Wittreich 1984, pp. 32–33)[46]

David Lyle Jeffrey argues that generally, for biblically influenced literature, "[I]n apocalyptic texts there is a radical break between history and the new kingdom. Apocalypse grows out of a conviction that most persons and institutions are irredeemably corrupt, fit only for destruction. To this end, it expresses pessimism or despair; but it is also inspired by unshakeable faith that God will put everything right for a virtuous few" (Jeffrey 1992, p. 46); by contrast, according to Wittreich, in *Lear* "the essential task is to rescue Apocalypse and read it back into the human world; and [Shakespeare's] way of dealing with that problem is to demystify the Apocalypse and thereby humanize it—is to turn responsibility for the shaping of history over to man and thereby secularize the Christian prophecy" (Wittreich 1984, pp. 124–25). From a "more radical" and yet "less apocalyptic" perspective than the orthodox hope that Christ would be the one to establish a perfect kingdom, Shakespeare "sees man himself—at great personal cost and through tremendous sacrifice—moving slowly toward an ideal state" (Wittreich 1984, p. 125). Wittreich does see a resurrection in *Lear*—but it is confined to spirit, not body, and the operation of this resurrected spirit is itself confined to history, not eternity.

The references to redemption (including those in Job) and to apocalypse (including the expectation of Christ somehow establishing a new kingdom on earth) encourage re-investigation of the possibility of Cordelia as a Christ figure, a role that Wittreich in his secularizing analysis and Maillet in his theologizing analysis modify or reject for opposite reasons. Maillet wants Cordelia to be a Christian pointing to Christ, not a savior herself; Wittreich wants virtuous humans to be replacements for a divine redeemer, where "History" may be saved even if individual souls are not.[47] My own perspective aligns with Hannibal Hamlin's simple admission that Cordelia is indeed a Christ-figure. The biblical allusions support it, and the literary technique was ubiquitous in Shakespeare's day (Hamlin 2013, p. 71). By necessity, like all Christ-figures in literature, Cordelia is not a perfect corollary to Christ; all analogies

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[46] A distinguished Milton scholar, Wittreich must have seen what *King Lear* and *Paradise Lost* share: each is a literary masterpiece developing from and in tension with biblical narrative, vision, and imagery, a rich history of interpretive cruxes that affect the reading of the work's very foundations, revisited over centuries without definitive resolution, and a significant ultimate turn to psychological and spiritual interior spaces indicated by "the heart." In *Paradise Lost*, given Milton's narrative persona (Milton 2005), who sought a muse preferring "before all temples th' upright heart and pure," and who described his exterior environment as "in darkness and with dangers compassed round," the final book's postlapsarian turn to the "paradise within" was predictable (*Paradise Lost* 1.18, 7.27, 12.587). Shakespeare's Lear dies with what is generally considered to be an outward indication, enigmatic as it may be, but my argument is that the biblical allusion to Luke 17 in Lear's "Look there!" redirects the astute spectator to the interior space of the heart. For Wittreich, Lear's redemption is interior, potentially bearing fruit for the future, but limited to earth. One might note that an interior redemption is perfectly compatible with an eternally significant one, as far as Christianity is concerned. For Milton, the fruit of apocalypse transcends this world, involved in Christian doctrines of the afterlife and the resurrection of the body.

[47] Wittreich argues that Lear "incorporates no messianic vision" and "the personal tragedy is accentuated by irony—there is a reunion without a restoration, but the tragedy of history is alleviated, the possibility for *history* as a tragicomedy is allowed for in a play where evil is self-consuming and goodness triumphant in the calm, if not secured order, at its end" (Wittreich 1984, p. 42).

are imperfect. The difficulty comes in deciding what to make of the parallels that do exist, allowing even for the consideration of her association with Christ being ironic. The passages that mark Cordelia as a potential redeemer and that have generated so much critical attention have already been mentioned; Cordelia might redeem nature from the general curse (4.6.202) and more particularly redeem Lear from all his personal sorrows (5.3.264). She, like Christ, (especially in his Sermon on the Mount and in his confrontation of the Pharisees' hypocrisy) emphasizes the importance of the heart. Her name, as fortunately in the source texts, may be linked to the Latin *cors, cordis*, drawing attention to the inner life and spiritual integrity she epitomizes, and preparing the spectator for her role as Love in action; her patience and sorrow, smiles and tears in response to news of her father, become a "better way," which Peter Milward reads as suggestive of the "more excellent way" of Love as expressed in 1 Corinthians 13 (Lear 4.3.16–19; Battenhouse 1994, p. 449). She sheds tears of compassion as holy water (4.3.31). The "love, dear love" she has for Lear eventually leads her to prison and to pay (unwittingly) the ultimate price for that love—the loss of her very life (4.4.28).

Lear is filled with emphatic repetitions, and the story of Lear's dependence on Cordelia might be summarized by them from 4.7 onward. When Lear wakes from a healing sleep with fresh garments, his half-belief that the lady in front of him might be his child Cordelia is met with Cordelia's "And so I am, I am" (4.7.70). Her response is simple and profound. The repeated "I am" draws attention to the name by which YHWH identifies himself to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:14), an Old Testament account that the early fathers of the Christian Church read as typological of the incarnation or resurrection of Christ.[48] It is also the name Jesus uses to identify himself in John 8:58: "Verely, verely I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am." The significance of such a statement was not lost on Jesus' Jewish audience, who tried to stone him for blasphemy. Given the surrounding evidence for her position as a Christ-figure, Cordelia's emphatic "I am" could be read as a similarly significant statement. She is the voice that leads Lear's exodus through fire to freedom.

The second emphatic repetition to note immediately follows Lear's response to Cordelia's self-identification. Facing the daughter he has wronged, Lear says,

> If you have poison for me, I will drink it.
>
> I know you do not love me, for your sisters
>
> Have, as I do remember, done me wrong.
>
> You have some cause, they have not. (4.7.72–75)

Cordelia's response—"No cause, no cause"—again and at once simple and profound, signifies her forgiveness, although Lear is still too "far wide" to grasp that his petition for her to "forget and forgive" had been answered before he found the strength to ask (4.7.76, 50, 83–84). The words "no cause" may carry no particular biblical allusion, but the experience of unmerited forgiveness wed to intimations of prevenient grace is biblical in concept. At their capture in 5.3, Lear anticipates a life in prison with Cordelia involving a ritual of blessing and forgiveness as well as praying, singing "like birds i'the cage," laughing at "gilded butterflies," and taking up "the mystery of things" (5.3.8–17). Lear has not forgotten the "cause" Cordelia could bring against him, but his exuberance in the assurance that to Cordelia this is "no cause" to mention at all brings him to a nearly ecstatic vision of repeatedly asking (and receiving) her forgiveness. He goes with her to prison in contentment, if not joy.

The next significant set of emphatic repetitions, however, marks an utterly devastating change in fortune. Lear's poetic vision for life with Cordelia in prison is reduced to animal wails: "Howl, howl, howl, howl!" (5.3.255). For what is life without the beloved? "Cordelia, Cordelia ... " (5.3.269); "No, no, no ... " (5.3.304); "Never, never, never, never, never" (5.3.307). The agony is fresh, the tone is hollow. A newfound hope has been wrenched from Lear just as he had begun to see his daughter's true

[48] See, for example, *The Life of Moses* 2.17–26 (Gregory of Nyssa 1978, pp. 58–61) and *On the Holy Trinity* 2.13 (Augustine 2007, pp. 48–49).

value. The biblical allusions sprinkled throughout the play lead the spectator to consider the world of *Lear* in the light of Christianity, introducing the concepts of hope, redemption, and even resurrection; nonetheless, a spectator or reader might determine the ultimate effect of introducing such biblical allusions and Christian references is to intensify the devastation at its conclusion. As the play's last scene unfolds *The Tragedy of King Lear* remains a tragedy. The pagan setting remains pagan. The absent gods remain absent. To this environment is added extraordinary suffering, agonizing grief at the violent death of a beloved daughter, and, finally, the death of the weary protagonist. Yet, at Lear's last moment, he inserts one final, enigmatic, emphatic repetition: "Look there, look there!"

5. "Look There" in *Lear* and Luke 17

Without desiring to brush away the rich ambiguities and interpretive cruxes of the tragedy's ending, or smooth away the sorrow, in this last section I seek to illumine one corner of the critical conversation by examining what I consider to be a profoundly relevant scriptural echo in Lear's last words in the First Folio. I am unaware of any scholarly examination connecting Lear's "Look there, look there!" to Luke 17:20–23, yet making this connection adds relevant layers of meaning enhanced by their shared themes of apocalypse, kingdom, sight/insight, and the importance of the heart. The potential allusion bears upon the interpretation of Cordelia as living Christ-figure, then as the piteous image of innocence martyred, and finally as a sign of the interior space one might call the kingdom of the heart. Such an allusion challenges our reading of the play's presentation of "last things," providing some guidance in what one might look for at the play's ending—and where one might look for it.

Among the gospel narratives, the Book of Luke has had special literary influence, and it remains one of the most important biblical sources for Shakespeare. Donald Thomas Carlson, arguing for a "Lucan parallel" in *The Tempest*, lists reasons Shakespeare may have been especially drawn to the gospel of Luke. Carlson tentatively suggests that Luke's traditional occupation as physician would make him a suitable authority to introduce into plays with purgatorial or purgative themes; the content of Luke's gospel prevalently addresses the theme of forgiveness. Furthermore, Luke was held to be the most literary of the evangelists; he includes more parables than the other gospels do, and his figures of speech might appeal to a poet and dramatist (Carlson 1991, pp. 1–3). Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote in his *Notebooks* that the literary quality of Luke far excelled the Gospel of Matthew, in the way a "splendid poem" by Southey or Scott far outshines its source, a "rude tale in an old chronicle" (qtd. in Jeffrey 1992, p. 466). To the literary qualities of Luke, one might add strong socio-political concerns. As Jeffrey has argued, "More than any other writer in the New Testament, Luke reveals in-depth acquaintance with contemporary political and economic realities . . . . Luke emphasizes uprightness as adjunct to piety, stresses proper use of wealth, and encourages a broad social outreach which embraces women, the afflicted, and other marginal people" (Jeffrey 1992, p. 466). In this respect, Luke teaches what Lear learns.

The presence of the Gospel of Luke as intertext to Shakespeare's *King Lear* is unmistakable. A frequently noted example of this occurs as Cordelia returns to Albion in Act 4. As she prepares for battle with the British powers, she says, "O dear Father, / It is thy business that I go about" (4.4.23–24), alluding to the words of the boy Jesus in the temple, as described in Luke and only Luke among the canonical gospels. In the biblical story, Mary and Joseph return from observing the Passover in Jerusalem to discover that the twelve-year-old Jesus is not among their company of travelers. After three days' search, Mary finds her son in the temple courts talking with the teachers of the Law. She reacts with questioning, perhaps even chastening words: "Sonne, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee with very heavie hearts" (Luke 2:48). Jesus responds, "How is it that yee sought me? knew yee not that I must goe about my Fathers busines?" (Luke 2:49). Luke remarks that Mary and Joseph "understood not the word that he spake to them" (v. 50). Lear also lacks full understanding of the wisdom of his child, and the difficulties the boy Jesus and Cordelia share in explaining their actions to their parents have been noted by Skulsky (1966, p. 13). Cordelia's arrival in Dover with an army is motivated by "love, dear love, and our aged father's right" (4.4.28).

While one critic has associated Cordelia with the socially outcast woman who anoints Jesus' feet in Luke 7 (and thence Lear with Christ), in going about her father's business, seeking to restore his kingdom to him, she more directly presents herself as a young Christ-figure in the place where she will soon lose her life.[49]

Luke's parables, especially the series of forgiveness parables in Luke 14–16, also influence *Lear.* Parallels between *Lear* and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19–31 have already been mentioned in consideration of Lear's and Gloucester's developed sympathy with the poor; parallels have also been drawn between Kent and the shrewd manager in Luke 16:1–13, and between Lear and the prodigal son in Luke 15:11–32.[50] Each of these parables is exclusive to the gospel of Luke. The comparison between Lear and the prodigal son is the most prevalent one. In Shakespeare's play, the roles of father and child are reversed: Lear, the "child-changed father," generally is considered the reckless prodigal who must "come to himself" before reuniting with the daughter whom he had rejected, and who yet loves him, restoring him with compassion and a kiss (*Lear* 4.7.17, 26–29; Luke 15:17, 20). The parable's central concern of forgiveness for the repentant is enhanced with the image of new garments signifying an unmerited fresh start; in *Lear* it is Cordelia who arranges "fresh garments" to be put on the king as he sleeps (4.7.20–22). When Lear wakes, Cordelia imagines her father's past sorrows including "hoveli[ing] with swine"—the very bottom of fortune's wheel as experienced by the young Jewish prodigal in Jesus' parable (4.7.39; Luke 15:15–16). The prodigal son's return to the father becomes an occasion for great rejoicing: "For this my sonne was dead, and is alive againe: and he was lost, but he is found" (v. 24). In *Lear*, in the 4.7 reconciliation scene where the bulk of allusions to the prodigal son parable may be found, Lear is also in a sense recalled to life, even though in his shame (and perhaps desire for purgatorial fires) he repines, "You do me wrong to take me out o'the grave" (4.7.45)

With such correspondences, one might not be surprised to discover other parallels between *King Lear* and the gospel of Luke. Luke also contains two chapters (17 and 21) that are concerned with apocalypse. St. John's vision on Patmos is not the only reference to apocalypse in Christian sacred scripture; the gospel accounts record Jesus' teachings on the topic. The description of the "dayes of vengeance" in Luke 21 resounds in Gloucester's litany of environmental, social, and political troubles in Act 1, scene 2:

> Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide; in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father ... Machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves. (*Lear* 1.2.106–9, 113–114)

In Luke 21, "The dayes of vengeance" are marked by betrayal by "parents ... brethren, and kinsmen, and friends" (v. 16), "warres and seditions" (v. 9), kingdoms rising against kingdoms (v. 10), and situations where "mens hearts shal faile them for feare" (v. 26). Gloucester attributes the ruptures in nature and natural bonds he observes to "late eclipses in the sun and moon" that "portend no good to us" (1.2.103); Luke 21 prophesies "signes in the sun, and in the moone, and in the starres, and upon the earth trouble among the nations with perplexitie; the sea and the waves shall roare" (v. 25; cf. references to the turbulent sea in *Lear* 3.1.4–6, 3.4.10, 3.7.58–60, 4.4.1–2). Jesus' instructions to his disciples, "By your patience possess your soules" (v. 19) and "Look up ... for your redemption draweth nigh" (v. 28) might also be associated with the persistent question of Lear's own patience and Edgar's final petition, "Look up, my lord" (5.3.311). The parallels between Gloucester's apocalyptic vision and Luke 21 could be analyzed in far greater depth, but it is the other apocalyptic chapter, Luke 17, that concerns *Lear* most.

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[49] For the association of Cordelia with the woman in Luke 7:37–50, see (Lefler 2010).

[50] For the parable of the shrewd manager and *Lear*, see (Brisman 1998). For the parable of the prodigal son and *Lear*, see (Snyder 1966; Milward 1969; Cunningham 1984; Tippens 1988).

Amid longstanding concern about where and how Lear looks, what pagan and Christian elements may be permitted, and what to make of apparently biblical language and imagery in the play, no one has yet examined in Lear's last words a significant and troublesome biblical allusion to Luke 17. Richmond Noble finds allusions to 22 biblical passages in *Lear*, and in appendix records allusions throughout Shakespeare's plays to multiple verses from twenty-one of Luke's twenty-four chapters, but in either case provides nothing for Luke 17 (Noble 1970, pp. 294–95). With a more inclusive approach and an eye for the probable rather than the certain, Naseeb Shaheen finds allusions from each of Luke's chapters in Shakespeare (171 verses or passages from Luke in total, many of these alluded to more than once in Shakespeare's works); he lists twelve references to Luke 17 in Shakespeare's plays, but none in *Lear* (Shaheen 1999, pp. 808–812). Among these, he identifies allusions to verse 29 most frequently (four times, in *Twelfth Night*, *Richard 2*, *Othello*, and *Pericles*), but this is due to the interjection "Fire and Brimstone," often used comically in Shakespeare. Like *Lear*, much of *Luke* 17 is apocalyptic in topic, but Joseph Wittreich's scholarship on apocalypse in *Lear* does nothing with this particular chapter. Yet there is good reason for including Luke 17 among the apocalyptic biblical texts that shape Lear, for this chapter shares with *Lear* an interest in the topics of kingdom, divine judgment, sight, insight, revelation, and the importance of both the inner spiritual realm and active love.

Luke 17 begins with Jesus warning his disciples against offending "litle ones," exhorting them to extravagant forgiveness, and assuring them of the extraordinary power of faith. The third verse, "If thy brother trespasse against thee, rebuke him: and if he repent, forgive him," might be compared with Edgar's challenge, duel, and then desire to "exchange charity" with his brother Edmund (5.3.124–38, 164). The center of Luke 17 includes the parable of the unthanked servant (cf. Kent) and the story of Jesus healing the ten lepers, of whom only one returned to thank his healer; this section shares with *Lear* the themes of dutiful service and gratitude/ingratitude.[51] The rest of the chapter concerns the apocalyptic message about the "comming of the kingdome of heaven," the anticipated appearance of "false Christes," and "After what maner Christe's comming shal be," as expressed in the argument of Chapter 17 in the 1595 Geneva-Tomson Bible, the version Richmond Noble gives good evidence for having been in Shakespeare's possession (Noble 1970, pp. 58–69). Indeed, Shakespeare's play might be illuminatingly read alongside the whole of Luke 17, but the particular verse deserving emphasis is Luke 17:21. Here it is in context, from the Geneva-Tomson translation:

> [20]And when he was demaunded of the Pharises, when the kingdome of God should come, he answered them, and said, The kingdome of God commeth not with observation.
>
> [21]Neither shall men say, Lo here, or lo there: for behold, the kingdome of God is within you.
>
> [22]And he said unto the disciples, The dayes will come, when ye shal desire to see one of the dayes of the Sonne of man, and ye shal not see it.
>
> [23]Then they shall saye to you, Beholde here, or beholde there: but goe not thither, neither follow them.
>
> [24]For as the lightening that lighteneth out of the one parte under heauen, shineth unto the other part under heaven, so shall the Sonne of man be in his day.
>
> [25]But first must he suffer many things, and be reproved of this generation.

The "Lo here, or lo there" of Luke 17:21 (rendered "loo here loo there" in the Tyndale (1534), "Lo here, or lo there" in the Great Bible (1539), and "lo here, lo there" in The Bishop's The Bishop's Bible (1568)) is similar enough to Lear's "Look there, look there!" to warrant further investigation. Similarly, the "Beholde here, or beholde there" in verse 23 ("Se here se there" in the Tyndale, and "See here, see there" in the Great Bible and the Bishop's Bible) invites comparison with Albany's exhortation,

[51] The good servant of Luke 17 calls himself "unprofitable" because he is simply doing his duty; the parable is referred to in the Elizabethan homily "Of the Misery of All Mankinde" to emphasize that no one is good but God (Lancashire 1994).

"O see, see!" (5.3.303). Perhaps this allusion has been overlooked because today we may not readily think of 'lo' as a shortened form of 'look,' although the *OED* confirms this (see the second etymology given *sv. lo, int.*1). Granted, where the biblical passage has "here ... there" Shakespeare has emphatic repetitions, but in context the effects are similar. In Luke 17:21, the "here" and "there" of purported locations of the kingdom of God are not contrasted with each other, but paired together in contrast with the authentic location of that spiritual realm: "within you."[52]

If Lear's last words indeed allude to Luke 17, how does this affect our reading of the play? Is the last scene "the promised end," as Kent inquires, "or the image of that horror," as Edgar suggests? Or is it something else? In Luke, Jesus warns his disciples not to believe those who, saying "lo here, lo there," point to a partially visible apocalypse or to the coming of the Kingdom of God. This coming, Luke states, will be self-evident, like lightning stretching from heaven to heaven (v. 24). We, with Lear, have seen a storm in the play, and the raw power of Nature, but the indeterminacy—or at least, the disputability—of the play's conclusion suggests that the kingdom of God has not come at the end of *Lear*, that this is not the promised end. "Goe not thither, neither follow them," Jesus admonishes. There are false Christs. In this, I can agree with Wittreich: "For all the suggestions of end-time that are to be found in *King Lear*, the play does not produce the promised end—defiantly resisting, instead, the expectations built by its apocalyptic reference" (Wittreich 1984, p. 32). Eclipse-driven hype remains the mark of Gloucester's superstition, and matter for Edmund's scorn. The same allusion to Luke 17 that may be used to support the redemptive role of Cordelia also presents the possibility that Lear has become an unwittingly false prophet. If Lear's "Look there" is regarded as a reference to the eschaton, there remains the possibility that Lear's final words misdirect us—that at the play's close, the audience left darkling, there is only the tragic image of a promised horrific end that, like the thud of a Tenebrae *strepitus*, reverberates no hollowness. We would then have the corpse of a Christ-figure, but no Resurrection, and no Second Coming. If one accepts apocalyptic references in *Lear's* final scene as well as the terms of Luke 17:24 for identifying apocalypse, the very fact that the vitality of Cordelia (and thus the redemption of Lear) is disputed will indicate her role as Christ figure has reached its limits in her death. "Ye shal desire to see one of the dayes of the Sonne of man, and ye shal not see it."

If Lear's final indication, whether heavenly or earthly, is indeed a misdirection, wittingly or unwittingly, one still must consider what to make of the corpse onstage. I am assuming Lear's "look there!" points to the body of dead Cordelia—not outward to a vast and meaningless abyss, nor upward to a spirit blissfully ascending to the heavens. Lear's reference to her lips in the preceding line turns the spectator's attention with him to the body of his daughter. But what ought one make of this body? Is it a sacred relic, or a lump of clay? Performance history cannot settle the issue, only present to us a range of options. In Max Reinhart's 1925 production, as Marvin Rosenberg records, "Cordelia lay limp in Klöpfer's arms as if taken down from the cross of life" (Rosenberg 311); this may be contrasted with Benedict Nightingale's description of Sir Robert Stephens's 1993 performance: "On 'she's dead as earth,' the last word full of disgust, Stephens actually kneed the body onto its back as if it were a slab of meat" (Ogden and Scouten 1997, pp. 242–43). Frequently in performance the sacred and the profane are mingled, especially where the aged king's regard for his daughter's corpse leads to awkward exposure of his own failing strength, as in the case of Tommaso Salvini's *Lear* (1883–1887): "not allowing anyone but himself to touch the beloved body, [Lear] must drag it in with difficulty" (qtd. in Rosenberg 312).

[52] The 1560 Geneva notes provide an alternate translation for "within you": "*Or, among you*." Calvin's explication of Luke 17: 21–22 in *The Institutes* 2.15.4 reinforces the primary choice of *within* in the Geneva translations while maintaining the relevance of the alternative *among*, for, as he argues, "[Christ] reigns ... both within us and without us" (Calvin 1863, vol. 1, p. 429). In the context of Jesus' apocalyptic statements in the synoptic gospels, the Lucan reference to the kingdom of God as "within" [ἐντός in the original Greek] is peculiar, for the parallel verses Matthew 24:33 and Mark 13:29 both have "near, at the doors" [ἐγγύς ... θύραις]. To the aforementioned reasons for considering Luke's special influence on Lear one might add a shared emphasis on psychological or spiritual interior spaces in Luke 17 and *King Lear*. The parallels promote consideration of an allusion in Lear's final words to the "Lo there" of Luke 17:21 rather than to the correlative verses of Matthew 24:23 and Mark 13:21.

What the theater has not resolved, the scholarly battle lines of the Christianizers and the Existentialists have brought to the level of overdetermination or aporia. The internal evidence of the play cannot resolve it—the absence and silence of the gods neither proves nor disproves the operation of a spiritual realm extending to an afterlife, and even Kent's expectations, implicit in "Vex not his ghost" and "I have a journey, sir" do not establish assurances of any such afterlife within the world of the play (5.3.312, 320). The previously considered biblical allusions clearly present Cordelia as a Christ-figure with redemptive potential—but the text does not show that potential actualized in Lear's pagan world beyond the life of the king, and with her body cradled in his at the end of the play, it is just as difficult to prove that Cordelia's role as redemptrix is ultimately ironic as it is to prove that this piteous Deposition scene is pointing toward a Christian perspective on resurrection and redemption.

If Cordelia is a Christ figure, and Lear's last command is to look upon her corpse, the final words of Lear usher the Jacobean playgoer into one of the heated religious issues of the English Reformation, the image debate in early modern England. What if the body of the hanged Cordelia becomes an object of veneration? Perhaps Lear's fixation on the corpus would be an indication for the Protestant playgoer that Lear is indeed deluded, clinging to a creed outworn. Perhaps the spectacle would be received more sympathetically as a variation of the supreme image evoking pity, a pietà, with the father cradling the dead daughter in his lap, evoking the ghosts of the old Catholicism.[53] For Cherrell Guilfoyle, who has reminded readers of *Lear* that the crucifixion of Jesus was traditionally referred to as a hanging (Acts 10:39; Guilfoyle 1989, p. 62), Lear carrying the dead Cordelia onstage "concentrate[s] attention on the relation between Lear and the body of his daughter, and the powerful symbolism of the Deposition and pietà is fed into this final icon" (Guilfoyle 1989, p. 63). For the early modern English Protestant audience, however, there is always the threat that the icon could become an idol.[54]

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[53] Stephen Greenblatt has argued in *Hamlet in Purgatory* that Shakespeare "had a particular interest in digging up and redeploying damaged or discarded institutional goods, cultural memories that he returned to his contemporaries and bequeathed to the future" (Greenblatt 2013, p. xiv). Dennis Taylor and David Beauregard have edited a volume of essays, *Shakespeare and the Culture of Christianity in Early Modern England*, based on the premise that "the ghost of the old Catholicism haunts Shakespeare and his Elizabethan world" (Taylor and Beauregard 2003, p. 12). The question of where Shakespeare's personal religious convictions lay is thorny and not always scholarly. Hannibal Hamlin does a fine job summarizing the key issues and arguments, and remarks that, while arguments for Shakespeare's Catholicism are "gaining the ascendancy," it is also true that "the Catholic Shakespeare remains especially popular among Catholic scholars" (Hamlin 2013, p. 75). In the case of *King Lear*, one should note that arguments for *Lear* intimating a Catholic perspective need not be among those arguing for the ultimate redemption of Lear. For Beauregard, the final scene "seems designed as a secular imitation of Michelangelo's Pieta" and "suggests that Shakespeare conceives of nature in Catholic rather than Protestant terms," but ultimately "portrays the deficiency, indeed the horror, of a world apparently without grace and certainly without redemption" (Beauregard 2008, pp. 205, 217).

[54] The image of Cordelia's corpse is a contentious but ambiguous one. Treated as a religious image, it cannot settle recent heated debates about Shakespeare's own religious convictions, or even whether his sympathies tended toward the old Roman Catholicism or some sort of Protestantism. On one hand, Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* provides a notable example of a Catholic humanist satirizing over-attention to religious images; on the other, the Protestant view of images was not uniformly iconoclastic, especially among English Protestants (Davis 2013, pp. 68–69). In one of his sermons John Donne wrote, "there is no necessity of pictures; but will not every man add this. That if the true use of Pictures be preached unto them, there is no danger of an abuse" (qtd. in Davis 2013, p. 68). Donne's measured tolerance of images if properly explained may be contrasted with the Elizabethan Homily Against Peril of Idolatry, which insists that "idolatrie is to Images, specially in Temples and Churches, an inseparable accident (as they terme it) so that Images in Churches, and idolatrie, go alwayes both together, and that therefore the one cannot bee avoyded, except the other (specially in all publike places) bee destroyed" (Lancashire 1994). The image debate continued into the Jacobean period, with the king himself articulating his position in his 1609 *Premonition to all most Mighty Monarches, Kings, Free Princes, and States of Christendome*:

> I am no *Iconomachus*; I quarrell not with the making of Images, either for publike decoration, or for mens private uses: But that they should bee worshipped, bee prayed to, or any holinesse attributed unto them, was never knowen of the Ancients: And the Scriptures are so directly, vehemently and punctually against it, as I wonder what braine of man, or suggestion of Sathan durst offer it to Christians. (James 1918)

While many early modern Protestants considered venerating religious images idolatrous, there were those whose nuanced positions permitted the use of images as an aid to spiritual devotion. Lutherans, for example, permitted crucifixes, and the reformer Peter Vermigli, whose *Loci Communes* was published in London in 1583, proposed that Jesus "may be resembled and painted out" (Davis 2016, pp. 126–27; Davis 2013, pp. 105–8). Conversely, John Calvin, in his sermons on Deuteronomy (also published in London in 1583), argued against any images of Christ: "Yes, and therefore whenever a crucifix stands

In accordance with Jesus' warning in Luke 17:25, perhaps one is foolish even to bother to "look there" at all.

In terms of the early modern image debate, an eikon or image may not be an idol if it serves as an aid to worship something or someone beyond it. For many Protestant Reformers, images, like sacraments, are properly useful only when clearly associated with the Word of God.[55] What sacred word might be associated with the image of the dead Cordelia? Even the iconoclast might agree that the wrongful use of images is found in the heart of the worshipper, not in the image itself. In the last scene of *Lear*, even amid all the pathos, we have limited access to the heart of Lear in his last moments of life. One might recollect Alison Shell's suspicion of the "dangerously limited manner" of Lear's redemption (Shell 2010, p. 193).

If the early modern theatergoer saw in the body of Cordelia an imitation of a religious image, what reference might be discovered in the spectacle? What word might be on her unmoving lips? We are commanded to gaze at the dead Cordelia, and left wondering if there is "aught within that little-seeming substance," challenged to decide whether, even in her death, we can yet see the inner value of the princess, that she is herself a dowry (1.1.199, 243). Outwardly, the body of Cordelia is a picture of death, suffering, and injustice. Inwardly, she becomes a sign of truth, love, and sacrifice—not a thing to be worshipped, but a visual aid to worship. Such an image serves as a reminder of the words she had once spoken: "love, dear Love ... "; "I am, I am"; "no cause, no cause." The lips may serve as the outward indication of the heart (cf. Luke 6:45, Matthew 12:34), but Cordelia and Kent have shown that, while there are occasions for speaking out, there are also occasions when one cannot heave one's heart into one's mouth. For those who best know Cordelia's heart, her "Nothing, my lord" is perhaps as meaningful and virtuous as "love, dear Love" (1.1.87, 4.4.28). Her compassionate action on Lear's behalf signified by the latter phrase is motivated by her personal integrity under pressure, signified by the former. It takes five tragic acts for Lear to know and articulate the value of such a heart.

We are at a crux. Cordelia may become for the spectator a false Christ, an ineffectual Messiah, or an idol—but for those who might see her heart—feelingly, not with ocular observation—even in her death the spectacle of her body on stage might serve as true icon, referring beyond itself to the truth and love Lear has come to recognize and cherish—the truth and love that, in the midst of great suffering, has transformed him.

In Luke 17, Jesus does not simply negate the storm-chasers. By pointing forward to an unmistakable day of revelation, he silences speculative rumors, but he also directs his disciples to the most immediate place of redemption: "The kingdome of God is within you." It is the interior space of the self—it is the heart—that for now must carry the kingdom of God. And perhaps this is what Lear ultimately sees in Cordelia, and in the process of such a revelation, sparks in himself.

After all, the richest portion of the kingdom has ever been interior. On a literal level, Lear begins the play intending to award his youngest daughter the "more opulent" middle regions of his domain, thereby creating a buffer kingdom separating the lands subjected to the belligerent whims of his first two daughters, their husbands, and their armies (1.1.86). The Fool knows that Cordelia was central to Lear's original plans, not only for the "kind nursery" Lear expects from her for his own person, but also for the peaceful influence her governance would provide the kingdom. According to the Fool's raillery, Cordelia is the nutritious meat of an egg, while Goneril and Regan are the empty half-shells surrounding her (1.4.148–54). She is the nose, keeping the spying eyes on either side of one's face

mopping and mowing in the church, it is all one as if the Devil had defaced the son of God" (Davis 2016, p. 54). For more on reconsidering iconoclasm in early modern England, see (Budd 2000).

[55] See (Hutchinson 2017). The Protestant Reformers frequently referred to sacraments as "visible words" that are nevertheless *not* self-explanatory, and consequently must be joined to the Word of God to be received in understanding and faith. The position is articulated in John Calvin's *Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper* (sect. 48), which supports its position with reference to Augustine's *Tractates on the Gospel of John* (Tractate 80). David J. Davis connects Protestant liturgical emphasis on the Word to the early modern image debate: "[A]lthough no longer points of reverence, [religious images] continued to thrive as points of reference" (Davis 2013, p. 69).

(1.5.19–24). She is the natural locus of wisdom, or would have been, the Fool implies, had Lear kept her inheritance in place. As it stands, however, the Fool chides, "Thou hast pared thy wit o'both sides and left nothing i'the middle. Here comes one o' the parings" (1.4.177–79). The Fool's announcement of Goneril's entrance makes it clear that "nothing I' th' middle" is a lament over the loss of Cordelia as ruler over an interior kingdom. Her substantial political worth as implied in Act 1 is all the more evident in the beginning of Act 2, where Curan informs Edmund of the rumors of imminent war between Albany and Cornwall (2.1.7–12). And yet, from the first mentioning of her heart, Cordelia's association with an interior kingdom is not only physical, but spiritual.

Lear is not redeemed upon evangelical Christian terms. He has not in a burst of illumination received a glimpse of a future Christian era and accepted Jesus Christ as Savior. Lear is not even redeemed in the sense in which Dante redeems a few of his favorite pagans, granting Ripheus and Trajan a place in paradise through divine grace and through their personal virtue. If Lear is redeemed, he is redeemed as a pagan, but through a journey understandable to a Christian audience. If he is in some sense saved, he is saved by Cordelia's heart: by her truth and love.

It is necessary to permit ambiguity. The history of the debate over the ending of *Lear* is too rich to resolve or explain in a way that satisfies all tastes and accounts for all perspectives within a single thesis. Nonetheless, given the profound thematic and topical parallels between *Lear* and Luke 17, I remain surprised that Lear's final words have not previously been explored in relation to Luke 17:20–21. It bears repeating: acknowledging this allusion does not remove all ambiguities. Lear's command to "Look there" may yet be the mark of delusion or unwitting deception. Even so, one might arrive at the same conclusion through two pathways. One might "look there" at Cordelia, not as an idolater nor as an iconoclast, but as a sensitive spectator, seeing the body of Cordelia as a religious image properly, as a visual that evokes sincerity in feeling and in worship and leads beyond itself to the Word. Alternatively, mindful of the allusion to Luke 17, one might choose to ignore the command to "Look there" and consider instead how "the kingdom of God is within" the self, and within one's own community. The result is the same: a turn toward a realm that is seen "not with observation" but feelingly, the realm of love resulting in humility, hope, compassion, and active and beneficent service. Hearts work best in *King Lear* when they are stubborn in their commitment to truth and virtue, and yet fragile in their compassionate response to suffering.

Even as her corpse lies in Lear's arms, Cordelia as image might yet be going about her father's business. If we, like Mary and Joseph, do not have the insight to fully understand this image, and the words she has spoken that lie behind it, who could blame us? But perhaps Lear, who began the play by seeking partial, outward manifestation of his daughters' love—through words if not through deeds—has come to realize what is in Cordelia's heart—not only her innocence, for that he discovered earlier, but also a certain sacred, living kingdom. Here, in the heart, is the apocalypse, understood properly as a revelation, and the anagnorisis of the tragedy, and the promise of life to come. Perhaps Lear's last words point to the apocalyptic warnings of Luke 17, as well as to Job and one of the most vivid intimations of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body in Hebrew sacred scripture:

> "For I am sure that my redeemer liveth, and he shall stand the last on the earth. And though after my skinne wormes destroy this body, yet shall I see God in my flesh. Whom I my selfe shall see, and mine eyes shall beholde, and none other for me, though my reins are consumed within me." (Job 19:25–27) [56]

Shakespeare's play is profoundly, fantastically, exuberantly ambiguous. Perhaps this is partly because the existence and location of kingdom must be decided in the heart of the reader. To each his own. Broadening the context of our intertext, one may find in Luke 17:33 the promise that "Whosoever

[56] In Hebrew sacred scriptures, the reins (kidneys) were the seat of affections or feelings, in correspondence with our metaphoric understanding of the heart today.

will seek to save his soule shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose it, shall get it." Perhaps it is only as he loses it that Lear can be every inch a king.

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Article

Prospero, the Divine Shepherd, and Providence: Psalm 23 as a Rubric for Alonso's Redemptive Progress and the Providential Workings of Prospero's Spiritual Restoration in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

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Abstract: In this essay, I argue that Psalm 23 serves as a thematic rubric through which to understand how Prospero's machinations affect the progress of the redemption of King Alonso throughout the play. At the same time, however, recognizing Prospero's moral complexities and deficiencies, I also argue that Prospero's mercy toward and reconciliation with Alonso ultimately demonstrates the sovereign influence of a Providence beyond Prospero's control—a Providence that works through charity and grace beyond Prospero's initial intentions. This higher providential power, therefore, ought rightly to be seen as the ultimate shepherd of the play—one who works to effect not only Alonso's but also Prospero's spiritual restoration.

Keywords: *The Tempest*; Bible; Providence; Prospero; Alonso; Ariel; Caliban; Epilogue; Richard Hooker; John Calvin; *Twelfth Night*; Malvolio; Gonzalo

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Studies on Shakespeare's use of the themes and language from the Bible have flourished since the beginning of the twentieth century, continuing to the present day.[1] However, no critic has yet investigated Shakespeare's use of Psalm 23 in his late romance, *The Tempest*. In this essay, however, I will argue that Psalm 23 serves as a thematic rubric through which to understand how Prospero's machinations affect the progress of redemption of King Alonso throughout the play. (Readers will recall that Alonso—now shipwrecked with his royal company by Prospero's magic on the island Prospero rules—supported then-Duke Prospero's usurpation by his brother, Antonio). I suggest that Shakespeare's text demonstrates, in ways that Alonso himself never recognizes and in ways that transcend Prospero's own understanding, that Prospero's supernatural orchestration of various events—particularly his preventing Alonso's murder and his spectacular but ultimately merciful prodding of Alonso's conscience in ways that elicit the king's repentance and restoration—allows Shakespeare's audience to view Alonso in relation to the psalm's speaker and to view Prospero in relation to the psalm's Lord and shepherd.

At the same time, however, recognizing Prospero's own moral deficiencies—his problematic penchant for complete control over the persons and events of the play, his deep-seated bitterness against his enemies, and, indeed, his own need for redemption—in this essay, I will also argue that Prospero's mercy toward and reconciliation with Alonso ultimately demonstrates the sovereign influence of a Providence beyond Prospero's control—a Providence that works through charity and grace beyond Prospero's initial intentions, a Providence that transcends the efforts of any human individual, however powerful and however benevolent or flawed, who would seek to exercise godlike machinations even within his limited sphere of control. This higher providential power, therefore, ought rightly to be seen

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1 See especially (Shaheen 1999), (Hamlin 2013), and, very recently and for the Special Issue "Religions in Shakespeare's Writings," (Skwire 2018) and (Stelzer 2019).

as the ultimate shepherd of the play—one who works to affect not only Alonso's but also Prospero's spiritual restoration in ways that also recall aspects of Psalm 23.

My essay, on one level, falls within the long tradition of viewing Prospero as a kind of God figure upon his island, although my recognition of Prospero's various moral shortcomings distinguishes my reading of Prospero from the more idealized views offered by (Russell 1876, pp. 482–85), (Still 1921, pp. 202–3), or (Boitani 2013, pp. 89–123).[2] Nonetheless, I argue that Prospero's basic attitude toward Alonso is benevolent, seeking genuine reconciliation with the man largely responsible for exiling Prospero and his daughter Miranda, desiring the restoration of Alonso's soul.[3] In this sense, Prospero plays the role of the divine shepherd of Psalm 23, and we may trace the path of Alonso's redemption through Prospero's benevolent (albeit also self-interested) machinations by comparing certain stages of Alonso's time on the island with specific portions of the psalm. I will note that certain specific connections between the psalm and the play are ironic in nature, but when we view these connections within the larger process of Alonso's redemption, we may recognize that these ironic elements play significant roles within Alonso's redemptive progress. Finally, in this essay, I shall demonstrate that the goodness and mercy that pursue Alonso throughout the play transcend Prospero's intentions toward Alonso—intentions that combine both benevolence and a bitterness that wars against Prospero's better virtues. Indeed, our recognition that a higher benevolence than Prospero's guides the paths of Alonso's and Prospero's redemptions allows us to better understand Prospero's complexities as one who, amid his own godlike control of the events and persons who surround him, is in the end a fallible human being also needing forgiveness.[4]

1. Psalm 23, Prospero, and Alonso's Redemptive Progress

I quote Psalm 23[5] in full below:

1 The Lord *is* my shepherd, I shal not want.
2 He maketh me to rest in grene pasture, & leadeth me by the stil waters.
3 He restoreth my soule, & leadeth me in the paths of righteousnes for his Names sake.
4 Yea, thogh I shulde walke through the valley of the shadow of death, I wil feare no euil: for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staffe, they comfort me.
5 Thou doest prepare a table before me in the sight of mine aduersaries: thou doest anoint mine head with oyle, *and* my cup runneth ouer.
6 Douteles kindenes, & mercie shal follow me all the dayes of my life, and I shal remaine a long season in the house of the Lord.

Throughout my discussion, I do not argue that the stages of Alonso's Prospero-guided progress of redemption occur in an order that coincides with the order of the psalm's verses; however, each of the verses expresses an idea or action that, in some way, significantly coincides with Prospero's restoration of Alonso.[6] The psalm's first verse establishes both Prospero's essential godlike benevolence toward Alonso and a basic assurance that, whatever his hardships on Prospero's island, Alonso will be cared for by his merciful host. The sixth and final verse similarly establishes the mercy and grace with which Prospero pursues Alonso—a grace that offers blessings that extend well beyond the temporal

[2] See also (Knight 1948, pp. 208, 232, 234, 242) and (Nuttal 1957, pp. 6–7, 9–10).
[3] Robert Egan states that Prospero's intentions in shipwrecking the royal party are to subject Alonso (and, ideally, Antonio and Sebastian as well) "to an ordeal of self-knowledge and purgation" (Egan 1972, p. 175).
[4] My reading of Prospero as one whose intentions toward his enemies are genuinely restorative but nonetheless significantly tainted by morally problematic emotions and actions goes against the portrayal of Prospero as primarily manipulative and self-serving as seen in (Shakespeare 1987), although I do not thereby deny the appropriateness of some of Orgel's skepticism about Prospero's character.
[5] This and all biblical quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the 1560 Geneva Bible (Geneva Bible 1969).
[6] My extensive use of Psalm 23 as a rubric by which to understand *The Tempest* finds some precedent in (Esolen 1997) and its extensive use of Isaiah as a key for understanding the same play.

parameters of the play. The verses in 23.2–5 suggest specific ways in which Prospero's benevolence toward Alonso manifests itself.

Psalm 23.2 parallels rather explicitly Prospero's machinations toward Alonso in Act 2, Scene 2, even as Psalm 23.6 is implicitly present here and in the other scenes where Alonso is present. Although of course ignorant of the source of the benevolence that now "follow[s]" them, Alonso's councilor, Gonzalo, immediately recognizes Prospero's "mercie" toward the king's party. As the party—consisting also of the evil Antonio, Alonso's treacherous brother Sebastian (who also supported Prospero's usurpation), and the young lords Adrian and Francisco—walks, presumably not far from the now "stil waters" from which they emerged, Gonzalo observes the "miracle" of their "preservation" (2.2.6–7), noting not only that they are all alive upon a verdant island but also the strange fact that their recently sea-drenched garments are unstained and in excellent condition. Specific parallels with Psalm 23.2 are evident in lines 189–98, when Alonso, along with the other voyagers besides Antonio and Sebastian, are *made* to rest, indeed sleep, by Prospero's magic via Ariel. This rest is a great mercy indeed to Alonso, whose soul—not to mention body—is painfully weary because of the presumed drowning of his son, Ferdinand. Significantly, the grass in which they lie down is described by Gonzalo as "lush and lusty" and "green" (2.2.53–54), and Gonzalo's description recalls the "grene pasture" of Psalm 23.2, in which the psalm's speaker proclaims that the Lord "maketh me rest." When Ariel awakens Alonso and Gonzalo just in time to foil Antonio and Sebastian's attempt to murder them, we see Psalm 23.4 come into view. For although Alonso "walke[s] through the valley of the shadow of death" (or sleeps there!), he need "feare no euil," because Prospero is with him through Ariel, with Prospero's magic "staffe" protecting the king.[7]

When Alonso next appears in Act 3, Scene 3, we again see him "walke through the valley of the shadow of death" in ways that he himself does not recognize. He again complains of his weariness and hopelessness because of Ferdinand's supposed death (3.3.5–10), and we may rightly suspect that he now contemplates suicide; more explicitly, however, Antonio and Sebastian remain resolved to murder Alonso and Gonzalo (3.3.11–17). However, amid Alonso's danger, Prospero is there—explicitly present "on the top" of the stage and "invisible" to the other human characters,[8] as is described by the stage directions following line 17—protecting the king with his magic staff in ways that I shall discuss below.

It is just at this point that Prospero's spirits bring forward their banquet table, and here the play's connection to Psalm 23—specifically verse 5—again becomes explicit: Prospero here "prepare[s] a table before me [Alonso] in the sight of my aduersaries." At this point, the ironic nature of the play's connection to Psalm 23 is increasingly significant. For although Prospero does indeed prepare a banquet table for Alonso in the presence of his unknown-to-him enemies and would-be murderers, the table disappears before they can eat of it, and any blessing Prospero here offers the hungry king is not immediately apparent. Such blessing is even less apparent when, upon the table's disappearance, Ariel appears as a harpy—a mythical bird "associated with guilt and punishment" (Kott 1976, p. 433)—to rebuke Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian, whom Ariel calls "three men of sin" (3.3.53) for their respective roles in Prospero's usurpation and, says Ariel, Prospero's and Miranda's drowning. Ariel also specifically tells Alonso that because of divine justice, his own son has also been drowned:

> . . . for which foul deed
> The pow'rs, delaying, not forgetting, have
> Incensed the seas and shores, yea, all the creatures,

[7] Unless otherwise noted, all quotations for *The Tempest* are from (Shakespeare 1999). A more cynical reading of this scene is offered by Curt Breight, who suggests that "Prospero is responsible for setting up [Antonio and Sebastian's] conspiracy," the knowledge of which Prospero uses at the end of the play "to blackmail" the duo (Breight 1990, p. 16). I rather suggest that, in this scene, Prospero uses Ariel's ministrations to test Antonio and Sebastian, finding them unchanged in their morality from twelve years earlier.

[8] In a comment germane to the present study, John C. Adams describes Prospero here as appearing "like some god of Olympus surveying mortals on the earth" (Adams 1938, p. 415).

> Against your peace. Thee of thy son, Alonso,
> They have bereft; and do pronounce by me
> Ling'ring perdition (worse than any death
> Can be at once) shall step by attend
> You and your ways. . . (3.3.72–79)

One might object at this point that the table that Prospero prepares for Alonso hardly resembles the image of blessing, protection, and spiritual refreshment suggested by Psalm 23.5. However, Ariel's speech, though it initially torments the guilt-stricken Alonso, is intended "to reform" (Lamb 1998, p. 544). At the end of his terrifying speech, Ariel offers an alternative to "Ling'ring perdition": "heart's sorrow" (repentance) that brings about "a clear [innocent] life" (3.3.81–82).[9] Indeed, Ariel's confrontation becomes a wondrous instrument of grace to affect the king's redemption, and when Prospero, describing Ariel's speech, says, "a grace it had" (3.3.84), he speaks better than most commentators recognize. As Grace Tiffany recognizes, Ariel "has 'grace'" and "is a heavenly hound who drives" sinners "to repentance" (Tiffany 2000, p. 429). Indeed, the "table" that Prospero prepares for Alonso "in the sight of" his enemies is a table that confronts sin and offers spiritual cleansing.[10] Moreover, both Alonso's mournful admission of his transgression against Prospero and his recognition of the consequent (seeming) drowning of Ferdinand (3.3.95–99, which I examine closely later) clearly distinguish him from the thoroughly unrepentant responses of Antonio and Sebastian, who exit after senselessly declaring their intentions to battle the supernatural forces they are powerless to oppose (3.3.103–4). Significantly, their shocked reactions to Ariel's speech have displaced their plot to murder Alonso—a displacement attributable to Prospero's machinations. Nonetheless, we should note that Alonso's final words in the scene are not hopeful:

> Therefore my son i' th' ooze is bedded; and
> I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded
> And with him there lie mudded. (3.3.100–2)

Here, Alonso declares his frankly suicidal intention, but he does not act on his despair. Rather, the next time we see Alonso is early in the play's final scene (stage instructions following 5.1.57). There, he enters with Sebastian and Antonio, as well as Gonzalo, Adrian, and Francisco, all charmed by Prospero's spell, unable to speak, and seemingly unable to move but by Ariel's leading, presumably taken captive by Ariel at Prospero's behest shortly after the party's exit at the end of Act 3, Scene 3. Here, we can see that Prospero has again protected Alonso as he "walke[s] through the valley of the shadow of death," for Alonso has been harmed neither by Antonio and Sebastian nor by himself.

When Prospero breaks his charm and restores Alonso and the others to their senses, Alonso, who had been described as entering the scene "with a frantic gesture," responds immediately to Prospero's self-revelation with both relief and humble, tangible repentance as he speaks to his former captor:

> Thy pulse
> Beats, as of flesh and blood; and, since I saw thee,
> Th' affliction of my mind amends, with which,
> I fear, a madness held me.. . .
> . . .
> Thy dukedom I resign and I do entreat

[9] My glosses upon "heart's sorrow" and "clear" are taken from Peter Holland's notes in (Shakespeare 1999, p. 59). Perhaps more helpfully, Maurice Hunt defines "heart's sorrow, / And a clear life ensuing" as "repentance and sanctification" (Hunt 1993, p. 294). Thomas McAlindon correctly observes that here, Alonso has "been subjected to an experience designed by Prospero to lead him through 'heart's sorrow' to 'a clear life ensuing' (III.iii.81–2)" (McAlindon 2001, p. 348).

[10] Anthony M. Esolen, following the reading of (Berger 1977, pp. 226–27) that Ariel's banquet table "is eucharistic," argues that the sinful trio's unconfessed sin prevents them from eating at the table. Indeed, "There can be no communion . . . without repentance" (Esolen 1997, p. 233).

Thou pardon me my wrongs. (5.1.113–16, 118–19)

Alonso's plea for Prospero's forgiveness[11] is accompanied by his report that his afflicted mind has been healed, presumably by the opportunity to gain reconciliation with the man for whose supposed death the conscience-stricken Alonso knew he was responsible. Here, we see that Prospero's machinations have again brought about another specific and spiritually crucial element of Psalm 23: the psalmist's declaration that the Lord "restoreth my soule" (23.3), with the soul encompassing both the emotional and moral dimensions that Alonso describes above. Moreover, Alonso's stated intention to return Milan's dukedom to Prospero—who introduces himself to Alonso as "The wronged Duke of Milan, Prospero!" (5.1.107)—demonstrates that Prospero is successfully leading Alonso "in the paths of righteousness for his Names sake" (Psalm 23.3). Indeed, Prospero's self-interest in Alonso's redemptive progress is captured within the psalm as well, for Alonso's repentance affirms the truth of Prospero's naming himself the rightful Duke of Milan.

However, the blessings that Prospero here offers Alonso go beyond forgiveness and moral/spiritual restoration; indeed, Prospero blesses Alonso in ways that exceed the king's hopes, thus coinciding with another portion of Psalm 23. We must recognize that, even after Alonso and Prospero are reconciled, Alonso remains convinced that Ferdinand is drowned, expressing his resignation to this supposed fact: "Irreparable is the loss, and patience / Says it is past her cure" (5.1.140–41). Moreover, when Prospero tells him that he also "lost [his] daughter" (5.1.148), Alonso responds by uttering a seemingly unanswerable prayer for the two youths and then expressing his desire to die in their stead:

O heavens, that they were both living in Naples,
The king and queen there! That they were, I wish
Myself were mudded in that oozy bed
Where my son lies. (5.1.149–52)

Prospero soon proceeds to present the still-living and now-engaged Ferdinand and Miranda to Alonso, who responds with joy and amazement (see 5.172–215). Remarkably, what Prospero now gives Alonso transcends even the king's stated fantasy: Alonso had wished that the couple could be ruling in Naples, at the price of his own life; but now, his wish has been granted beyond his utterance, for Alonso is separated from Ferdinand and his bride neither by death nor by location, and they have every expectation to live together happily back in Naples for years to come. Alonso's joy in his "discovery that [his] despairing prayer is to be answered" is repeated in his "ecstatic" "amen" (5.1.204) to Gonzalo's benediction upon the young couple (5.1.201–4) (McAlindon 2001, p. 347). The fact that Prospero here blesses Alonso in ways that transcend the king's deepest hopes again reflects Psalm 23, in which the psalmist proclaims, "my cup runneth ouer" (23.5). Moreover, Alonso's overflowing blessings increase upon the sudden reappearance of the Boatswain, who joyously announces that their ship, which they thought had been destroyed, is now miraculously "tight and yare and bravely rigged as when / We first put out to sea" (5.1.224–25), having been secretly repaired by Ariel at Prospero's direction.

Having examined specific parallels between portions of *The Tempest* and particular phrases in Psalm 23.2–5, let us now return to the larger thematic parallels between Alonso and Prospero's relationship and Psalm 23.1 and 23.6, particularly the latter. In light of Prospero's arranging of the presumably happy and fruitful marriage between Ferdinand and Miranda, we recognize that Prospero's "kindenes & mercie" will pursue Alonso "all the dayes of [his] life." Indeed, Alonso's delight in the couple's engagement suggests that their marriage and anticipated children will indeed bless Alonso for the remainder of his years.

Moreover, Prospero's charity toward Alonso is evident throughout the entire play, for the opening scene suggests Prospero's first effort to "restore" Alonso's "soule" (23.3). We see little of Alonso in the

[11] Francis Neilson notes that Alonso's "remorse" and "confession" follows the pattern of "the Lord's Prayer" (Neilson 1959, p. 430).

first scene, but what we hear about him is extremely important: amid the tempest, Gonzalo announces that "The king and prince [are] at prayers," urging the others to "assist them, for our case is as theirs" (1.1.52–53). In stark contrast to Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian show no interest in prayers, even as their lives seem almost certain to end, and Antonio continues to heap abuse upon the Boatswain, to whom he has recently said, "We [he and Sebastian] are less afraid to be drowned than thou art" (1.1.44–45), displaying a startling degree of self-righteousness for a fratricide at death's door. Significantly, from the onset of the play, Alonso behaves very differently from Prospero's other enemies, recognizing his own mortality and his need to make peace with the divine before his death.

If Alonso is "at prayers" during the first scene's tempest, we may speculate regarding the content of his prayers. Given that the passengers recognize their imminent deaths as almost inevitable, we may expect that Alonso here offers prayers of confession, asking for forgiveness of past sins. The play's text suggests both that the praying Alonso is remembering his sin against Prospero and that Prospero himself is orchestrating this recollection. The evidence for this assertion can be found in Alonso's response to Ariel's speech to the "three men of sin":

> O, it is monstrous, monstrous!
> Methought the billows spoke and told me of it,
> The winds did sing it to me, and the thunder,
> That deep and dreadful organ pipe, pronounced
> The name of Prosper; it did bass my trespass. (3.3.95–99)

The immediate context of these lines suggests that the "billows," "winds," and "thunder" that Alonso mentions are those that accompany Ariel's speech (McAlindon 2001, p. 348), which the stage directions tell us is accompanied by "Thunder and lightning" and, arguably, the "loud winds" and "still-closing waters" that Ariel mentions when he tells Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio the following:

> The elements,
> Of whom your swords are tempered, may as well
> Wound the loud winds, or with bemocked-at stabs
> Kill the still-closing waters, as diminish
> One dowl that's in my plume. (3.3.61–65)

Robert Grams Hunter goes so far as to assert that Alonso's "memory of his crime against Prospero [had] sunk to the bottom of his mind" until Ariel's speech (Hunter 1965, p. 232).

However, the idea that Alonso would not have considered—during what he thinks are his final prayers before death!—his role in the presumed deaths of Prospero and Miranda seems highly unlikely. Rather, Alonso's diction suggests that his above lines also, or even primarily, refer to the initial tempest of the opening scene. Indeed, For Alonso to say "*Methought* the billows spoke ... " with reference to Ariel's speech seems odd on several levels. First, because Ariel's speech ends only seconds before Alonso speaks, "Me*thinks*" would be the more appropriate word choice if Alonso were referring to this speech. However, "Methought" is entirely appropriate if Alonso is referring back to what he thought he heard in the initial tempest. Second, the word "methought" implies that Alonso has some uncertainty about what he just heard concerning Prospero and his sin against him. However, what Ariel, fully visible in the form of a harpy, has just spoken is abundantly clear, both to Alonso and the others, so any expression of uncertainly by Alonso regarding Ariel's speech seems out of place. Such uncertainty, however, is entirely understandable if, during the opening scene's tempest, an invisible Ariel spoke to the king of his sin against Prospero. Moreover, Alonso's presumed prayers of confession in the opening scene are a sensible response to such foreboding words.

Third and closely related to the previous point, Alonso here speaks of hearing of such matters from the "billows," "winds," and "thunder." However, although Shakespeare's stage directions explicitly mention that "thunder and lightning" precede (and perhaps accompany) Ariel's speech, Ariel's convicting words are clearly spoken by Ariel, not the elements. However, an invisible Ariel speaking

of Alonso's sin during the opening tempest would certainly give the impression that such words were being spoken by the elements themselves. Fourth, again closely related, is Alonso's mention of the "billows" speaking. Although Ariel talks of "still closing waters" in his speech, the stage directions do not mention them, and Ariel's words do not necessarily mean that such threatening waters are near them at this time. However, such billows were certainly present during the tempest.

Finally, Alonso's declaration that the thunder "did bass my trespass" merits scrutiny. Why does Alonso say "my trespass" instead of "*our* trespass," given the fact that Ariel clearly addresses all three transgressors in his speech? Obviously, Alonso is, at this point, consumed with the horrible realization that his sin has brought about the seeming death of his son, and perhaps that is explanation enough. However, the idea of having the thunder specifically speak of *Alonso's* trespass is especially sensible if Ariel, invisible during the tempest, spoke to Alonso individually. In that case, Alonso would already be conscience stricken before he commenced to prayers beneath the ship's hull, and indeed, Ariel's words would have elicited Alonso's determination to pray. Moreover, and related to my first point two paragraphs above, Alonso's saying "did bass"—as opposed to "bassed"—again serves to remove from this scene's immediate temporal context Ariel's initial supernatural declaration of Alonso's sin against Prospero. Moreover, "did bass" also allows for the possibility of the actor playing Alonso to emphasize the word "did"—an emphasis that would affirm Alonso's previous sense that the thunder during the opening scene's tempest *did in fact* "pronounce / The name Prosper" and thus "bass [Alonso's] trespass." All this textual evidence suggests that Alonso's ultimately grace-giving conviction of sin, elicited by Prospero via Ariel, began upon the ship during the initial tempest.

2. Prospero, Providence, and the Path to Redemption

In this essay thus far, I have demonstrated both that Psalm 23 offers an important interpretive rubric by which to understand Alonso's redemptive progress and that Prospero's active work eliciting Alonso's progress is evident from the play's opening scene, manifesting itself in each scene in which Alonso appears and climaxing during the final scene. For the remainder of the essay, I will move beyond direct discussion of Prospero's efforts in Alonso's redemption and investigate how the play's larger redemptive structure suggests the workings of a greater Providence that guides the action of the play as well as events in Prospero's life that precede the play's action. This Providence transcends Prospero's machinations—be they benevolent or self-serving—and indeed precipitates not only Alonso's but also Prospero's redemption in ways that again call to mind Psalm 23, as we perceive Providence working through both to protect Alonso and Prospero from death and to restore their souls, a restoration that culminates in the play's final scene and Prospero's Epilogue. Throughout this section, while not denying my previous assertions regarding Prospero's ultimately restorative intentions toward Alonso, I will emphasize somewhat Prospero's moral imperfections, recognizing his own need for spiritual restoration amid the conflict that rages within Prospero's soul, as he vacillates between his desires for reconciliation and vengeance.

The play's first suggestion of such a Providence is explicitly mentioned in the second scene. There, after Prospero tells Miranda his account of his betrayal and usurpation at the hands of his beloved brother Antonio, with Alonso's support, Miranda asks, "How came we ashore?" Prospero immediately responds, "By Providence divine" (1.2.159–60).[12] The argument that Prospero's words ought to be considered a genuine acknowledgement of divine aid is strengthened by Prospero's previous description of the unseaworthy boat that his usurpers provided him and Miranda in the hope that they would drown at sea. He calls it:

> A rotten carcass of a butt, not rigged,
> Nor tackle, sail, nor mast; the very rats
> Instinctively have quit it. (1.2.146–48)

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12 My capitalization of "Providence" follows (Shakespeare 1974) and various other editions.

Moreover, Prospero's description of the sea's initial condition when he and Miranda were placed in the boat is significant: "There they hoist us, / To cry to th' sea that roared to us" (1.2.148–49). However, likely alluding to the Providence he explicitly mentions moments later, Prospero continues: "to sigh / To the winds, whose pity, sighing back again, / Did us but loving wrongs" (1.2.149–51).[13] Indeed, although Prospero's enemies put Prospero and Miranda into a wretched boat in adverse conditions, the winds themselves, guided "[b]y Providence divine," modulated the roaring sea, took them—similar to the psalm's speaker—"through the valley of the shadow of death" (23.4a), and brought them safely to the island where they lived twelve years. Providence is also evident in the ministrations of then-three-year-old Miranda, who, Prospero tells her, was, during their sea journey, "a cherubim / ... that didst preserve me ... / Infuséd with a fortitude from heaven" (152–54).[14] Prospero's recollection of Miranda's angelic blessings again parallels the sentiment of the psalmist, who tells his Lord, "for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staffe, they comfort me" (23.4b).

The hand of Providence is also implicitly evident in Prospero and Miranda's ability to live on the island for many years. Prospero immediately follows his mention of providence by noting the gracious efforts of Gonzalo, who, "Out of his *charity*" (emphasis added; we may note Prospero's theologically rich diction here, cf. 1 Corinthians 13), stocked the boat with "food," "fresh water," "garments," and various other "necessaries," as well as Prospero's books (1.2.162, 160, 164; see 160–68). Indeed, in spite of his deadly situation, Prospero, thanks to Gonzalo's charity, did "not want" (Psalm 23.1). The items Gonzalo gave Prospero enabled him and Miranda to survive their trip and initial days on the island, even as they enabled Prospero to free Ariel from the "cloven pine" (1.2.277) where he was trapped for twelve years by the spell of the witch Sycorax (see 1.2.277–79). We may speculate whether the "art" (1.2.291) Prospero used to free Ariel was a magic spell from his books or simply the wielding of an ax Gonzalo might have included among the aforementioned "necessaries" (see 1.2.291–93). Indeed, we may see the hand of Providence in providing Prospero and Miranda with the assistance of Caliban, who, upon their initial encounters, "showed the[m] all the qualities o' th' isle" (1.2.337). Conversely, we may ask whether Prospero's decisions to enslave Ariel and eventually Caliban mark Prospero's violation of these providential provisions in favor of misusing his powers to lord his authority over others. We may not unreasonably speculate that Ariel would have happily assisted Prospero out of gratitude instead of compulsion, as Caliban happily assisted Prospero when he first befriended him. In any event, I suggest that Prospero's decision to enslave the two beings whom Providence provided to assist him marks Prospero's transition away from righteous dependence on the good shepherd to his morally problematic penchant for controlling others, which characterizes his rule of the island.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss at length the significant moral violations evident in Prospero's enslavement—and, at least in the case of Caliban, consistently harsh treatment—of Ariel and Caliban.[15] However, we ought to note that Prospero's extreme control of Ariel and Caliban seems motivated by expedience over morality—a practice ironically similar to Antonio's self-justification for usurping Prospero's dukedom. Significantly, it is within his exercise of extreme control that we meet Prospero and see him in action for the vast majority of the play, and amid this exercise of control, Prospero's word choice reveals a disinclination to recognize the Providence that works above his own efforts.

Prospero's movement away from acknowledging Providence displays itself promptly in his conversation with Miranda. After Miranda asks his "reason" (1.2.175) for causing the tempest, Prospero replies:

[13] James Walter asserts that these lines allude to "a Spirit at work in the very processes of nature and history" (Walter 1983, p. 71).

[14] McAlindon writes that "Providence operated first through Gonzalo ... and secondly, through Miranda herself, who was to her despairing father what the comforting angel was to the storm-tossed Paul" (McAlindon 2001, p. 340).

[15] Intriguing recent commentary on this topic is offered by Julia Reinhard Lupton, who writes that Prospero fails to grasp a proper "natural law perspective" that could show him his "equality with Caliban in both dignity and sin," even as he "negate[s] the emancipatory potential of natural law and instead wield[s] the rhetoric of nature to justify slavery" (Lupton 2019, p. 9).

Know thus far forth.
By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune
(Now, my dear lady) hath mine enemies
Brought to this shore; and by my prescience
I find my zenith doth depend upon
A most auspicious star, whose influence
If now I court not, but omit, my fortunes
Will ever after droop. (1.2.176–84)

Significantly, and in marked contrast to his statement only minutes before, Prospero here offers no credit to the Christian notion of Providence for the remarkable development of his enemies' ship passing so close the island but, rather, cites to the pagan notion of "Fortune"—a word choice that calls to mind the absurd mutterings of the vain and deceived steward Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* who, contemplating the notion that his rich and beautiful mistress, the Countess Olivia, might indeed love him, says, "'Tis but fortune, all is fortune" (2.5.23),[16] a parallel that casts some suspicion on Prospero's character. Prospero's change in diction is noteworthy in that Shakespeare's contemporary Christian audience would likely have considered Alonso's ship's unexpected proximity to the island to be as providential as Prospero and Miranda's safe arrival upon its shore. However, Prospero's rhetoric moves away from such an interpretation. Boasting of his "prescience" and speaking within the context of his own "raising" of the tempest that brought his enemies to his island, he declares his pursuit of another pagan symbol of destiny—a "most auspicious star," which he must actively "court" lest his "fortunes" forever "droop." Remarkably, Prospero's reference to this star again parallels the words of Malvolio, who, reading Olivia's maid Maria's forged letter that he thinks reveals Olivia's love for him, ridiculously proclaims, "I thank my stars . . . . Jove and my stars be prais'd!" (2.5.170, 172–73). Though Prospero's words lack the "astrological determinism" (Hunt 1993, p. 281) evident in Malvolio's, Prospero's diction in this paragraph and its accompanying self-exaltation suggest that his portrayal of the supernatural here is on some level as wrongheaded as that of the duped and self-deceived Malvolio—a man who, in the words of Olivia, is characterized by "self-love" (1.5.90).

It is instructive to consider Prospero's aforementioned word choices in light of theological writings contemporary to Shakespeare on the topic of Providence. As Hunt observes, according to the Church of England's most influential theologian, Richard Hooker (1554–1600), "What is Providence to God, working His will through secondary natural agents, goes . . . by different names among men" (Hunt 1993, p. 286). "Nature," writes Hooker in *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, "is nothing else but God's instrument" (Hooker 1841, p. 211). He also writes:

> Only thus much discerned, that the natural generation and process of all things receiveth order of proceeding from the settled stability of divine understanding. This appointeth unto them their kinds of working; the disposition whereof in the purity of God's own knowledge and will is rightly termed by the name of Providence. The same being referred unto the things themselves here disposed by it, was wont by the ancient to be called natural Destiny. (Hooker 1841, p. 211)

Additionally, John Calvin (1509–1564), in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, writes:

> Basil the Great has truly said that "fortune" and "chance" are pagan terms, with whose significance the minds of the godly ought not to be occupied. For if every success is God's blessings, and calamity and adversity his curse, no place now remains in human affairs for fortune or chance . . . . I see that men have a very bad custom, that where one ought to say "God willed this, they say, "fortune willed this." . . . [Augustine] sufficiently demonstrates that men are under, and ruled by, providence. (Calvin 1960, pp. 207–8)

[16] The quotations from *Twelfth Night* are from (Shakespeare 1974).

As Hooker asserts, though the ancients might use the term "Destiny"—a term we shall soon see used by Prospero via Ariel—any such workings by natural effects are properly termed God's Providence. Calvin's language is stronger, admonishing the godly not to credit "fortune" with what is in fact God's Providence. We may recognize that Calvin's aforementioned words cast an even more absurd light upon Malvolio who—though he is, in Maria's words, "sometimes ... a kind of a puritan" (2.3.139) and thus should presumably heed Calvin's words—attributes his life's developments to pagan forces. Prospero, of course, makes no pretense to puritanism. Yet, in light of Hooker's and Calvin's words and Prospero's strange parallels to Malvolio, we may recognize something religiously problematic about Prospero's movement away from acknowledging divine Providence.[17] This movement coincides with his assertion of control over the natural and the supernatural—an assertion that complicates his spiritual condition even as he continues to orchestrate his "project" (5.1.1) that affects the lives of every person on the island.

Notably, Prospero concludes his aforementioned speech by magically putting Miranda to sleep, punctuating his act by saying, "I know thou canst not choose" (186). Prospero's magical control over his daughter—a control exhibited again in his conversation with Ariel that directly follows—helps explain his choice against giving Providence credit for Alonso's ship's proximity to the island. Twelve years before, the betrayed and victimized Prospero, in the throes of a fratricidal usurpation and expected to die at sea, was utterly dependent upon the "charity" of Gonzalo and the "Providence divine" that modulated the weather and brought him and Miranda safely ashore. (That Prospero's worldview when arriving at the island was still basically Judeo-Christian is also suggested by Caliban when he tells Prospero, "When thou cam'st first, / Thou ... / ... / ... [did] teach me how / To name the bigger light, and how the less, / That burn by day or night" [1.2.332–33, 334–36], an obvious allusion to Genesis 1.16.) However, now Prospero's seemingly complete control of his surroundings, a control brought about by his mastery of magic and consequent power over Ariel and the other spirits of the island, allows him to even control the weather and manipulate the actions of his usurpers and the others on their ship. Prospero's use of magic, though clearly abetted by the magic of the isle itself and often used for ostensibly benevolent purposes, certainly alters his spiritual perspective.[18] The fact that sorcery is explicitly condemned within the occult "abominations" of Deuteronomy 18:9–14[19] suggests some explanation for Prospero's movement away from a more Christian framework in order to understand his present situation and his relationship to the events at hand. Nonetheless, even if Prospero chooses not to acknowledge the workings of Providence in bringing his enemies near his shore, Shakespeare's "Jacobian audience" would recognize "the stirring of God's hand" (Tiffany 2000, p. 435; Calvin 1960, p. 210) in orchestrating their arrival—an arrival that paves the way for the restoring of not only Alonso's but also Prospero's soul.

Prospero's rhetorical preference for a pagan presentation of life's unfolding is again evident in the previously discussed scene in which the disguised Ariel confronts Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian. Significantly, Ariel begins his speech as follows:

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17 In light of the documented influence of the book of Isaiah upon *The Tempest* (Esolen 1997), Prospero's pagan diction recalls the 1610 Douay-Rheims Bible's translation of Isaiah 65:11: "And you, that haue forsaken the Lord, that haue forgotten my holie mount, that set a table for fortune ... " (Douay-Rheims Bible 1635). This translation appeared just before or during the time Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest*, generally held to be 1610–11.

18 Egan asserts that the "assumption of godlike powers and responsibilities by one [Prospero] who is in no way superhuman" brings about "the central problem of the play," for Prospero's powers, "being capable of great evil as well as great good, place him in a perilous position." Egan notes, "We need only remind ourselves that "*prospero*" is the Italian for "*faustus*" (Egan 1972, p. 175). Anthony Harris argues that Prospero, by finally abjuring his "rough magic" (5.1.50), admits "the damnable nature of his art" (Harris 1980, p. 136). One need not go as far as Harris (see [Cornfield 1985] for a more moderate position) to recognize that Prospero's mastery of magic and control of spirits leaves him less dependent on the Judeo-Christian concept of providence. John D. Cox suggests that recognizing the parallels between Prospero's and Shakespeare's art—particularly with reference to Prospero's bewildering claim to have raised the dead (5.1.48–50)—defuses the notion that Prospero exercised "demonic power" (Cox 2007, p. 214).

19 See particularly Deuteronomy 18:10 and 14, which specifically forbid "sorcerer[s]"; note also that Caliban describes Prospero to Stephano as "A sorcerer" (3.2.43).

> You are three men of sin, whom destiny—
> That hath to instrument this lower world
> And what is in't—the never-surfeited sea
> Hath caused to belch up you . . . (3.3.53–56, emphasis added)

A bit later, as the company attempt to draw their swords, Ariel says, "You fools: I and my fellows / Are ministers of *Fate*" (3.3.60–61, italics added). Ariel's speech was dictated by Prospero, who, invisible, watches the scene and says to Ariel "Of my instruction has thou nothing bated / In what thou hadst to say" (3.3.85–86). Ariel's use of the words "destiny" and "Fate" are especially important here. Although earlier I emphasized the spiritually restorative nature of Ariel's speech, we now ought to recognize that here Prospero—even as he offers through Ariel's words what Hooker might consider a paganized nod toward a larger providential design—does not actually credit a Providence beyond himself. Rather, unbeknownst to Ariel's listeners, Prospero implicitly portrays himself as "destiny" and "Fate," as well as "The pow'rs" who, because of the trio's "foul deed" against Prospero and Miranda, have now "Incensed the seas and shores, yea, all the creatures, / Against your peace" and have specifically "bereft" Alonso "of [his] son" (3.3.73, 72, 74-75, 76, 75). Indeed, Prospero, through his sorcery, is playing God here, assuming the role of divine justice even as he misleads and tortures Alonso with false information regarding Ferdinand, and although the effects of this scene ultimately bring Alonso to repentance, we may rightly question Prospero's benevolence here and ask if his intentions at this point are in fact reconciliation with his enemies or, rather, the dubious satisfaction of vengefully watching them suffer at his hands. He glories in his victory over his oppressors, saying, "My high charms work, / And these, mine enemies, are all knit up— / In their distractions: they now are in my pow'r" (3.3.88–90). His words here do not reflect Psalm 23's divine shepherd. Viewing Prospero in the fullness of his character and recognizing the conflict between his benevolent intentions and his lingering bitterness, we may see the godlike Prospero for what he is: a man who, as may be expected of a victim of betrayal, is torn between a longing for reconciliation and a desire for vengeance.[20]

Yet, providentially, Prospero's efforts bring about a good that transcends the bitterness that mitigates his charity. Indeed, if we may cynically suggest that, on one level, Prospero's initial words regarding Ariel's speech—"a grace it had, devouring" (84)—speak ironically from Prospero's immediate perspective concerning the "grace" one says before "devouring" a meal,[21] we understand, nonetheless, that Ariel's words do indeed work grace to restore Alonso's soul, convicting him of sin and leading to the repentance and reconciliation of the play's final scene. Moreover, even if the acts of nature on and near the island have been and are being directly orchestrated by Prospero, Alonso himself "apprehends Providence through its secondary agent, nature" (Hunt 1993, p. 295), which not only speaks the name of Prospero and exposes Alonso's sins but has also worked to wreck his ship and seemingly drown Ferdinand as belated justice for Alonso's crimes. Nonetheless, we must recognize that, if this scene were left only to Prospero's own design, Alonso's restoration might never have come about. Strikingly, Alonso's final words in this scene declare his intention to commit suicide, not pursue forgiveness. Convinced that Ferdinand is drowned, Alonso declares, "I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded / And with him there lie mudded" (3.3.101–2). In addition, Prospero in this scene indicates no desire for restoration.[22] Rather, in exiting, he states, "And in these fits I leave them . . . " (3.3.91), departing before Alonso speaks his horrified words.

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[20] R. A. D. Grant writes that "Prospero's residual and quite understandable resentment and tetchiness prior to the great forgiveness scene do not qualify or diminish his goodness, but are rather a constant reminder of what must be conquered or sublimated in order to achieve it" (Grant 1983, p. 241). Grant's comment is easier to agree with in light of the whole of the completed play than at the moments when Prospero, in his resentment, tortures others and even endangers another's life, as he does here. I would add that Prospero's overall goodness has been tainted by his treatment of Caliban.

[21] Holland's notes for (Shakespeare 1999) indicate that here "devouring" means "making the banquet disappear" (p. 59).

[22] Hunt writes, "For the moment, Prospero's eagle-like desire for vengeance overwhelms his angelic, Christian intentions" (Hunt 2003, p. 227).

It is not Prospero but, rather, Gonzalo who, providentially, works here to save Alonso from self-destruction in this "valley of the shadow of death."[23] Seeing that Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian "are desperate" because of "their great guilt" (3.3.104), Gonzalo, once again displaying "grace" (Grant 1983, p. 249), beseeches his younger companions to "follow them swiftly / And hinder them from what this ecstasy / May now provoke them to" (3.3.107–9). Here, as in his saving of Prospero and Miranda twelve years earlier, Gonzalo—who has just before inquired of Alonso "in the name of something holy" (3.3.94)—acts with charity toward Alonso and the others, recognizing their emotional and spiritual desperation and the potential deadliness of their situation. Although Antonio and Sebastian here pursue violence toward others, Gonzalo correctly discerns Alonso's danger of self-harm. Although Ariel presumably works Prospero's charm on the king's company not long after the scene's end, Alonso's being alive at that point can be credited to Gonzalo and the workings of a Providence that transcends whatever charity Prospero intended to grant Alonso amid Ariel's speech.[24] Indeed, the restoring of Alonso's soul in this scene works itself out both through and beyond Prospero's actions.

As the play's final scene begins, Prospero is still reveling in his power and the success of his plans. His repeated use of the word "my" suggests his focus. He concluded the penultimate scene by declaring to Ariel, "At this hour / Lies at my mercy all mine enemies" (4.1.262–63), and he opens the final scene by telling him, "Now does my project gather to a head. / My charms crack not, my spirits obey . . . " (5.1.1–2). At this point, however, Ariel's words break into Prospero's self-focus and control, challenging him to consider the condition of those who now stand "at [his] mercy" and to move toward compassion and genuine mercy:

> The king,
> His brother, and yours abide all three distracted,
> And the remaining mourning over them,
> Brimful of sorrow and dismay; but chiefly
> Him that you termed, sir, the good old Lord Gonzalo.
> His tears runs down his beard like winter's drops
> From eaves of reeds. Your charm so strongly works 'em,
> That if you now beheld them, your affections
> Would become tender.
> PROSPERO
> Dost thou think so, spirit?
> ARIEL
> Mine would sir, were I human. (5.1.11–20)

Prospero's response to Ariel's prodding is to empathize with his captives' sufferings, bid Ariel to "release them," and commit to "restore" "their senses" (5.1.30, 31). He states, "They being penitent, / The sole drift of my purpose doth extend / Not a frown further" (5.1.28–30; see 20–32). Upon Ariel's exit, Prospero also vows to "abjure" his "rough magic" and to "break [his] staff" and "drown [his] book" (5.1.51, 50, 54, 57; see 33–57). After Ariel returns with Alonso and his company, all still under Prospero's charm, a deeply emotional Prospero speaks his forgiveness to his oppressors and promises to Ariel to free him presently (5.1.58–87). Renouncing vengeance and illegitimate forms of control, Prospero enters into the risks of relationships as he prepares to return to Italy.

Hunt has written persuasively about Ariel's role as "a grace-giving Spirit" in this scene, noting that Ariel's words "providentially" provoke "a Christian-like pity within Prospero" (Hunt 2013, p. 65). Hunt goes on to discuss the theological importance of Ariel's prompting Prospero to empathy:

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23 Grant correctly asserts that Gonzalo "is in his limited way a direct human representation of the Providential power that lies behind the play." He "imitate[s]" and "embodie[s] the action of Providence" (Grant 1983, p. 249).

24 The observation by Tiffany concerning *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*, that "it is not human rituals but God's grace, working through Providential time, that effects resolution and miracles" (Tiffany 2018, p. 2), is applicable to *The Tempest*, especially as we read "human rituals" as signifying Prospero's imperfect machinations.

> Empathy for another's suffering, especially in association with forgiveness, is notably a principle of Judeo-Christian doctrine. Generally humankind's emulation of a deity whose compassion and forgiveness for humankind is singular moves men and women to the conversion Prospero experiences. (Hunt 2013, p. 66)

In any event, if Prospero's original intention toward Alonso was, from the initial tempest in the opening scene, to prod his conscience and offer him the opportunity for repentance, it has been threatened by Prospero's flirtation with vengeance and his exultation in seeing the suffering of his erstwhile oppressors, demonstrating within himself "an ambivalence that would seem well to be described in Romans 7" (Cox 2000, p. 39).[25] Ariel's words prompting Prospero to forgiveness and reconciliation come providentially from without, acting to restore Prospero's soul, offering a shepherding guidance, and eliciting but not demanding Prospero's change of heart.[26] Having "deftly exposed" Prospero's "moral gaps," "Ariel offers a contingent vision of Prospero's better self, opening a gap into which Prospero can choose to step" (Gibbons 2017, pp. 326, 327).

With Prospero's own decision to respond with charity in mind, we ought to briefly consider another spiritually restorative decision in Act 5 and its influence on Prospero. We have already discussed at length Alonso's decision to repent for his wrongs against Prospero—a decision that, significantly, he makes before Prospero reveals to him that Ferdinand is living and engaged to Miranda. By contrast, Antonio and Sebastian, also objects of Prospero's charity and forgiveness, decidedly reject their opportunities for repentance and reconciliation. However, perhaps most significant in light of the play's remarkable Epilogue is Caliban's repentance before Prospero after he and his spirits foil Caliban and his newfound associates, Stephano and Trinculo, in their pathetic attempt to murder Prospero. Responding to Prospero's merciful requirement that he merely clean Prospero's cell in order to gain his "pardon," Caliban replies, "Ay, that I will; and I'll be wise hereafter, / And seek for grace" (5.1.295–96). Caliban's confession—significantly, something that is *not* under his master's control—is most remarkable in that it ironically provides an example of repentance that Prospero will soon imitate. For if Ariel's gentle challenge has prompted Prospero's Christlike empathy and forgiveness, Caliban's desperate plea for mercy exemplifies what Prospero must do to obtain reconciliation with the Providence he sought to displace amid his practice of complete control. Indeed, even as Antonio's callous refusal to repent demonstrates for Prospero the ultimate limitations of supernatural power to coerce another's free will, Prospero's own clemency toward Caliban, coupled with his implicit admission of longstanding wrongdoing against his slave—"this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine" (5.1.275–76)—elicits a declaration of repentance rich in theological significance. Strikingly, Caliban couples his resolution to "seek for grace" with a renouncing of the pagan worldview that sought to manipulate his surroundings through his worship of the "dull fool" and "drunkard" Stephano, whom he took for his "god" (5.1.298, 297).[27]

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[25] See Romans 7:7–26, especially Romans 7:21: " ... when I wolde do good, euil is present with me." Hunt writes that Prospero is "conflicted by his desire to both destroy and to forgive his enemies" (Hunt 2013, p. 63). Although I suggest that Prospero's intentions from his initial conjuring of the tempest incline toward benevolence, Hunt's statement well captures the internal moral warfare that takes place within the mind of one whose recollections of his betrayal and usurpation have tortured his mind for the past twelve years.

[26] Prospero's decision to renounce vengeance here, Alonso's and Caliban's subsequent decisions to repent, Antonio's and Sebastian's decisions *not* to repent, and, certainly, Prospero's final repentance during the Epilogue all speak to Barbara Kiefer Lewalski's observation that the English church contemporary to Shakespeare, in its modified Calvinism, "reserve[d] some role, however ambiguously stated, for human response to divine grace" (Lewalski 1979, p. 20). (Hunt 1993) and (Hunt 2004) apply the perspective of Hooker's and other English divines' "centrist Reformational theology" (Smith 2018, p. 3) to Shakespeare's plays.

[27] Discussing the role of Providence in *The Tempest*, Lois Feur writes that the play does not depict "passive humanity, led by a puppet-master," but rather "human and divine actions conjoining to produce the final, benevolent result" (Feur 1997, p. 281). Considering optimistically Ferdinand and Miranda's future life in Naples, Brian Sutton writes that "the play suggests that Prospero's earlier misfortunes were part of a larger divine plan" for Alonso's and Prospero's "descendants" (Sutton 2008, p. 228).

In his deeply theological Epilogue that immediately follows his freeing of Ariel, Prospero, now utterly bereft of the magic spells and the command of spirits that allowed him to control the island, freely admits that his remaining "strength" is but "mine own" and "is most faint" (Epilogue 2–3). Without his magic and spirits, Prospero is no more a god than Stephano, and he would himself be a "dull fool" were he to depend on his own power. Yet, providentially, Prospero's "cup runneth ouer" with spiritual guidance from a most unlikely source who aids in his soul's restoration into "the paths of righteousness" (Psalm 23.3). Similar to Caliban, Prospero must himself now turn away from any pretense of a pagan manipulation of Fortune and, similar to Caliban, seek grace.[28] His most spiritually meaningful words, replete with "Christian overtones" (Hunt 2013, p. 69),[29] conclude the play:

> And my ending is despair
> Unless I be relieved by prayer,
> Which pierces so that it assaults
> Mercy itself and frees all faults.
> As you from crimes would pardoned be,
> Let your indulgence set me free. (Epilogue 15–20)

Much can be said regarding the "specifically Christian significance" (Cox 2000, p. 39) of these lines, and John D. Cox rightly observes that the Epilogue's final couplet "urges a specifically Christian response to Prospero based on the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer: 'Forgiue vs our dettes, as we also forgiue our detters (Matt. 6:12)" (Cox 2000, p. 40; cf. Esolen 1997, p. 247). Indeed, in these lines the once-spiritually isolated Prospero reenters the community of the faithful, seeking grace as he begs the audience's charity through spiritual intercession. However, for the purposes of this essay, we do well to emphasize Prospero's request that he be "relieved by prayer" so fervent that "it assaults / Mercy itself." Prospero's use of the word "Mercy" as metonymy for the Christian God recalls to us the final verse of Psalm 23 and its speaker's promise that "kindenes, & mercie shal follow me all the dayes of my life." Prospero's humble appeal to Mercy here stands in stark contrast to his previous self-glorying boast: "At this hour / Lies at *my mercy* all mine enemies" (4.1.262-63, italics mine). As we consider the workings of Providence in Prospero's life throughout *The Tempest*, we may suggest that Prospero, having renounced his religion of paganized self-sufficiency, now understands his need to pursue the Mercy that has been, beyond his recognition, pursuing him.[30]

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[28] As Tiffany observes, in Shakespeare's late romances, "Human participation in God's comedy requires characters to turn away from 'pagan' works to Christian faith" (Tiffany 2018, p. 2). The respective efforts to "seek for grace" that we see in Act 5 and the Epilogue by Alonso, Caliban, and Prospero recall Matthew J. Smith's recent suggestion that "Shakespeare unites his characters through patterns of action ... that demonstrate a shared experience of religion as a desire for salvation beyond the law" (Smith 2018, p. 2).

[29] Prospero's Epilogue has been examined from different theological perspectives within Christianity. (Tiffany 2000, p. 439) suggests Calvinist dimensions, whereas (Beauregard 1997) and (Beauregard 2008, pp. 145–56) argue at length for its Catholic underpinnings. Following the basic thrust of (Hunt 2004), I believe that an understanding of Shakespeare's apparent sympathy for the "middle way" of Richard Hooker's theology can allow us to profit from both Tiffany's and Beauregard's arguments.

[30] My reading of Prospero's supplication stands in stark contrast to the skeptical reading offered by (Sanchez 2008, p. 81).

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The Tempest and Black Natural Law

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Abstract: Vincent Lloyd's 2016 book *Black Natural Law* presents four case histories in which African American intellectuals used the natural law tradition to mount defenses of the rights, capacities, and dignity of members of their communities. This essay uses the discourse of black natural law as reconstructed by Lloyd to reread Caliban's political arguments and social and aesthetic project in *The Tempest*. Although the natural law tradition became increasingly secularized during the century of revolution, black thinkers such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Martin Luther King, Jr. drew on the religious renditions of natural law that were alive in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Reading Shakespeare with black natural law is not simply an audacious leap into our troubled present, but also brings new focus on the forms of scripturally-inspired pluralism that natural law theory supported in Shakespeare's age.

Keywords: natural law; black theology; *The Tempest*; Richard Hooker; Thomas Aquinas; James Cone; Vincent Lloyd

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> We are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be.
>
> 1 John 3:2a, cited by James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1970 (Cone 2010, p. 24)

In his 2016 *Black Natural Law*, Vincent Lloyd describes the African American church imagined by W. E. B. Du Bois:

> The church of his dreams would include 'a cooperative store in the Sunday school room; with physician, dentist, nurse and lawyer to help serve, and defend the congregation; with library, nursery school, and a regular succession of paid and trained lecturers and discussion ... a credit union, group insurance, and a building and loan association.' There would be preaching, but it would not be limited to the Bible. It would also include the words of Shakespeare, Confucius, Buddha, and John Brown (Lloyd 2016, p. 84).

Shakespeare appears here as part of a broadened religious program that begins with the Bible but spirals out to works of secular literature, eastern wisdom, and black history, as part of a church re-envisioned as a community center designed to support the flourishing and build the capacities of its congregants. Lloyd notes that the vocabulary of Fredrick Douglass, too, was "thoroughly soaked in the Shakespearean" (Lloyd 2016, p. 5). I have taken the presence of Shakespeare in Lloyd's powerful treatise as an invitation to consider the extent to which Caliban's claim to embody a creaturely humanity in opposition to the punitive actions of Prospero can be captured within a natural law tradition that culminates in the African-American discourse on human dignity that Lloyd reconstructs in *Black Natural Law*. Lloyd, a scholar of religious studies and a historian of black theology, tunes into the Scriptural strain that stamps black natural law, whose writers took the idea of humanity created in the image of God as the basis of dignity and equality for all people. The received history of natural law thinking is one of progressive secularization, in which the monotheistic synthesis of classical philosophy with Scripture effected by the great medieval Aristotelians Averroes, Maimonides, and Aquinas eventually shed its theistic imagism in the works of Grotius, Hobbes and Locke in order

to become the modern doctrine of rights. Black natural law, unapologetically theological, is thus in some ways a return to the scholastic tradition that stretches from Aquinas to Hooker and to which Shakespeare can be seen to belong. Black natural law is not simply natural law *radicalized*; it is also natural law *theologized*: natural law with its creaturely soul rendered bare and trembling, open and heaving. Thus, reading Shakespeare with black natural law is not simply an audacious leap into our troubled present, but also brings new focus on the forms of scripturally-inspired pluralism that natural law theory supported in Shakespeare's century, and might support again.[2]

1. Natural Law, *Imago Dei*, Pluralism

Natural law in the West stretches from ancient philosophy to the century of revolution, where its impact is visible in the Declaration of Independence and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Despite the sublimity of those documents, the difficulty of establishing genuinely shared norms in a modern world distinguished by competing moral and legal codes eroded the credibility of natural law, which ceded to legal positivism in the nineteenth century. After World War II, legal philosophers such as Alexander Passerin D'Entrèves began reconsidering the value of norms, and natural law plays a role in various post-war enterprises, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. D'Entrèves provides a conceptual history of natural law and presents natural law itself not as an anti-historical discourse but as a mode that incorporates elements of adjustment and adaptation into moments of judgment that occur in time and space. The same can be said of both Lloyd, who pluralizes natural law by articulating a distinctive political discourse in African-American letters, and Shakespeare, who participates in a broadly Hookerian understanding of natural law but opens that tradition to a distinctly subaltern vocalization through the person of Caliban.

In his effort to revive natural law jurisprudence, D'Entrèves pointed to the very different functions of natural law in classical, Christian, and post-Reformation settings. For Cicero, "Mankind is a universal community or cosmopolis. Law is its expression" (D'Entrèves 2017, p. 25). *Ius naturale* (natural law) and *ius gentium* (the law of nations) were distinguished by Justinian in his famous code, but often blend together and share many attributes, above all the insight that different nations and groups arrive at similar maxims concerning human relations from their own regions of custom and thought. Furthermore, Cicero posited the equality of men: "'For those creatures who have received the gift of reason from Nature have also received right reason, and therefore they have also received the gift of Law, which is right reason applied to command and prohibition'" (D'Entrèves 2017). Despite these bold pronouncements, D'Entrèves argues that Roman law was concerned not with transcendental and eternal rights, but with "the intrinsic character of a given situation" (p. 32). Natural law is thus coordinate with Ciceronian decorum, making it much more adaptable, flexible, and intrinsically historical than is commonly understood, but also less revolutionary. In D'Entrèves' gloss, *ius naturale* was "not a complete and ready-made system of rules, but a means of interpretation ... it played a decisive part in the process of adapting positive law to changing conditions and in elaborating the legal system of an international or rather super-national civilization" (p. 33). This also means that there was nothing revolutionary in the Roman conception: "Being in itself merely 'a reflection upon the existing law', it was not meant to give 'legal sanction to what was not otherwise law'" (D'Entrèves 2017, citing Zulueta: p. 33). Reason for Roman lawyers was not the opposite of experience so much as a synonym for it (D'Entrèves 2017, p. 51). Cicero did, however, defend tyrannicide, a fact not lost on his Renaissance readers (Dzelzainis 2009).

The natural law of Thomas Aquinas looks a lot like the Roman theories upon which it builds. Aquinas, like Cicero and Aristotle, affirmed that human beings are capable of discerning the teachings of natural law through the use of reason. Yet creaturely life—sinful, historical, unreliable,

[2] For a related reading of Shakespeare's Scriptural pluralism, see (Smith 2018). On the *imago dei* in *The Tempest*, see (Urban forthcoming).

and passionate—distinguishes the post-classical subject of natural law from its classical counterpart. When Aquinas argues that "Grace does not abolish Nature but perfects it", he at once preserves the rational order of nature so important to classical science and philosophy and refigures nature as the zone of creation: made by God in a deliberative temporal process and then thrown into disarray by the event of original sin (D'Entrèves 2017, p. 44). In the words of Jewish natural law theologian David Novak, "Like all creation natural law is made in time", a maxim derived from the first book of the Torah and foreign to the eternity of the cosmos posited by Aristotle, Plato, and the Stoics (Novak 2014, location 167). If for Aristotle the good was the telos of all actions, for Augustine and his heirs the human will has been deformed by sin, driving the arrow of virtuous intention away from its promised end towards darker sticking places tainted by lust, aggression, and envy.[3] Although for Aquinas, the soul as *imago dei* participating in God through reason secures access to natural law, fallen human beings require both the help of God (in the form of grace) and the coercive power of positive law (in the form of punishment) to act upon those precepts. But because positive law was itself made by creatures, natural law could be used to judge human law, making some room for resistance to tyranny and injustice (D'Entrèves 2017, p. 45). In the words of Walter Benjamin, the sovereign is "the lord of creatures, but he remains a creature" (Benjamin 1988, p. 85).

The creaturely horizon of the monotheistic synthesis also meant that natural law could be changed over time when transformations in ways of life required it (D'Entrèves 2017, p. 46). D'Entrèves asserts that "a deep feeling for history" pervades Aquinas' account of natural law (D'Entrèves, p. 47), a claim developed by Pamela Hall (Hall 1994) in *Narrative and Natural Law: An Interpretation of Thomist Ethics*. Hall demonstrates how for Aquinas natural law must be discovered, both in history and over the course of individual lives, through the highly situational and temporally reflective operation of prudence (Hall 1994, p. 40). For Aquinas, different moments in God's covenanting with humanity articulate natural law over time, a philosophical-historical understanding of the relation between reason and revelation that would continue to develop in the natural law writings of Richard Hooker, Hugo Grotius, and John Selden. In this evolving juridical hermeneutics of history, the Creation, the Noahide laws, Babel, Sinai, and the New Testament were conceived as events in the discovery, adaptation, and supplementation of natural law within the saeculum of human history (Hall 1994, pp. 45–64).[4] The Noahide laws are of special interest to the development of a pluralized natural law jurisprudence; although they are based on Genesis 9, when God re-covenants with his creation after the Flood, they were only formalized as a law code by the rabbis in the Talmud. Thus the adaptation of Noahide laws by Christian natural law thinkers required active engagement with post-biblical Jewish legal texts and methods, convening a plurality of sources in the articulation of laws shared by all peoples.[5] Meanwhile, for the Jews, the Noahide laws are conceived as "the law of the *other*," providing the bare rudiments of civil life for gentiles but lacking the soul-shaping, people-founding power of the revelation at Sinai (Wilf 2008, p. 4).

D'Entrèves canonizes Shakespeare's contemporary Richard Hooker (1554–1600) as the Elizabethan inheritor of Aquinas. Like Aquinas and against Calvin and his hardline Augustinianism, Hooker affirms the power of human reason to discern shared truths concerning social and political life, maxims discovered by human beings seeking the good within concrete situations.[6] Like Aquinas, Hooker acknowledges the insufficiency of reason alone to order human communities and hence the need for positive law, which adapts natural law to the realities of human nature and to different historical

[3] "Every art, and every inquiry, and similarly every action as well as choice, is held to aim at some good" (Aristotle 2011, 1094a). For a nuanced and integrative account of Augustine's lifelong dialogue with classical virtue, see (Wetzel 1992).

[4] (Wilf 2008, p. 3) refers to "the legal foundations of the generation after the Tower of Babel" as another instance of legal re-founding.

[5] (Rosenblatt 2006, p. 10) makes this point and notes that "discussions of Noachide law appear in the work of Richard Hooker, Hugo Grotius, Isaac Newton, Henry Burton, John Lightfoot, Henry Stubbe, Jeremy Taylor, James Harrington, Edward Stillingfleet, John Toland, Samuel Pufendorf, and Lancelot Addison (father of Joseph Addison)."

[6] For Calvin, "the purpose of natural law is 'to render man inexcusable" (Koetsier 2003, p. i).

scenarios: "The case of man's nature standing as it doth, some kind of regiment the law of nature doth require; yet the kinds thereof being many, nature tieth not to any one, but leaveth the choice as a thing arbitrary" (Hooker 1883, 1.9.5.) Explaining why "even in good laws [there is] so great variety," he suggests that "the sundry particular ends whereunto the different disposition of that subject or matter, for which laws are provided, causeth them to have special respect in making laws" (Hooker 1883, 1.9.5). Hooker's allowance for the situational adaptation of natural law recalls the Ciceronian link between natural law and decorum.

But what if nature, both human nature and the physical world, is perfect on its own, and needs to be neither abolished nor perfected by grace? For Thomas, natural law was organized around the order of the cosmos and the dignity of the human soul as a reflection of God, all united by reason (Kent 2017). The modern innovation was to remove God from the picture by affirming the self-sufficiency of human reason; centering the legal discussion around the rights of the individual rather than the laws of nature; and entertaining the possibility of revolution (D'Entrèves 2017, p. 51). Human dignity, derived by the three monotheisms from the *imago dei* and radiated by the doctrine of grace, separated out from this theological matrix to become an independent value, though not without retaining a sublime charge (Debes 2017). Hobbes inherits the pessimism of Tacitus, Augustine, and Luther, while Locke develops the humanism of Cicero, Aquinas and Hooker, but each sets natural law off on its path towards rights, and also, arguably, towards legal positivism. Yet the creationist element does not disappear completely, as we see in the preamble to the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are *created* equal ... " (emphasis added). *Created* introduces a temporal gap between an originary foundation, historical realities, and future projects that allows for both normative judgment and historical reasoning while keeping on call the reference to a divine maker (Wills 1978, pp. xviii–xix).

Shakespeare is the inheritor of a natural law still marked by the monotheistic merging of nature and creation, but his world-building is also enlivened by the skepticism and pessimism of Machiavelli before him and anticipates Hobbes to come. Meanwhile, his anthropology is not untouched by Calvinist convictions concerning unregenerate humanity. (Elton 1988) long ago demonstrated the presence of all of these frameworks in *King Lear and the Gods.* In *The Tempest*, Gonzalo is a kind of Hookerian, or would be with a little education, while Sebastian and Alonso are Hobbesians *avant la lettre*. The play itself unfolds in a landscape that is marked by epochal events in the history of natural law, including the Creation, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel, all moments of what Wilf (2008) calls "the law before the law." In *The Tempest*, natural law becomes natural history, encrypted in a layered landscape alive with multiple intentions shaped by different catastrophes in the history of the human spirit. Caliban rethinks and reimagines elements of the scholastic tradition, but within an emergent framework of rights, by dint of his position not as judge but as plaintiff: the one who complains, the one who suffers. That is, he contributes to neither scholastic nor modern natural law, but to a distinct strand that links the theological and the political in a great recursive loop: what Vincent Lloyd calls black natural law.

2. From Natural Law to Black Natural Law

Lloyd's book recovers a natural law theology and politics in the works of four African-American thinkers and leaders: Frederick Douglass, Anna Julia Cooper, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Martin Luther King, Jr. By asserting the humanity, equality, and dignity of black men and women, these thinkers protested the existing laws of the land, participating in "a rich, coherent style of ethical inquiry and political practice" of which, Lloyd argues, "only ruins remain" (Lloyd 2016, pp. vii, 75). Lloyd traces natural law to Aristotle, Cicero, Grotius, and Hobbes, and he acknowledges the existence of Christian, Jewish, and Islamic natural law traditions alongside "dogmatically secular" variants (his own thinking is undogmatically post-secular) (Lloyd 2016, p. vii). Like D'Entrèves, Lloyd does not see natural law as a single continuous tradition; his aim is to "pluralize" natural law by articulating this other line of black thought within and alongside it. D'Entrèves focuses on the "function", not the "doctrine"

of natural law; similarly, Lloyd focuses on the "process," not the "product," of BNL (black natural law) (D'Entrèves 2017, p. 18; Lloyd 2016, p. viii). Lloyd presents his BNL thinkers as lenders as well as borrowers: "European or Catholic natural law traditions can learn much from the black natural law tradition. For example, the black natural law tradition places particular emphasis on the role of emotion in discerning natural law, a theme often neglected in European and Catholic traditions" (p. vii). Like neo-Thomist readers of natural law such as D'Entrèves, Alisdair MacIntyre (2007), and John Finnis (2011), Lloyd calls attention to the theological foundations of the concept for its practitioners, whether they are professional men of faith like Martin Luther King, Jr. or religious humanists like W. E. B. Du Bois. (Du Bois, Lloyd reminds us, lodged the word "souls" in the title of his most famous book (Lloyd 2016, p. 58.) Indeed, black natural law, as an explicitly political-theological teaching, reaches back before Hobbes to the Hookerian and Thomist understandings of natural law. That alone makes BNL compatible with a reading of Caliban. Lloyd's book ends with a stunning accountof secularism as a form of white privilege and religion as an abounding resource for communities of color.

BNL builds on the cosmopolitan and egalitarian aspects of European natural law, with special emphasis on the idea of humanity as *imago dei* put forward by the three monotheisms. By uniting reason with imagination and feeling, the *imago dei* of BNL reclaims the breadth of the human soul that Aquinas had tended to identify exclusively with reason. Moreover, for BNL, Lloyd argues, that composite soul "is ultimately unrepresentable" (p. viii), broaching "a concept of the human essentially defined by what it is not, marking what is in the world but never fully captured by it" (p. ix). The *imago dei* is an inherently creationist formulation, founded on the idea that human beings are made in God's image. Black natural law amplifies the creaturely character of the *imago dei* by emphasizing the positive role of passion and imagination in discerning natural law, and by unfixing the *imago dei* from its presumptive whiteness. BNL taps the existential stakes and inherent indeterminacy of the *imago dei* doctrine, whose promise of a reassuring likeness and mirroring coherence between God and human is undone by the cognitive rigor of the prohibition against idolatry.

Black natural law is also communitarian: its proponents appreciate "the influence communities have on individuals, and the need for political change to happen through social movement organizing" (Lloyd 2016, p. ix). This insight develops the seeds of resistance theory implicit in natural law, now understood not simply as a last resort in the face of immovable tyranny, but as an independent social good that builds the capacities of oppressed communities and might even defer precipitously violent actions. The political organizing undertaken by Du Bois, for example, aimed to create "a vibrant, complex black social and political space"; "in the process of organizing itself, [this work] provided an opportunity for the realization of human capacities" while "restraining the desire for justice to flow immediately" (p. 83). Finally, BNL "recognizes the epistemic privilege of the oppressed, the way that suffering attunes us to justice" (p. viii). Whereas much natural law theory is written by jurists and philosophers who are protected and empowered by the legal systems they consider, BNL is written from a place of heightened legal disability and enforced minority. Hooker writes that "the search for knowledge is a thing painful" (Hooker 1883, 1.7.7). Whereas Hooker means that for sinful humans, acquiring knowledge is difficult and hence best managed by experts, for black natural law the link between pain and knowledge unlocks heightened attention and a deeper kind of understanding: "where other natural law traditions see each human being as equally capable of discerning the natural law, the black natural law tradition recognizes the epistemic privilege of the oppressed, the way that suffering attunes us to justice" (Lloyd 2016, p. ix).

So, what does it mean to think about *The Tempest* as participating in black natural law? After all, Shakespeare was white, and he was writing with different questions in mind and under constraints that included a royal audience. In response, I would argue that Shakespeare created a character who has gained a life of his own in interpretation and performance. If Shakespeare has "created" Caliban, not simply written his part, this means that Caliban is his "creature," a vital composite of interpretive and performative possibilities and latent intentions. Creature Caliban is possessed of a soul, a word that captures both the ensemble of capacities that characterize his dynamic personhood

and the extraordinary afterlife, the sempiternity, of Shakespeare's golem. Ancient philosophy derived human dignity from the soul or *psyche*, the ensemble of capacities for thought, movement, perception, and emotion that are exercised and realized in virtuous action. In the assimilation of Aristotle to monotheism, the soul merges with the *imago dei*, becoming at once substantialized and virtualized as the person's immortal part while retaining its ancient sense as the animate infrastructure of mindful faculties. The soul is both *naturata* and *naturans*, a created thing that also creates. The soul makes us who we are (soul as an ensemble of resources for thought and action) and orients us towards what we want to be (soul as *imago dei*). In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois defines the soul as a "'marvelous universe,'" "'a reservoir of experience, knowledge, beauty, love, and deed'" (Lloyd 2016, p. 63).[7] From Dante to Du Bois, the soul as virtuous capacity and divine imprint asserts the creaturely dimension of natural law, grounded in a primal landscape and flowing into neighboring construals of *natura*, including human nature, the state of nature, and the natural world. Creature Caliban, who is also Caliban ensouled, participates in that story.

3. Autonomy and Negation

Caliban's counter-narrative to Prospero recites certain topoi of natural law:

> I must eat my dinner.
> This island's mine by Sycorax my mother,
> Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first,
> Thou strok'st me and made much of me, wouldst give me
> Water with berries in't, and teach me how
> To name the bigger light, and how the less,
> That burn by day and night; and then I loved thee
> And showed thee all the qualities o'th' isle,
> The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile—
> Cursed be I that did so! All the charms
> Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you;
> For I am all the subjects that you have,
> Which first was mine own king, and here you sty me
> In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
> The rest o'th' island. (1.2.331–45)[8]

Caliban begins with an argument from positive law (he has inherited the island from his mother Sycorax), but he ends by asserting his original self-sufficiency: "For I am all the subjects that you have, / Which first was mine own king." To be one's own king is to discover a law within oneself and by oneself, through the exercise of rational capacities shared with other human beings. This is the idea of human autonomy (from *auto nomos*, to give oneself the law, to be one's own law).[9] Hooker cites Paul on the discovery of natural law by classical philosophers and jurists:

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[7] Life in this scheme is "the rhythmic workings of the physical and social world that can be understood through the human capacity to reason" (Lloyd 2016, p. 63).
[8] All citations from Shakespeare are taken from (Shakespeare 2016).
[9] Compare Grotius: "For God created man αυτονόμοσ, 'free and *sui iuris*,' so that the actions of each individual and the use of his possessions were made subject not to another's will but to his own." Cited by (Nijman 2017, p. 104)

> The apostle St. Paul having speech concerning the Heathen saith of them, 'They are a law onto themselves.' His meaning is, that by force of the light of Reason, wherewith God illuminateth everyone who cometh into the world, men being enabled to know truth from falsehood, and good from evil, do thereby learn in many things what the will of God is, which will himself not revealing by any extraordinary means unto them, but they by natural discourse attaining the knowledge thereof, seem the makers of those laws which indeed are his, and they but only the finders of them out. (Hooker 1883, 1.8.4-5).

Caliban is a "Heathen" who "by natural discourse," that is, without the gift of revelation but through his own ratiocinative processes, was able to govern himself on the island. This self-rule was not simply animalistic survival; when Prospero arrived, Caliban demonstrated that he was able to know "good from evil" (Hooker) by "loving" Prospero and showing him "all the qualities o'th'isle" (Shakespeare). Hooker lists as maxims discoverable by reason and acknowledged by nations around the world: "God to be worshipped, Parents to be honoured, Others to be used as we ourselves would by them" (Hooker 1883, 1.8.3). All these principles are evident in Caliban's discourse and self-narration. When he refers elsewhere to Setebos, we see him practicing a kind of natural theology, and in this passage, he honors his mother and he recollects his own practice of neighbor love and reciprocal care (cf. Urban forthcoming).

Moreover, Caliban's willing and affectionate movement from self-rule in a state of nature to human sociability retraces the passage into political association that Hooker gives:

> But forsomuch as we are not by ourselves sufficient to furnish ourselves with competent store of things needful for such a life as our nature doth desire, a life fit for the dignity of man; therefore, to supply these defects and imperfections, which are in us living, single, and solely by ourselves, we are naturally induced to seek commune and fellowship with others. (Hooker 1883, 1.10.1)

Caliban was indeed able to live "single and solely" by himself, but the association with Prospero brought tangible benefits, from rather modest new recipes ("water with berries in it") to the mind-expanding resource of a language shared with others. The "dignity of man" that Hooker associates with social life encompasses the forms of love, conversation, and mutual succour that persons confer on each other in the process of producing and sharing these material and intellectual goods.

Caliban, addressed by Prospero as "thou earth, thou" (2.2.315), is associated with God's first human creature, Adam. "Adam" comes from *adamah*, earth: earth is God's plastic medium for fashioning the first man, and it also the ground, literally, of natural life in its teeming fecundity and vermicular decomposition. In naming "the bigger light and . . . the less," Caliban labels the elements of God's creation in a childlike, naively concrete language, directly echoing Genesis 1:16 (Orgel 1987, p. 119n). Adam, like Caliban, is associated with a primal self-kingship in seventeenth-century political theory (Benjamin 1988, p. 85). Unlike Adam, however, Caliban must be taught this language by Miranda and Prospero rather than finding it on his own, though he was not without language when they discovered him. Upon encountering Caliban's draped and prostrate form, Trinculo exclaims, "A man or a fish?—dead or alive?" (2.2.23): amphibious Caliban swims and struts in a world after Noah and Babel, and he himself serves as a translator between worlds and tongues. Whereas Adam's naming project places him at the head of creation, Caliban's language lesson places him within creation, as one creature among others, a monster whose reflection of the *imago dei* appears inchoate and uncertain, not a birthright immediately recognized by the other human creatures on stage but rather an attribute that must be demonstrated and performed.[10] This defensive and disenfranchised posture associates Caliban not simply with natural law, whose precepts he has discovered and put into practice, but with

[10] This claim revises my statement that "Caliban is mere creature, a creature separate (like Adam) from the Creator but (unlike Adam) not reflected back to the Creator as His image" (Lupton 2005, p. 166).

black natural law, whose defiant condition he embodies and begins to vocalize. Unlike Hooker's virtuous heathens, who get to do philosophy for everyone, Caliban, embattled and embittered, marks creaturely humanity as "what is in the world but never fully captured by it" (Lloyd 2016, p. xi). Caliban takes the creaturely condition that runs through premodern natural law theory and intensifies it into a point of protest: he *blackens* it. This does not mean that Caliban is exempt from the condition of fallenness, as I will soon demonstrate. It does mean, however, that Caliban as black natural lawyer understands that the depravity of all creatures (original sin) is unevenly amplified by the corruption of institutions and the blindness of privilege (social injustice).

Hooker distinguishes the undeveloped reason of a child, whose soul can "only store itself with conceipts of things of inferior and more open quality, which afterwards do serve as instruments unto that which is greater" with mature reason, which is supported by logic and language: "When once it [the soul of man] comprehendeth anything above this, as the differences of time, affirmations, negations, and contradictions in speech; we then count it to have some use of natural reason" (Hooker 1883, 1.6.3). Caliban's retort to Prospero indeed combines "things of inferior and more open quality," namely the resonant realia of the island's flora and fauna, with the tools of reason: the ability to speak in several tenses and to use affirmations, negations, and contradictions to mount an argument. His special handling of particulars indexes his creaturely knowledge, while his use of language to tell a counter-narrative politicizes rational discourse in a new, oppositional mode. Once again, what are attributes of *natural law* in Hooker, shared by a broad and theologically divided but racially unified collective, become features of *black natural law* in the hands of Caliban, who uses the "differences of time" and the power of negation to tell his own story of self-rule, neighbor-love, the joys of society—and their betrayal and destruction.

4. Sex, Sociability, and Slavery

Caliban's attempt to couple with Miranda has led to this state of affairs is. Here, too, natural law teachings abound. Although Hooker, following Aquinas, asserts participation in God as the highest good that humans can strive for, he exalts in the fact that "there are so many kinds of perfection which man seeketh," beginning with "desiring the continuance of their being": "All things therefore coveting as much as may be like unto God in being ever, that which cannot hereunto attain personally, doth seek to continue itself another way, that is by offspring and propagation" (1.6.2). Hooker implies here that all creatures, not only human ones, strive to imitate the divine, and that the desire to reproduce expresses the creature's urge to become like God by achieving intergenerational immortality. The creaturely scope of Hooker's vision recalls the great covenant God makes with all creation after the Flood: "And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you, and every living creature of all flesh" (KJV: Gen. 9:15). Elsewhere in the text, Hooker associates Adam's desire for a helpmeet with human sociability, not just human reproduction: "it is of Adam said that amongst the beasts 'He found not for himself any meet companion.' Civil society doth more content the nature of man than any private kind of solitary living" (1.10.12). In Hooker's creaturely reading of natural law, the sexual act achieves its own dignity, which humans share with other forms of animate life and transform into a vital bond of human fellowship.

So what happened between Caliban and Miranda? The event itself remains obscure and contested, dissolved in "the dark backward and abyss of time" (1.2.50). Prospero accuses Caliban of "seek[ing] to violate / The honour of my child." Caliban responds:

> O ho, O ho!
>
> Would't had been done!
>
> Thou didst prevent me—I had peopled else
>
> This isle with Calibans. (1.2.349–51)

Hooker's natural law provides two ways into this exchange. On the one hand, Caliban's desire for Miranda links him to all living things, expresses his own yearning toward and reflection of

the divine, and seeks to deepen human fellowship, all Adamic properties that assert the dignity of Caliban. The nonconsensual nature of his action, however, has fundamentally reconfigured not only his relationship to Prospero and Miranda, but also his management of his own passions and his linguistic and rational capacities. The Caliban who speaks these words to Prospero is no longer the loving and gracious host to the island's newcomers but an angry and unrepentant sex offender whose desires appear drained of divine aspiration. Hooker places consent at the heart of human sociability: "Two foundations there are which bear up public societies, the one, a natural inclination, whereby all men desire sociable life and fellowship, the other an order expressly or secretly agreed upon, touching the manner of their union in living together" (1.10.1). Caliban's debased and passionate language manifests his membership in fallen humanity, who "prefer their own private good before all things, even that good which is sensual" (1.10.6). Caliban's move on Miranda constitutes his own fall, expressing at once an urge towards divine and human participation in the form of a helpmeet and an affront to such participation, a turning within his own being that obscures his rational capacities and gives his passions the upper hand. Subject to what Hooker calls "the divine malediction" (1.3.3), Caliban himself speaks in maledictions.

In Aquinas and Hooker, the story of the Fall serves to reconcile the positive anthropology of Aristotle and Cicero, based on man's sociable and rational being, and the negative anthropology of Tacitus and Augustine, who dwell on humanity's passionate and self-interested impulses. Janne Nijman (2017) argues that Grotius used the *imago dei* to mediate between hard-line Protestant and more humanist Erasmian and Arminian accounts of human nature; in 1601, at age eighteen, Grotius wrote a play about the Fall called *Adamus Exul* that explored precisely these motifs (Barham 1839). Both anthropologies are expressed in Shakespeare's depiction of Caliban, a naturally loving rational creature who has been morally damaged by his own precipitous attempt to realize his desires violently, that is, without consent. Embodying the psalmist's confession of broken humanity, "Behold, I was shapen in inquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5 [KJV]), Caliban is not a noble savage but a creature like others. Shakespeare's Caliban is both sinned against *and* sinning. Yet what Miranda and Prospero refuse to acknowledge in this exchange is that they too are creatures. They are unable to consider Caliban's suit as a failed bid for fellowship because their own outrage blinds them to the natural law perspective, which has the potential to assert their equality with Caliban in both dignity and sin. They have replaced the sense of a law that educates and directs (natural law) with the imposition of a law that punishes through force (positive law). They negate the emancipatory potential of natural law and instead wield the rhetoric of nature to justify slavery:

> But thy vile race,
>
> Though thou didst learn, had that in't, which good natures
>
> Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou
>
> Deservedly confined into this rock, who hadst
>
> Deserved more than a prison. (1.2.358–62; cf. 4.1.188–92)

Shakespeare sides with Prospero when he identifies Caliban in the list of characters as "a savage and deformed slave." The poetic Creator rezones the creatureliness of his Creature from a common condition in which good and evil mingle to a state of permanent exclusion from human society, with "good natures" inside and those of "vile race" without. Yet the Creature is not fully determined by the Creator: Caliban's ability to mount a counter-narrative, to organize a coup, and to continue to develop his own virtuous capacities demonstrates the potential of natural law to yield an approach other than the one taken by Prospero, Miranda. and Shakespeare himself.

Slavery was indeed a part of the natural law tradition. Aristotle, no universalist, argued that some men were naturally slaves and others naturally masters, by virtue of their relative virtues (Dyer 2012, pp. 1–3). Aquinas did not admit slavery to natural law, but accepted it as a potentially legitimate part of positive law, if it benefitted all parties; the right of dominion, however, applied only to the service of

the slave; "in all other respects, the relationship between the two persons was one of justice and mutual rights" (Valenzuela 2017, p. 60).[11] Aquinas echoes Job 31:13–14, sometimes taken as a statement of natural law (Perdue 1991, pp. 185–87). Epictetus, one of the greatest of the Stoic philosophers and an exponent of human equality, cosmopolitanism, and natural law, was himself a freed slave. In his *Diatribes*, he remarks that "all human beings have Zeus as their progenitor, and so masters have kinship with their slaves, and are related by nature" (Herschbell 1995, p. 189). Although Epictetus did not espouse the abolition of slavery, his status as a freedman writing on the rational dignity of all persons places him in the prehistory of black natural law. In *Natural Law and the Antislavery Constitutional Tradition*, Justin Buckley Dyer shows how natural law was used on both sides of the slavery debate in the period leading up to the Civil War, but especially powerfully by the abolitionists. Sean Wilentz makes a similar argument in his 2018 opus *No Property in Man: Slavery and Anti-Slavery at the Nation's Founding* (Wilentz 2018).

Frederick Douglass, a key figure for Dyer, Wilentz, and Lloyd, argued that slavery contradicts "not only the just and proper rules of legal interpretation, but the origin, design, nature, rights, powers, and duties of civil government, and also the relations which human beings sustain to it" (Dyer 2012, p. 181). Douglass compares the slave owner to a tyrant: "arbitrary power, whether 'vested in the civil ruler' or in 'a slaveholder on a plantation,'" runs contrary to natural law (Dyer 2012, p. 180). Douglass develops the resistance theory already evident in Cicero's defense of Brutus's assassination of Caesar and that comes into play in Renaissance political theory. Caliban twice calls Prospero a tyrant, a word given new power in religiously driven defenses of resistance and tyrannicide in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Mortimer 2017, pp. 31–33). "Tyrant" is a fighting word. It is also a natural law word. In the words of Cicero, "there can be no fellowship between us and tyrants—on the contrary there is a complete estrangement—and it is not contrary to nature to rob a man, if you are able, whom it is honorable to kill" (1991: II.32). Caliban *contra tyrannos* is a brute, but also a Brutus.

One of the dogs that Prospero unleashes against the rebels is named Tyrant: "Fury, Fury! There, Tyrant, there! Hark, hark!" (4.1.249). The dogs embody Prospero's own tyrannical fury and the resurgence of his disavowed creatureliness; the hound's name was powerful enough to have carried a distinct political charge in 1795 (Taylor 2011, p. 511). The image anticipates the canine tracking of runaway slaves; in performance, the specter of the rebels chased by dogs can be quite disturbing. Prospero's tyranny motivates Caliban (though not his confederates), and raises their revolt into what Ariel suggestively calls "their project" (4.1.175). The word "project" appears more often in *The Tempest* than in any other play by Shakespeare: thrice to describe Prospero's overarching plans for the action of the play, and once to characterize the conspiracy. In *The Tempest*, resistance fails, but not before it assumes the quality of a project comparable to Prospero's own, asserting the dignity of the creature and placing Caliban in the black natural law tradition. Novak provides a creationist scaffold for human projects: "For God's purposeful creation of the cosmos is not only a datum; it is a task given (*Aufgabe* in German) to humans to imitate and further actively" (Novak 2014, location 756). Mark Taylor defines ethos as "an orientation, an attitude, a directional movement that can be found in action, particularly in law's pursuit of justice and community's pursuit of love" (Taylor 2009, p. 195). Yet Shakespeare denies his creature either an achievable or a defensible project; Caliban's desire to overcome Prospero while he is sleeping recalls Macbeth, while his continued disregard for Miranda's sexual consent reveals the limits of his understanding of political and personal obligation. Violence may be Caliban's only recourse, but it is not yet justice, and it certainly falls short of love (Schwartz 2017). If the conspiracy against Prospero were the only project that Shakespeare had given Caliban, *The Tempest* would not have yielded the rich discourse of creative political thought that has issued from it, from Mary Shelley to Aimé Césaire.

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[11] Compare Cicero, *On Duties*: "Justice must be maintained even towards the lowliest. The lowliest condition and fortune is that of slaves; the instruction we are given to treat them as if they were employees is good advice; that one should require work from them, and grant to them just treatment" (Cicero 1991, I.41; p. 18).

5. Sounds and Sweet Airs

Caliban fashions a different kind of project in the sounds and sweet airs passage:

Be not afeard, the isle is full of noises,

Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.

Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments

Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices

That if I then had waked after long sleep

Will make me sleep again; and then in dreaming

The clouds methought would open and show riches

Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked

I cried to dream again. (3.2.126–34)

This passage discloses Caliban's ability to tune his soul through the art of listening (Jackson 2018). Music in the period was understood to harmonize the different parts of the soul, taken as the ensemble of faculties that lend themselves to thinking and feeling. The lutenist and song writer John Dowland, translating a 1516 treatise on music by Andreas Ornithoparcus, writes,

> Humane Musick, is the Concordance of divers elements in one compound, by which the spirituall nature is joyned with the body, and the reasonable part is coupled in concord with the unreasonable, which proceedes from the uniting of the body and the soule. For that amitie, by which the body is joyned unto the soule, is not tyed with bodily bands, but vertuall, caused by the proportion of humors. For what (saith Caelius) makes the powers of the soul so sundry and disagreeing to conspire oftentimes each with other? who reconciles the Elements of the body? what other power doth soder [solder] and glue that spirituall strength, which is indued with an intellect to a mortall and earthly frame, than that Musicke which every man that descends into himselfe finds in himselfe? (Lindley 2015, p. 22)

According to Dowland, "humane Musick" modulates a series of internal divisions: the soul, itself a dynamic infrastructure composed of "sundry and disagreeing . . . powers," brings order to the fluctuating but infinitely generative humors of the body. Drawing on natural reason, Dowland claims that this definition can be gleaned from simply observing the operations of music upon one's own composite self. Dowland's free translation emphasizes the created nature of the human being, who relies on the "soder and glue" of music to attach the mind to the "mortal and earthly frame of the body." Listening to music becomes a spiritual exercise, initiating an auto-affective "amity" among "divers elements" that yields a sense of sustained well-being at once mellifluous and cognizant of breaks and joints. In Caliban's musical reverie, reason, imagination, memory, perception, and emotion resonate with each other like so many strings on the lute of the soul (cf. Psalm 108:1–2). Whereas Dowland listens to human music in a human way, creature Caliban responds to natural sounds in a manner that affirms the unbearable fullness of his ensoulment while immersing him in a trembling continuum of living things. The ambient noise of the island become music through the creative-receptive hearing of the soulful auditor, who uses this attunement to build his emotional world and ultimately to calm himself.

This is a new and different order of self-rule from Caliban's presentation of himself as his own king. Neither sovereignty nor resistance is the dominant motif; instead, we glimpse spiritual techniques that give the ensouled creature inner strength and a new equilibrium along with heightened cognitive and affective capacities. (This is what arts education looks like.) The overall effect is to enhance the dignity and personhood that Prospero, Miranda, and even his creator, Shakespeare, would take from him, in a manner that emphasizes his porous, sensitive being in an environment that he inhabits without ruling. For a musical analogue, we might look to composer Luciano Berio's "O King," a symphonic piece

for eight voices, first written as a tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1967 and then retooled as an elegy in 1968. The highly crafted and experimental piece takes the phonemes in the civil rights leader's name as sonorous fragments that merge with the instrumentation rather than float above it; the word "King" itself is sounded for new sovereignties that reside in collective processes (Osmond-Smith 2016, pp. 65–80). At once weaning and keening, Caliban's proprioceptive lullaby elaborates the psyche as a virtual lyre that meshes with somatic and environmental flows and enables new creative attunements across the island and with future auditors.

Lloyd suggests that social organizing is a key component of black natural law. Social organizing involves more than resistance; it also initiates capacity-building within the community, as we saw in Du Bois's designs for a new church. After abolition, Frederick Douglass "committed himself to cultivating the capacities of freed blacks," which meant "attending to their broader humanity, including stimulating their emotions with music and poetry" (Lloyd 2016, p. 9). Noting Du Bois's use of spirituals as epigraphs, Lloyd concludes that "Just as black life offers privileged access to natural law, black music in a sense performs the natural law . . . Such songs remind us that there is a law beyond the world and that is the law by which we will ultimately be judged" (Lloyd 2016, p. 79). Caliban's psalm of self-comforting contributes to the historical performance of black natural law. His project may fail, but his soul will not break.

6. Wisdom and Grace

Caliban's final act in the play is to "seek for grace." Ordered by Prospero to trim his cell, Caliban replies,

> Ay, that I will; and I'll be wise hereafter,
>
> And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass
>
> Was I to take this drunkard for a god,
>
> And worship this dull fool! (5.1.292–95)

Although the speech is often taken as proof of Caliban's utter submission to Prospero after the collapse of the conspiracy, his desire to seek wisdom and grace has special resonance in natural law thinking. Recall the dictum of Aquinas: "Grace does not abolish Nature but perfects it." In both his dignity and his degradation Caliban is a type of the Old Adam, living after Eden in the wake of a Flood, in the Noahide zone before the mountain-top talks of either Moses or Jesus. Is this "grace" that Caliban seeks simply a set of Christian teachings that will replace the bad natural theology that he exhibited in taking a drunkard for a god? Will grace become violent, as it did in the Pilgrimage of Grace, the English Civil War, or John Brown's military actions? Or will it involve the transformation and expansion of that capacity-building work that Caliban had practiced at the vibrant infrastructure connecting self and world in his "sounds and sweet airs" reverie? This is the direction that grace takes in Matthew J. Smith's reading of Shakespeare's anthropology of religion in this volume: for Angelo, and I would say also for Prospero and Caliban, "the assumption of responsibility for [one's] action imagines a world in which guiltiness is not predetermined"; "confession does not remove [the sinner] from the sphere of guilt, but it enacts his recognition of the need to be outside it" (Smith 2018, p. 13). For Shakespeare, grace ultimately signifies the capacity of religion to transcend its own punitive frameworks and release human beings into new forms of creative freedom, obligation, and mutual recognition.

I took as my epigram 1 John 3:2a, cited by James Cone, the founder of black theology, as he strived to communicate the emergent character of black consciousness in 1970: "'We are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be'" (Cone 2010, location 688). Cone cites the first half of the verse by itself, heightening the mood of expectancy; the full verse is *imago dei* theology through and through:

> Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. (KJV John 3:2)

This passage captures the mood of expectancy and creative possibility that animates (ensouls) Caliban's search for grace at the end of *The Tempest*, and affirms his radiant impress by God's image, to be realized in an encounter yet to come. To seek for grace is to approach eternity by turning one's own incompleteness into an instrument that plays the world.

And what is this wisdom that Caliban seeks? Under the punitive rule of Prospero, Caliban experienced resentment, frustration, and coercion as symptoms, in the form of the cramps, pricks, and itches that beset the creaturely edges of his being. The stinging nettles of pain triggered by the denial of personhood constitute one kind of knowledge, a knowledge that is fierce, inarticulate, and best verbalized in the curse. At the end of the play, anticipating Prospero's departure, Caliban can seek another kind of knowledge, a wisdom that grows out of pain but, like Ariel's pearls, moves beyond it towards benediction, social action, and self-care, the wisdom he has already begun to access through the art of listening. Wisdom is not simply more reflective or accepting than the knowledge that erupts immediately from pain; to the contrary, wisdom must involve the whole person, in the present moment, over time, and in the resonant spaces of dwelling. This is why wisdom is cultivated by spiritual exercises that, like Caliban's music, operate on and through the entire infrastructure of the psyche (Sterrett 2018). The fractured and flowering landscapes of romance, replete with classical, Jewish, messianic, medieval, Reformed, and New World zoo-anthropologies, provide the setting for Shakespeare's ecumenical search for wisdom and grace. In this pulsing, pluralized ecology composed of multiple virtue traditions, the creator begins to acknowledge this thing of darkness as his own, calling back the dogs of tyranny and rage in order to clear the ground for an unknown future freed from his own overbearing supervision.

In what sense does *The Tempest*, through the passion of Caliban, become wisdom literature? I began with Du Bois's library for the souls of black folk, which included works by "Shakespeare, Confucius, Buddha, and John Brown." This world canon is unified by shared values discerned by the librarian from the point of view of the community he aims to represent and to serve. Wisdom literature, like natural law, involves teachings that may be produced by and for a particular religious or cultural group but lend themselves to diffusion and translation. In the seventeenth century, John Selden understood Talmud and Torah as wisdom literature:

> [I]t would seem that anyone who considers the matter carefully cannot, for the same reasons, help but place the highest possible value on this philosophy or law of the Hebrews as being the best part and sole survivor of a great treasure, i.e., of the sum total of the barbarian philosophies of the East. (Haivry 2017, p. 128)

Selden credited the Jews with transmitting a "great treasure," namely eastern philosophies such as Zoroastrianism, in the form of natural law discourses such as the Noahide laws. In placing Shakespeare next to Confucius, Buddha, and John Brown, Du Bois is doing a similar kind of comparative work. Writing from the perspective of Judaism, David Novak asserts that natural law "can save multi-culturalism from the dead end of relativism" while also protecting "natural law thinking from its all too frequent political and epistemological myopia" (Novak 2014, location 545). Writing from the perspective of black studies, Vincent Lloyd observes: "The field, born of struggle, was once centrally concerned with normative questions—What ought to be done? How ought we to live? What is a just society?—but these concerns have faded, critical inquiry replaced by dogmatic 'progressive' assumptions'" (Lloyd 2016). A similar claim could be made for Shakespeare studies, which has largely eschewed universals in favor of particulars, filtered through "progressive assumptions" that may miss what is most redeeming in the precious texts entrusted to our care. In my new work on Shakespeare's virtues, I am interested in finding a non-reductive and historically attuned place in Shakespeare studies to reevaluate and renew normative concepts such as excellence, soul, autonomy, fellowship, amity, and tradition. Natural law thinking, perfected rather than abolished by black natural law, contributes to that effort.

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