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Chatter and Chant: Religion and Community on the Renaissance English Stage

Abstract

This dissertation examines moments in five English Renaissance plays when characters employ religious language in bids to consolidate or to fracture communities. The plays are John Bale's *King Johan* (c. 1538, revised c. 1560), Nathaniel Woodes' *Conflict of Conscience* (c. 1581); Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603); Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (1611); and John Webster's *The White Devil* (1612). The types of communities examined most closely are those of a small scale - relationships of individuals to God, marriages, families, friendships, households, parishes, courts - but these appear against the backdrop of much larger communities such as the nation and the Church. I investigate the striking diversity of ways a well-known prayer, a Gospel parable, an iconic religious image, or a scriptural type can function during a quest to divide a group of people or to bring them together.

A central point in this dissertation is that these religiously-inflected speeches and actions in these plays alert us to the many dynamic intricacies involved in maintaining or dissolving particular communities. As such, the instances I examine serve as further evidence that we who study Renaissance drama do well to question grand-narrative accounts - such as an uncomplicated secularization thesis - of religion's place on the stage. Individual chapters stake out specific resistances to the impulse toward generalization and homogeneity, as I participate in the "turn to religion" in early modern studies. The chapters question or supplement readings in certain New Historicist veins that see the theatre as merely a replacement for religion; or conceive of religion mostly as politics in flimsy disguise; or reduce literary art to its ideological content and/or context. I identify a variety of attempts at community formation by means of self-transcendence, considering the degree and types of control characters and playwrights attempt to wield over Christian discourse and practice. I posit that my engagement with these moments should make us pause before assuming that these playwrights and their audiences shared our belief that more obviously collaborative or more apparently secular models of community formation are automatically or in every way the best.

Document Type

Dissertation

Degree Name

Ph.D.

Department

English

First Advisor

Linda Bensel-Meyers, Ph.D.

Second Advisor

W. Scott Howard

Third Advisor

Clark Davis

Keywords

Community, Drama, Religion, Renaissance

Subject Categories

Classical Literature and Philology | Comparative Literature | English Language and Literature | Literature in English, British Isles

Publication Statement

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CHATTER AND CHANT:
RELIGION AND COMMUNITY
ON THE RENAISSANCE ENGLISH STAGE

A Dissertation

Presented to
the Faculty of Arts and Humanities
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Rachel Dunleavy Morgan

June 2018

Advisor: Linda Bensel-Meyers

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Author: Rachel Dunleavy Morgan
Title: CHATTER AND CHANT: RELIGION AND COMMUNITY ON THE
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Advisor: Linda Bense-Meyers
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This dissertation examines moments in five English Renaissance plays when characters employ religious language in bids to consolidate or to fracture communities. The plays are John Bale's *King Johan* (c. 1538, revised c. 1560), Nathaniel Woodes' *Conflict of Conscience* (c. 1581); Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603); Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (1611); and John Webster's *The White Devil* (1612). The types of communities examined most closely are those of a small scale—relationships of individuals to God, marriages, families, friendships, households, parishes, courts—but these appear against the backdrop of much larger communities such as the nation and the Church. I investigate the striking diversity of ways a well-known prayer, a Gospel parable, an iconic religious image, or a scriptural type can function during a quest to divide a group of people or to bring them together.

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theatre as merely a replacement for religion; or conceive of religion mostly as politics in flimsy disguise; or reduce literary art to its ideological content and/or context. I identify a variety of attempts at community formation by means of self-transcendence, considering the degree and types of control characters and playwrights attempt to wield over Christian discourse and practice. I posit that my engagement with these moments should make us pause before assuming that these playwrights and their audiences shared our belief that more obviously collaborative or more apparently secular models of community formation are automatically or in every way the best.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many communities enabled the completion of this dissertation. My parents, Mike and Symona, and grandparents, Fran and Gene, encouraged my appreciation for literature, our faith, and good conversation. Exceptional teachers, whose enthusiasm and respect for texts I strive to emulate, have furthered my education; my mother, Lori Butcher, and many of my professors at Ave Maria University particularly come to mind. At the University of Denver, I had the good fortune of belonging both in the English department and in the Writing Center. Patrick Kelling brightened many a day with his seemingly indefatigable good humor. One could not ask for a more gracious colleague than Sarah Olivier. Eliana Schonberg and Juli Parrish encouraged me to try to forge a career that allowed me to delight both in Renaissance drama and in writing center work. I know I cannot adequately thank my colleagues at the University of Providence for their support over the past four years. To Sarah Spangler, Janine Giordano Drake, Brendan Palla, Kevin Eubanks, and Curt Bobbit I owe particular gratitude. During the same period, my students challenged me to become a better teacher and scholar. I thank my advisor, Linda Bensel Meyers, for her patient guidance, as well as my other readers, Scott Howard and Clark Davis. Jan Gorak gave me shrewd advice before and after his retirement. With my sisters, Kathleen and Lauren, I have long enjoyed an especially wonderful little community. My sweet Mary has been the best of reasons to take breaks from this project and the best motivation for completing it. Finally, I am blessed with a husband who unfailingly supports my scholarly work while offering extremely erudite responses to it. For Matt and to Matt I am most grateful.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines moments in five English Renaissance plays when characters employ religious language in bids to consolidate or to fracture communities. The plays are John Bale's *King Johan* (c. 1538; later revised c. 1560), Nathaniel Woodes' *Conflict of Conscience* (c. 1581); Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603); Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (1611); and John Webster's *The White Devil* (1612). The types of communities examined most closely are those of a rather small scale—relationships of individuals to God, marriages, families, friendships, households, towns, parishes, courts—but these appear at times against the backdrop of much larger communities such as the nation, the Church, and even, at one point in the fourth chapter, the community of all human beings. This study investigates some of the striking diversity of ways a well-known prayer, a Gospel parable, an iconic religious image, or a scriptural type can function during a quest to divide a group of people or to bring them together. I consider the degree and types of control characters and playwrights attempt to wield over Christian discourse and practice in a time of religious turbulence. Such investigation offers insight into some communal relationships depicted on stage and into

the interplay between these and certain off-stage communities to which they appear connected.¹

A central point in this dissertation is that religiously-inflected speeches and actions in these plays tend to resonate in situation-specific ways, ways that alert us to the many dynamic intricacies involved in trying to maintain or dissolve any particular community. As I shall discuss in more depth in the next section of this introduction, community is aspect of our experience defined in part by its resistance to reification, to easy schematization, to complete definitions. Hence, when I investigate, for example, attempts to break apart and eliminate the Litany of the Saints, I demonstrate that the “same” prayer can create both unity and division among persons and that it functions in a variety of sometimes unpredictable ways. Its deep roots in a variety of personal and public devotions make it difficult to eradicate from parishes committed to the practice of praying it. I also show that John Bale is far from the first to capitalize on the Litany’s formal flexibility and potential for humorous and/or subversive modification. In other words, I draw attention the fact that, even in the pre-Reformation Church, another person’s or parish’s litany might more seem more peculiar, less efficacious, or more dangerous than one’s own. I also, however, try to attend to the particular resonances of Bale’s parodic assault on the Litany of the Saints, uncovering some of the methods by which his parodic litany picks certain battles and avoids others.

¹ As I neared completion of this dissertation, a collection of essays appeared entitled *Community-Making in Early Stuart Theatres: Stage and Audience* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2016). Although my project considers plays written during a longer period of time, I share with its contributors and editors, Anthony W. Johnson, Roger D. Sell, and Helen Wilcox, an interest in “questions about the relationship of early modern plays and performances to the multiple communities on which they could have had some bearing.” (1).

Likewise, my concluding discussion of *The White Devil* sees Webster engaged in longstanding traditions of using the figure of Cain as a means of critiquing and resisting the functions of social/sovereign power. More particularly, Webster draws attention to Elizabethan and Jacobean social policies that would problematically seem to sustain the life of its poorest subjects only on the condition that their lives remain highly contingent, balanced precariously on edges of society. At the same time, however, the evocation of Cain also raises questions about the ultimate value of Cain's brand of energetic resistance to power. As the various Cain-like characters attempt to outmaneuver one another, they often end up more strongly entangling their fates. Furthermore, the existences they carve out for themselves, the communities they create, their "cities of men," seem also to achieve only the barest sort of life.

Taken all in all, the instances I investigate illustrate a point that we who study Renaissance drama generally agree upon—albeit more often in theory than in practice: namely, that we do well to question neatly packaged, grand-narrative accounts of religion's place on the Renaissance and Reformation English stage. The "turn to religion" during the past few decades spurred robust reevaluation of how religious concerns inform the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century. Indeed this movement continues to gather speed at such a pace that nothing like a comprehensive review could be accomplished here. As many others have already done so, I also refrain from recapitulating in depth here arguments about the limitations of the secularization thesis or of periodization that posits too rigid a difference between pre-and-post

Reformation religious experience.² Rather, individual chapters will stake out specific resistances to the impulse toward generalization and homogeneity. The chapters themselves also shoulder the burden of questioning or supplementing readings in certain New Historicist veins which see the theatre as a replacement for religion; or conceive of religion mostly as politics in flimsy disguise; or reduce literary art to its ideological content and/or context.³

For the moment, a few metacritical accounts can efficiently provide helpful insight into the kinds of re-thinking recently engendered by “the religious turn” and thereby contextualize my own discussion. First, Julia Reinhard Lupton characterizes current understanding of “the religious landscape of Renaissance England as mixed terrain shaped by uneven development rather than strict teleology, composed of layered formations in which past and present often touch each other in unexpected ways.”⁴

Rumpled, stratified veins of stone: they seem a particularly apt metaphor for Christianity’s formation, reformations and counter-reformations, when the authority of

² For overviews of the field’s explosion of interest in religion and of notable challenges to the secularization thesis, which was expressed most magisterially in reference to English drama by E.K. Chambers’ three volume *The English Stage*, see Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti, “The Turn to Religion in Early Modern Studies,” *Criticism* 46, 1 (Winter, 2004): 167-90; and Julia Reinhard Lupton, “The Religious Turn (to Theory) in Shakespeare Studies,” *English Language Notes* 44 (2006): 145-9, along with her more recent chapter cited in note 4 below. Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007) provides an extensive argument against a simplified secularization thesis. On certain pitfalls into which Early Modernists are sometimes liable to fall when it comes to periodization and discussions of religion, David Aers has been particularly vociferous. See, for example, his “A Whisper in the Ear Modernists, Or Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the History of the Subject” in *Culture and History 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities, and Writing*, Aers, David, ed. (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1992), 177-202.

³ As Deborah Shuger has been reminding us for some time now, “religion is, first of all, not simply politics in disguise, a set of beliefs that represent and legitimate the social order by grounding it in the Absolute.” *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 14.

⁴ Julia Reinhard Lupton, “Religion and the Religious Turn” in *A Handbook of English Renaissance Literary Studies*, ed. John Lee (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2017): 70-85.

the pope was for some overturned and when seemingly sharp doctrinal differences could often be traced back to the same textual foundations.

Next, Brian Cummings describes the dismantling of discrete categories and habits of thought that long held sway:

Yet if religion and secularity turn out instead to have had porous boundaries all along, everything we describe in historical writing via the assumption of a dialectic between the religious and the secular has to be removed and rethought. The realm of the religious includes many things that we think of in secular terms. . . . The religious, perhaps, is not quite as ‘religious’ as we thought, and intersects with the world in its totality, not in some hermetically sealed sphere all of its own.”⁵

In line with such descriptions, this dissertation emerged out of wonder at all the ways religious language and practice permeated these plays. Religion suffuses them in ways that upset some standard distinctions between medieval cycle plays, Protestant morality drama, and works for the commercial theatre by Shakespeare, Thomas Heywood, and John Webster.

My own goal throughout this study, then, is balancing close attention to individual works with a historicism supple enough to allow for the extensive variety of belief and unbelief in Early Modern England. Richard Strier is one of the most lucid proponents of the approach to which I aspire. Drawing conclusions from his comparison of the critical approaches of William Empson and Rosamund Tuve, Strier insists,

we must strive to see traditional works against the backdrop of their traditions, not as merging indistinguishably into them. All the “elements” of a poem can be familiar, yet the poem can be startlingly original. We must, in Empson’s wonderful phrase, taste each text with “as clean a palate” as we can. . . . To do what Empson recommends does not mean making believe that each text is the

⁵ Brian Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts: Religion, Secularity & Identity in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 14.

first thing ever written, or the first thing ever written on its topic, but it does mean trying to appreciate each text's distinctive qualities, however strange or familiar. It means letting the historical chips fall where they may.⁶

Accordingly, each of my chapters first prioritizes consideration of how the religious language and practice appear to work within the relationships depicted in the play itself. Second, I investigate some resonances of that religious rhetoric and action that we can reasonably assume would have been available to its author and audience. Third and finally, I engage with some relevant, although less historically specific, theoretical considerations insofar as they have been suggested by this interplay between text and culture. Two fairly obvious caveats here: the possible resonances I attempt to capture are far from the only ones available, given the degree to which religion permeated early modern culture. It should also be remembered that, while I sometimes make shorthand reference to collective "audience" while attempting to reconstruct responses to the plays, the responses to the performance undoubtedly differed greatly. The five plays I consider were written and performed during a period famous for its rapid oscillations among different versions of official reform, counter-reform, and "settlement." Furthermore, the rather chaotic history we trace through official printed artefacts overlays an even more jumbled array of difference in day-to-day belief and practice among the members of the public who would have attended these performances.⁷

⁶ Richard Strier, *Resistant Structures: Particularity, Radicalism, and Renaissance Texts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 25.

⁷ I often return, on this point, to Jeffrey Knapp: "Although we regularly pretend otherwise, we cannot with any certainty infer the beliefs of an individual based on his or her membership in a group, not even a group as self-conscious about its beliefs as a religious sect . . . Yet belonging to a group and experiencing the practical as well as ideological pressures upon it does incline an individual to profess certain general beliefs, especially about the group itself." *Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theatre in Shakespeare's England* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 13.

Community: A Working Framework

Before proceeding to individual chapters, a few global remarks seem in order on the meanings of “community” I propose to examine. The term is used often and often used imprecisely. In the introduction to a collection of essays, *Communities in Early Modern England*, the historian editors note that the term’s “rhetorical warmth, as well as its fuzzy definition, makes it remarkably adaptable.”⁸ It can too often mean just about anything, although the connotations are generally positive. Frequently, it appears as an ill-defined opposite of various things that are said to weaken or destroy it: community is something undermined by reformation, by capitalism, by totalitarianism, etc.

How do we, then, put our finger securely on something so slippery and ideologically entangled? After all, how many of us periodically stop to wonder if we ourselves are well and truly a part of a given community, even one with which we have been (ostensibly) affiliated for a long time? And yet, how acute also can be moments when we experience belonging, or of *not* belonging to a community? Community appears, by turns, as fragile and then robust, as a nearly imperceptible given and then as an entity under near-constant threat of dissolution.

Those same editors, Alexandra Shepard and Phil Withington, provide a useful, practical schema for trying to understand community, one that I use here in thinking through some connections among my various chapters. Resisting the urge to overly

⁸ Alexandra Shepard and Phil Withington, eds., *Communities in Early Modern England: Networks, Place, Rhetoric* (New York: St. Martin’s Press for Manchester University Press, 2000), 3. They build upon observations about the term made by Raymond Williams, citing *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society* (London: Fontana, 1976), 23.

determine the nature of community, they highlight its dynamisms: it is “something done as an expression of collective identity by a group of people. It occurred over periods of time, with shifting emphases and boundaries.”⁹ Pointing toward specific actions, in relation to one another, is a sensible means of trying to grasp what a particular “community” might entail and seems likely to alert us to both shifts and continuities.

Shepard and Withington furthermore suggest we think of community as comprised of six interrelated parts when we turn to analyze it:

First, the institutional arrangements, practices and roles that structure it. Second, the people who did it, did not do it, did not want to do it, were excluded from doing it. Third, the acts and artefacts—whether communicative or material—which defined and constituted it. Fourth, the geographical places in which it was located. Fifth, the time in which it was done and perpetuated. And, sixth, the rhetoric by which it was legitimated, represented, discussed, used and turned into ideology.¹⁰

As a study in the historicist vein, this dissertation does, as aforementioned, consider a range of early modern institutions, and roles of varying scope: the marriage, the household, the parish, the court, the “universal” Church, to name only a few. It also examines artefacts such as Books of Hours, Books of Psalms, Royal and Episcopal Injunctions and the like; communal acts such as “beating the bounds,” and funeral rites also appear. Issues of time and place garner particular attention when it comes to the topicality of certain plays, particularly those of Bale and Woodes. As a literary study focused specifically on drama, however, I adapt this framework somewhat, primarily

⁹ Shepard and Withington, 12.

¹⁰ Ibid.

concerning myself with the people on the page/stage: the characters who emerge through their rhetoric and their actions.

At the same time as I attempt a responsible historicist inquiry into dramatic literature, I am also cognizant of robust conversations about community undertaken over the past few decades by continental theorists such as Jean-Luc Nancy, Maurice Blanchot, Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Derrida, Alain Badiou, Roberto Esposito, Jean Pierre Dupuy, and others. While these thinkers differ widely from one other, they nonetheless share several characteristics in common, not least, no doubt, because in many cases they either were formerly or continue to engage in dialogue with each other's work. For example, Maurice Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community* (1983) explicitly responds to Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* (the title perhaps better translated into English as *The Unworking [desouvrement] Community*), published the previous year. Since that time Nancy's thought has remained engaged with the complexities attending the project of responsibly conceptualizing community, perhaps most notably in his *Being Singular-Plural* (1995).¹¹ Most recently, a third of a century after that initial exchange with Blanchot, Nancy has published *The Disavowed Community*, a text which takes the form of a running commentary on Blanchot's original essay. Signaling both the continued relevance and the challenging nature of the task, Nancy begins his remarks in that text

¹¹ Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, trans. Pierre Joris (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1988); Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), *Being Singular-Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), and *The Disavowed Community*, trans. Philip Armstrong (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

with a striking affirmation that the thinking of community remains the primary unfinished project of contemporary (continental) philosophy.¹²

It is always intellectually risky to make general claims about what heterogeneous a group of thinkers have in common; if, however, they do share a central impulse, or perhaps even a conviction, it is that the thinking of community needs to avoid *reifying* community. They conceive of communities as rooted not in a shared essence or positive identity, but rather in the lack of any such essentialism. Whatever else community may be, it is not (as Shepard and Withington would have it) the vehicle for expressions of group identity. Even the subjectivity of individual participants in community tends to be conceived as nebulous, more a lack or a deficit. (Roberto Esposito, to whom I return in my concluding remarks, is particularly eloquent on this topic.)

Finally, and most importantly for my purposes, one gathers from some of these theorists a sense that community can only come into being in virtue of some principle of self-transcendence. To borrow the terms employed most extensively by Jean-Pierre Dupuy, communities produce, so to speak, their own “exteriorities”. They generate ways to act upon themselves, as it were, from the outside; they are “machines for producing gods.”¹³ These ways of understanding communities proposed by continental philosophy have markedly influenced the “turn to religion” in early modern studies, as Arthur

¹² Nancy begins the “Preface to the English Language Edition” of *The Disavowed Community* by writing “if there is a ‘work-in-progress’ in contemporary philosophy, it is undoubtedly in work on community,” vii.

¹³ Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *The Mark of the Sacred*, trans. M.B. Debevoise (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013) 1-2. My understanding of these thinkers and their exchanges is owes a large debt to Matthew Morgan. I thank him for sharing his work-in-progress and many conversations.

Marotti and Ken Jackson detailed in their outline of the turn back in 2008.¹⁴ For example, Paul Stevens writes,

By religion I mean, above all, transcendence. Central to my understanding of the term are conceptions like Charles Taylor's "transformation of the frame," that is, those epiphanic moments when consciousness breaks through the quotidian or what we might take to be the natural frame of things to experience a new or radically different order of reality, a fullness of being that is for many people entirely coincident with the presence of God.¹⁵

Recurring Questions: Irony, Forgiveness, Self-authorization

As I utilize these various lenses to bring selected aspects of community into focus, certain *types of moments* which promote or corrode community keep coming to the fore. The first two chapters, those on John Bale's *King Johan* and Nathaniel Woodes' *Conflict of Conscience*, are thematically linked by consideration of ironic uses of religious language and actions. In the middle three chapters—which include (again) Woodes' *Conflict of Conscience*; Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*; and Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*—questions about forgiveness predominate. What I will refer to as “bids for self-authorization” appear variously in the course of analysis during all five chapters, materializing most saliently at the beginning and again at the end, with respect to *King Johan* on the one hand and to John Webster's *The White Devil* on the other. In the final chapter, the perplexities of irony also urgently recur, as characters such as Flamineo satirically reconfigure religious language and practice.

I did not explicitly intend at the outset of this project to privilege this troika of themes—irony; forgiveness; and attempted self-authorization—that I here highlight.

¹⁴ Marotti and Jackson, 178-179.

¹⁵ Paul Stevens, “Literary Studies and the Turn to Religion: Milton Reading Badiou,” *Religion and Literature* 47, no. 1 (2013): 138, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24397813>.

Instead, these themes emerged out of a commitment to and practice of historically-informed close-reading that tends to be on the lookout for the surprising. Upon reflection, I see that the moments I highlight all share the quality of disrupting certain business-as-usual community-sustaining or community-enabling processes; in other words, they all seem to aim at producing transcendence of one sort or another—or at least the appearance of it. As such they expose community as a communal project, a process forever being re-affirmed and re-constituted, yet remaining ever under threat. Indeed, my selection of plays reflects the degree to which I found their interrogations of transcendence and community to be in some way striking or surprising. (Certainly other plays could have been written about as part of this investigation; I expect that, as my interest in the topic is far from exhausted, they will be in the future. Given already extant treatments of the subject, I was not so interested, for example, by the violence of Scriptural interpretation in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* as in the parsing out the particulars of Nathaniel Woodes' practice.¹⁶)

But back now to types and moments, achievements and failures of self-transcendence, of religion. The apprehension of irony requires one to hold in abeyance literal, univocal meanings and to remain alert to the potential range of additional meanings. It also forces one to consider the knowledge or beliefs of the ironist in question. In other words, irony draws particular attention and puts pressure on that now critical commonplace that all communities are interpretive communities. Similarly, the

¹⁶ For example, an astute reading of *Doctor Faustus* of the sort that my own work seeks to emulate exists in Adrian Streete, "Consummatum Est": Calvinist Exegesis, Mimesis and *Doctor Faustus*" *Literature and Theology* 15, no. 2 (June 2001):140-158, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23925649>.

instances of forgiveness investigated here prompt one to halt and to scrutinize one's impulse to harbor dangerous resentments as well as one's still more dangerous urge to exact revenge. Such impulses and urges (those of internalized resentment; those that beckon towards vengeance) appear as entirely natural responses to a violation of the communal expectations about how a particular person should act. Yet the possibility of forgiveness imperatively calls that apparent "naturalness" into question. To forgive, then, is also to forestall and re-contextualize simple-mindedly punitive responses to violated norms. It arrests destructive spontaneities and converts them into moments for principled self-reflection. It offers to a community the possibility of a reconciled future beyond the norm-violating moments that would otherwise threaten its continued existence.

Finally, at the nexus of "people who did it, did not do it, did not want to do it, were excluded from doing it"¹⁷ are those who seem to make a bid to somehow self-legitimate or self-authorize their thinking, speech, and actions, to present them as free of (or, at least as far removed as possible) the communities to which the character in question belongs. In fact, these attempts often appear as a reaction to, or an attempt to preempt, a character's exclusion from a given community. Now, complete success in self-authorization seems self-evidently impossible. The inescapable interconnectedness of humans in community, however, does not prevent certain figures—particularly our

¹⁷ Shepard and Withington, 12.

literary devils—from audacious attempts to short-circuit those usual social and linguistic connections.¹⁸

All of these moments—of irony, of forgiveness, of the audacious bid for self-authorization—raise questions less about the *what* of community than about its *how*: about its modalities, its dynamisms, the diverse operations of consolidation and dissolution aforementioned.¹⁹ Any given community will enable and sanction certain kinds of speech and action while discouraging, inhibiting or rendering others absurd or unthinkable. In a society suffused with religious language and practice, these plays throw into relief questions about how one ought best to communicate to others. Characters (and their creators) often attempt to invite one group of people to reason or empathize along with them while simultaneously rejecting the claims of other groups to participate in the discussion. Modern readers, including myself, often tend to find much more palatable those religiously-couched communications that feel like an invitation rather than an injunction or imposition. When I juxtapose staged invitations to collaborative community-building against attempts to impose more authoritative command over those processes, however, such reactions are sometimes repudiated. They seem especially

¹⁸ For influential accounts of the functions of Devil and Vice characters in Medieval and Early Modern Drama that illustrate something of the field's evolving relationship with questions of religion and secularity, see Bernard Spivak, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to His Major Villains* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958); Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), John D. Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in English Dramatic Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and John Parker, *The Aesthetics of the AntiChrist: From Christian Drama to Christopher Marlowe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

¹⁹ As Constance Furey recently claimed in her study of early modern poets, “the self is neither alone nor universally connected, but is forever interactive and dynamically constituted by specific relationships.” *Poetic Relations: Intimacy and Faith in the English Reformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

sensitive to characters who turn out to be *trying* to appear more or less inclusive than they really are. In the case of the vice-figures, when falsity is to be expected, this might not surprise us; but such issue becomes far more complex in cases like that of Anne Frankford, Heywood's eponymous "woman."

In short, the following discussion should make us pause before assuming that these playwrights and their audiences shared our belief that more obviously collaborative—or more secular-looking—models of community formation are automatically or in every way the best. Certainly we witness in these plays many critiques of solipsistic reasoning and heavy-handed assertions about truths, religious or otherwise. We also, however, witness various moments when apparently good-faith collaborative efforts go awry. These works highlight for us many of the perennial problems inherent in the practice of textual interpretation itself, whether undertaken in isolation, but they also stress the many flaws in communities' collectively produced convictions. As we parse the complexities of living in a dynamic community, it becomes clear that, like the devils of discord, the angels of communal harmony reside in a thousand particular loci.

Chapter Descriptions

The first chapter, "John Bale's *King Johan* and Re-forming Communities with the Litany of Saints," considers the play's parodic treatment of the Catholic litany against the backdrop of English reformers' efforts to revise or eliminate the widely practiced prayer. As investigation into the Litany's history reminds us, the prayer's formal features render it eminently adaptable to personal, familial, local, and national devotions. Modifying it to accommodate a new saint simply involves adding a name. The same features make it

laughably easy to parody. As a “distillation of the cult of saints,” the Litany’s ostensible simplicity is, however, predicated upon a complex matrix of (at least partially) shared practice and understanding. It presupposes that those who pray it have access to the logic behind its various groupings, for the reasons that Saint Francis and Saint Dominic always appear together. Likewise, even if one were unfamiliar with a “Saint Herefield” one might infer certain things about the kind of role he played, based on his proximity to other, better-known bishops.

Bale’s parody, I argue, attempts to harness the familiarity, economy, and flexibility of the Litany’s form for multiple reforming purposes. When the vice Sedition seizes upon its easy modification, Bale questions how many other unworthy, self-promoting “saints” fill out the list. In highlighting the ease with which an individual makes changes, Bale here as elsewhere in his drama actively occludes the complex communal practices involved in the development of and use of ritual practices. At the same time, his parody still presupposes and tries to exploit that implicit knowledge with which the litany is suffused. He seeks to besmirch the posthumous reputations of such popular saints as Thomas a Becket and Saint Patrick through contagion: if Sedition would group himself with them, proclaiming himself a national saint, perhaps the audience ought to reconsider their veneration of these figures.

Yet, as the precise excerpt from the litany in *King Johan* alerts us, irony can be tricky to wield with precision when targeting a suspect form but only selectively targeting the content of that form. Bale may have wished to utterly discredit the *prayer* as an efficacious practice, but it did not follow that he wished to destroy the posthumous reputation for holiness of every person included in it. Thus, I conclude the chapter by

considering Bale's control of his parody in the context of a larger task undertaken by Bale, John Foxe and others: that of winnowing "true" saints from the community of the false ones in the service of reform.

The next chapter continues to examine irony and control in the Protestant morality play tradition. We can position *King Johan* in relation to Bale's substantial body of other work and considerable knowledge about his official appointments, his social connections, and the development of his theology. By contrast, we know next to nothing about Nathaniel Woodes, author of *Conflict of Conscience*, beyond the dates of his study at Cambridge (1567-1574), his ordination (1571), and his appointment as vicar of St. Mary's in Norwich (1572). His dramatic version of the well-known story of Francisco Spira, a sixteenth and seventeenth-century poster child for despair, comes down to us with two different endings. In the original, the protagonist's despair lands him squarely in hell; the second version, apparently hastily revised due to some kind of censorship, sees the central character saved in his final seconds. Erin Kelly posits that the play's ability to accommodate either ending results from its failure to lock down doctrinal certainty; she speculates that this sort of ambiguity, inherent to drama itself, eventually prompted Protestant reformers to abandon the morality play as a didactic tool.²⁰ I seek to complement Sullivan's reading of the play by looking closely at its arresting ironic uses of the biblical parables of the Evil Husbandmen and the Prodigal Son. More specifically, I consider why someone presumably quite invested upholding the integrity of scripture might subject it to such potentially devastating irony.

²⁰ Erin E. Kelly "Conflict of Conscience and Sixteenth Century Religious Drama" *English Literary Renaissance* 44, no. 3 (2014): 389-391.

When Satan and the other Vice characters appropriate these two parables, the moral valences of the typological characters—the vineyard owner, the vineyard workers, the father and the son—are inverted. The parables are thus removed from certain common Early Modern interpretations and extensions of their significance into contemporary settings. Because the narrative shape of the Parable of the Evil Husbandmen culminates in the restoration of order, those trying to maintain some kind of power frequently deploy it as a warning against rebellion. When reconfigured in the *Conflict of Conscience*, however, the parable instead calls for rebellion, for a unified Protestant resistance against the ill-gotten worldly power of Satan and his henchmen, the Pope and Catholic clergy. Although this ironic inversion—and the one practiced on the parable of the Prodigal Son—may be quite effective in preaching resistance to the Roman church, they also tend to foreclose possibilities of divine forgiveness. In so undermining the analogy between the earthly father-son relationship and that of God the father with Christ, Woodes leaves precious little imagery to counteract the Spira-character’s despair. After this assault on familial typology, then, his audience must rely upon their memory and convictions to “correct” the brash destabilization of scriptural types.

I conclude that putting such an onus on one’s audience can be viewed as a mark of great confidence in the faith and discernment of its individual members. Yet that same ironic experimentation might be viewed (and seems to have been seen by censors) as a flirtation with extreme instability and, ultimately, nihilism. No matter the intention, a good many people are likely to be made uncomfortable by Woodes idiosyncratic take on a familiar story.

Chapter Three considers yet more discomfort, that elicited by Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. Although in many ways far removed from the two earlier plays, with their personifications, obvious anti-Catholic polemic, and old-fashioned verse, *A Woman Killed* infuses many elements of the morality play tradition into a domestic tragedy. Heywood throughout draws attention to the circulation of religious language in the households and the Yorkshire neighborhood in which the action takes place. In the build-up to the climactic deathbed reconciliation of Frankford—the cuckolded husband—and Anne—his erring wife—I see the play pitting against one another two distinct responses to their broken bond. Frankford casts himself in the role of the righteous patriarch from Scripture, with Abraham as his most frequent point of reference. Among the key features of this role are the ability to engage with God directly (such that the counsel of others is not required), the finality of decisions once made, and the authority to impose those final decisions on others. Anne, by contrast, instantiates the iconography of the penitent woman, weeping, fasting, and so calling forth a spontaneous response from others. Ultimately, Anne's affective response prevails, as the force of communal pressure she marshals causes Frankford to reconsider his "final" decision just before she dies.

I follow the two spouses' uses of religion to re-orient themselves in the aftermath of Anne's infidelity, concluding that most of elements of these attempts—weeping, talk of angels and devils, ritualizing—continue to be used by both Protestants and Catholics of various stripes. Thus, it is difficult to assign particular allegiances to either spouse. I also posit that the play activates another conflict, entangled with but not reducible questions of gender and sectarianism: it suggests that one's relationship to the divine

might require rejection of those everyday human interactions that often constitute community. The structure of the play in many ways privileges a collaborative, affective, conversational version of living in a community—the kind that Anne manages to activate, albeit at great cost. In multiple ways, however, this play also demonstrates that collectively produced judgment tends to be fallible, even arbitrary. Heywood presents the alternative, rooting one's judgments and actions instead in a relationship to God, in the style of Abraham, as a problematic alternative as well. Hence, the play concludes without having presented any very articulations of how healthier community formation might proceed.

Questions about judgment and one's relationship to the divine also drive my investigation of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* in the fourth chapter. I draw out some benefits of hearing syntactic and thematic echoes of the *De Profundis* (Psalm 130; *Vulgate* 129) in Posthumus' soliloquy at the beginning of Act V. Investigating the psalm's public and private uses in early modern England illuminates the play's focus on human and divine forgiveness. At a moment of deep remorse over his actions, Posthumous calls up one of the two most famous penitential psalms. During the course of the reformation and counter-reformation, the *De Profundis* was considered appropriate to the penitent, whether one viewed it—following Luther, Calvin and many other reformers—as an appropriate expression of repentance or, in keeping with Roman Catholic theology, thought the prayer itself could function as an effectual work of penance. Perhaps somewhat more controversially, Posthumous evokes this psalm long associated with prayers for the dead as he forgives his murdered wife who did not, he assumes, have a chance to repent.

As many before me have noted, *Cymbeline* repeatedly illustrates the impossibility and dangers of assigning comparative values to people and their actions. Many interpreters of Psalm 130, including John Calvin, worry about similar pitfalls: I am all too ready to let myself off the hook if I glance over and see my neighbors engaged in iniquities worse my own. Yet, despite the dangers, neither psalm nor play completely repudiates comparison. Instead, they urge us to compare differently: to take a view at once more expansive, more humble, and more god-centric. I argue *Cymbeline* recognizes that the nearly unavoidable urge to weigh one's failings against others' can, if thus carefully regulated, facilitate forgiveness and repair broken communal bonds.

By Posthumus' own account, his forgiveness of his wife remains inextricably bound up with his contemplation of what a more divine view of ubiquitous human weakness might look like. I connect his soliloquy with a tradition of interpretation of the psalm that sees forgiveness for egregious wrongs as a nearly impossible act, one only accomplished after some kind of transformative, purgative experience that allows a glimpse of divine perspective. The phenomenology allowing for Posthumus' forgiveness of Innogen—which, we should remember takes place before he has any knowledge of her innocence—sometimes seems in our critical conversations to be obscured by the flare of the final scenes. Keeping it in mind, I argue, provides important context for the *deus ex machina* and the avalanche of confessions, reunions, and pardons with which the play concludes. In my reading, *pace* a number of other recent arguments that see Shakespeare's theatre as basically secular, these final scenes need not be viewed as staging a "new" kind of forgiveness that has given up a dependence on God.

The fifth and final chapter returns to consider characters that, like Bale's Seditio who would declare *himself* a saint, attempt to control their fates and reputations by dissolving the contingencies that bind them to others. Taking my cue from Vittoria Corombona's attempt to give her brother, Flamineo, "that portion . . . and no other / Which Cain groan'd under, having slain his brother," I investigate points of intersection between Webster's *The White Devil* and the history of Cain's typological significance. As the archetype of fratricide and despair, and as the founder of the corrupt city of man, Cain serves as a mirror many characters in this play, most whom seem to vie for the hollow victory of being the last Cain standing.

I investigate in particular Webster's contribution to an English tradition, evident in the medieval cycle plays, of transmuting elements of Cain's story into satires of legal practices—such as pardon and sanctuary—that acknowledge the power of kings, bishops and other powerful figures to override the usual workings of the law. I also show how Webster is heir to a dramatic tradition of using Cain to draw attention to the mutual but unevenly met obligations that structure communities. When Flamineo calls the letter his sister gives him, a "license to beg," he points out, as he does elsewhere in the play, that such legal documents institutionalize an abdication of responsibility on the part of the wealthy and powerful.

I conclude the chapter by asking if or how my examination of Cain and the law in *The White Devil* through a lens of the English dramatic tradition might benefit from dialogue with theories of political theology. Thanks to fascinating work by Julia Reinhard Lupton, Graham Hammill, Ken Jackson and others, the thought of Giorgio Agamben has for the past couple of decades received considerable attention among early

modern literary scholars, especially those involved in Shakespeare studies. Others, however, have raised concerns about the aptness of using theoretical categories such as the “state of exception” to understand sixteenth and early-seventeenth century English drama. I suggest that, in the case of *The White Devil*, we can note various thought-provoking points of contact between Agamben’s discussions and Webster’s drama. Most notably, the battle between various characters to suspend the law to their own advantage illustrates impulses toward the kind of sovereignty Agamben (and others) describe. In the end, however, I argue that Webster’s play kicks against the traces of such theories’ explanatory power. Similar to treatments of Cain in the mystery cycles, Webster does not finally present his proliferating Cain figures as actual extreme limit cases of exceptionality but as every-men-and-women who are loathe to acknowledge their inability to suspend their own bonds to their community and subjugation to sovereign power. Their exceptionality is disclosed less as a state, a *fait accompli*, than as a fantasy.

**CHAPTER ONE: KING JOHAN AND RE-FORMING COMMUNITIES WITH
THE LITANY OF THE SAINTS**

A monk appears on stage, hearkening to the sound of a familiar liturgical chant. As the singer—another monk—approaches, the first monk joins him in song. He retains the tune but eschews any of the usual variations on the words. Instead, he intones a curse, slipping it between lines while the other monk continues on, apparently oblivious to the subtly irruptive derision aimed at him and his prayer:

Clergy 1: (syng) Sancte Dominice, ora pro nobis.

Clergy 2: (syng) Sancte pyld monache, I beshrow vobis.

Clergy 1: (syng) Sancte Francisse, ora pro nobis (639-41).¹

Repetition with a difference describes both parody and a litany. As forms go, then, a litany seems rather low-hanging fruit for the parodist, one demanding little work or wit to mock. Indeed, the Litany of the Saints almost rewrites itself. Simply fill in the blank where the saint's name goes, preferably with someone (or something) obviously *not* a candidate for canonization: Saint _____. *Our Lady of the Pointless Miracle, pray for us. St. Indigestion, pray for us, etc., etc.* One could stop there; here, the clerical parodist exhibits some ingenuity in modifying the response as well, substituting a

¹ All quotations taken from *John Bale's King Johan*, edited by Barry B. Adams (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1969).

mongrel English-Latin, ad-hominem curse for the usual invocation. Thanks to the helpful similarity of Latin case endings and (a willingness to dispense with proper grammar), his variation settles back into the well-worn sonic grooves by the final syllable.

As I shall claim in the discussion that follows, this particular ironic treatment of the litany belongs to a considerable degree to its own time and place: this exchange first appears just as prominent English reformers are taking aim at the Litany of the Saints, trying to eliminate or at least reduce its prominence in both public liturgy and popular devotion. To begin illustrating the importance of topicality in the analysis of its irony, however, I first prize the jibe out of context, highlighting some variables in intentionality, interpretation, shared understanding (or lack thereof). The possibilities (which are by no means mutually exclusive) range from lighthearted jest to acerbic social critique. In so doing, I keep in mind Linda Hutcheon's important reminder that the evaluative "edge" always central to the operation of irony engages the emotions as well as the mind.² In other words, I ask questions about how this brief moment *might* resonate intellectually and emotionally, exploring first some of its potential meanings before considering which ones of them are actualized.

Could this fragment of the litany perhaps be evidence of a pitched personal feud among members of the same monastic community, a social unit that, like all others, sometimes skews toward the inharmonious? Alternatively, perhaps the sardonic monk is taking a jab at a visitor to the monastery; perhaps that visitor is member of the order of St. Francis or of St. Dominic, and the parodist interrupts this particular snippet of the

² Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 15.

litany to showcase the cloistered monk's disdain for—or perhaps even jealousy of—their friar brethren.

And why does the monk who is targeted fail to react to the insult? Perhaps he is meant to be seen as so advanced along the path to holiness that carping pettiness cannot ruffle him. Contrariwise, maybe he is not lost in contemplation of the divine so much as meditation on the mundane: “what’s for dinner?” he wonders. Or again, maybe he so advanced in years and regressed in wits that he truly cannot hear the interruption. Perhaps the prayer’s familiarity and soothing repetition have so numbed his senses that he no longer registers difference.

Irony always seeks to connect with a particular audience, eliciting recognition from those sufficiently “in the know” and capable of recognizing it. Yet this fragment could elicit a variety of different reactions in addition to recognition. Just how amused is one allowed to be by a curse? Do the members of the audience share a laugh or at least a smile with the cursing monk, appreciating his joke—even they do so somewhat guiltily? Their laughter at the expense of first monk might take on different tenors depending on where he falls on a spectrum of pure bumbling idiot to religious hypocrite to holy fool. Likewise, being affiliated with the same community as the parodist might make one’s laughter more hearty than the somewhat queasy laughter of one who feels the parody extends to oneself, by virtue of identification of some kind with the victimized monk. In short, the range of possible affective responses—both those sought by the parodist and those given by his audience—is quite wide.

I dwell on these possibilities of meaning in part because the English playwright responsible for this musical scene as it sounded forth sometime during the holiday festivities at the turn of 1538-39 was not venturing into anything like new territory in mocking the Litany of the Saints.³ Nor did he pioneer the spectacle of a member of the clergy satirizing the practices regularly identified with his own office or community. We have examples of mock litanies in both Latin and the vernacular in the pre-Reformation period, many of them with clerical authors. Martha Bayless, in her study of medieval Latin parody, points out that much of it “confounds the polarity between official and unofficial cultures: these carnivalesque texts, many lampooning religious forms and ideas, were written by and for members of what has been considered the bastion of medieval seriousness, the Church.”⁴ In other words, this particular parody emerges out of an already established tradition of satire, one often deployed for holiday entertainments and that extended to a whole range of liturgical practices and hierarchical

³ As everyone who writes about *King Johan* with an eye toward its topicality notes, the text presents difficulties because we have no complete version of the play as it seems to have been performed at the Canterbury palace of Thomas Cranmer, perhaps under the patronage of Thomas Cromwell, in 1538. Instead, we have an incomplete A-text in a scribal hand, on which Bale himself makes revisions up to 20 years later. The last leaves of the A-text are missing altogether, so we do not know exactly how the A-text ended, breaking off as it does right after the death of King John. See Adams, “Introduction,” 1-19. For the purposes of my discussion, I follow Adams, finding it reasonable to suppose that some versions of the passages referencing Becket were present in the A-text, for we have evidence that an audience member found the dramatic attack on Becket disturbing. For evidence of the varying responses to the play in Canterbury, see *The Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer*, edited by J.E. Cox (London: Parker Society, 1846), 387-88. I believe that noting the interest in revising the litany and translating it into the vernacular during the late 1530s and 1540s gives further strength to the conjecture that lines similar to those I quoted at the beginning of this paper were present in the original. For a convincing argument about the similarity of the original ending to the one we have now, see Greg Walker, *Plays of Persuasion: Drama and Politics at the Court of Henry VII* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 170-180.

⁴ Martha Bayless, *Parody in the Middle Ages: The Latin Tradition* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 2.

structures. Prominent examples are the temporary appointment of Boy Bishops and mock Masses.⁵

Of course, we well know—based on the other parts of the play, this playwright’s other plays, and this playwright’s extensive non-dramatic writing—that John Bale is not staging his morality drama *King Johan* simply to provide levity or even light-hearted social critique during the Christmas season as 1538 turns to 1539. “Bilious” John Bale—former Carmelite friar, protégé of Thomas Cromwell, friend of John Foxe—satirizes the Litany of Saints here and again near the end of *King Johan* because he wishes to reform substantially a church whose prayer and doctrine takes on this and other problematic forms. For Bale, the Litany of the Saints is not just a convenient means by which to mock specific people or institutions within the Church; it is itself an instance (among many) of the kind of practice he wants to persuade his fellow Christians to abandon. In contrast to anonymous pre-reformation parodists who, so far as we can tell, devised mock litanies without seriously challenging the prayer’s legitimacy, Bale intensifies his irony, seeking to discredit the prayer itself, putting it into the mouths of his demonic vice figures Dissimulation and Sediton:

[He hears someone] seyng the letany.

Sed. Lyst, for Godes passyon! I trow her cummeth sum hoggheerd
Calling for his pyggys! Such a noyse I neuer herd.

Here cum Dysymulacyon syngyng of the letany.

Diss. (syng) Sancte Dominice, ora pro nobis.

Sed. (syng) Sancte pylde monache, I beshrow vobis.

Diss. (syng) Sancte Francisse, ora pro nobis. (636-41)

⁵ Clifford Davidson, *Festivals and Plays in Late Medieval Britain* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1-46.

Sedition first humorously pretends that the litany is not an instantly recognizable song, thus repudiating a point of recognition he could have shared with the audience.

Dissimulation's failure or resistance to acknowledging Sedition's interventions. Rather, here and in the ensuing lines Dissimulation goes on with his own travesties of Catholic prayer, praying to be delivered *from* King John, annoyed that Sedition keeps trying to interrupt him (642-655). The litany is at once meaningless to some, droning on as it does despite interruptions and highly dangerous because, as Katherine Brokaw notes, "the difference between a prayer and a curse is a matter of intent, and Bale implies that whenever Catholic officiates pray, they take the Lord's name literally in vain."⁶

Hence, while in certain senses Bale is no pioneer, he is also, in other ways, on the forefront on an innovation that subsequently becomes quite mainstream. In his study of *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama*, John Cox argues that modern readers cannot easily recuperate the shocking novelty of Bale's interventions in dramatic history.

"Following Bale," writes Cox,

Protestant playwrights repeatedly identified the devil with the ritual and beliefs of traditional religion. Such demonization is so familiar that it is hard to imagine its audacity and boldness in early sixteenth-century drama, yet its frequent repetition by subsequent playwrights is a tribute to Bale's successful innovation in redefining what the devil stood for.⁷

⁶ Katherine Brokaw, "Music and Religious Compromise John Bale's Plays," *Comparative Drama* 44, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 335, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23038055>.

⁷ John Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred*, 85.

We tend, in other words, to interpret such scenes too simply, with too uncritical a sense of familiarity: of course a radical reformer such as Bale would assert that a prayer calling extensively on the saints is downright demonic: nothing to see here.

In what follows, on the contrary, I aim to recover something more of the complexity and boldness of Bale's demonization of the Litany of the Saints in *King Johan*. I examine how Bale draws attention to the prayer's formal features: its simplicity, its regularity, its flexibility, its internal logic. He demonstrates how these features enable the ungodly clergy to mislead the laity, abuse one another, and aggrandize themselves. By its very design, he suggests, the Litany of the Saints breeds sedition and unhealthy discord. Bale's dramatic representation tries to ensure all his audience members reach a similar negative verdict on the litany's efficacy—both as a means of social cohesion and as a type of religious practice.

A more multidimensional story than *King Johan* will countenance, however, emerges when we examine the play in light of reform efforts and controversies surrounding the Litany of the Saints in the late 1530s and 1540s. The litany does indeed sometimes function negatively and divisively, as Bale suggests. Nevertheless, its most salient features—simplicity, regularity, flexibility, and implicit logic—also serve as both evidence of and a means of further consolidating communal bonds. Variations on the Litany of the Saints help bind together families, parishes, regions, countries—and the living and the dead members thereof. Thus, Bale's efforts in *King Johan* and his other dramatic works to minimize the Litany of the Saints' positive functions can be instructively juxtaposed with his and other reformer's extensive work—outside of his

drama—one reshaping Church history and distinguishing true saints from false ones. In other words, I suggest that Bale’s *King Johan* pragmatically focuses on only one half of a complex equation: its creator knows that while re-forming the litany is, at some level, incredibly easy, it is, at another, quite difficult, given its extensive imbrication in a variety of communities and practices.

History Uses, and Variations on the Litany of the Saints

The history of the litany form involves a series of irregular, recursive, sporadically reciprocal exchanges among various communities within the Church. All this formed part of the Eucharistic liturgy in the Eastern Church by the fourth century and spread to the Western Church by the sixth century. Indeed, it was the Anglo-Saxon Church that, after the arrival of the Archbishop Theodorus in the middle of the sixth century, seems to have been responsible for developing a litany that specifically and extensively called upon the saints. In his *Acts of English Votaries*, Bale presents the arrival of the “Greke” Theodorus, which he pinpoints in the year 666, as a calamitous event for the English Church:

Euydent is yt, by all the Englysh Chronycles, that than this came hyther with the seale of that execrable Beast, to marke vp all to that most blasphemouse kyngdō. For neuer afore wrought the sprete of Antichrist, the mystery of iniquite so strongelye as at that tyme. For hyther than brought he all vayne & craftye scyences, of countinge, calkyng, measuryng, syngyng, rymyng, reasonyng, arguyng, dyffynyng, shauyng, oylng, exorcysyng, incantyng, & coniuryng.⁸

⁸ Bale, John. *The actes of Englysh votaryes comprehendynge their vnchast practyses and examples by all ages, from the worldes begynnynge to thys present yeare, collected out of their owne legendes and chronycles by Iohan Bale* (Wesel, 1546). Ann Arbor, MI: Text Creation Partnership. Early English Books Online, 34-35. <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A02573.0001.001>.

The “singing, rhyming” practice of praying the Litany of the Saints was then passed on to the Franks, where it was further developed and somewhat standardized, and then, finally, transmitted back to England in the ninth century. Subsequently, the litany became widely employed in England and (the wider Church) as a component of various kinds of public and private religious ritual.

The basic structure of this intercessional, responsorial prayer appears in the following chart.

Table 1: A simplified summary of the Greater Litany of Saints

	Form	President	Choir response
Kyrie eleison + Invocation to Trinity	Three-fold petitions to the persons of the Trinity.	<i>Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison. Christe audi nos. Pater/Fili/Spiritus...: Miserere nobis.</i>	Repeats each petition after president.
Litany of Saints	Invocations to saints singly and collectively: Mary, angels, patriarchs, apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins.	<i>Sancte N.: Ora pro nobis. Sancta N.: Ora pro nobis. Omnes sancti/sanctae...: Orate pro nobis.</i>	Repeats each petition after president.
Deprecations (×10)	From [sin]: deliver us, O Lord.	<i>Ab...:</i>	<i>Libera nos domine.</i>
Obsecrations (× 13)	Through [Christly attribute]: deliver us, O Lord.	<i>Per...:</i>	

	Form	President	Choir response
Intercessions (× 17)	That [good] might happen: we beseech thee to hear us.	<i>Ut...:</i>	<i>Te rogamus audi nos.</i>
Agnus Dei +Kyrie eleison	Three-fold petitions	<i>Agnus dei qui tollis...: Parce nobis domine. Miserere nobis. Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison. Kyrie eleison.</i>	Repeats each petition after president. ⁹

Various forms of the Litany of the Saints featured in high-profile public liturgies such as the Baptismal rite of the Easter Vigil, the rites of Ordination for deacons and priests, professions of monks and nuns, dedications of Churches and Abbeys, and the rituals associated with Rogationtide. The latter celebrations, in fact, seem to have been particularly crucial in the genesis and spread of the Litany of the Saints throughout the western Church. The four Rogation Days were April 25th (the Major Rogation) and the three days leading up to feast of the Ascension (the Minor Rogation). These days involved solemn outdoor processions during which the litany was chanted. Rogation ceremonies also became known as “beating of the bounds” or “walking the gang” because these processions would trace the boundaries of the parish, seeking—particularly

⁹ Reproduced, with permission, from Magnus Williamson, “Queen Mary I, Tallis’ *O Sacrum Convivum* and a Latin Litany” *Early Music* 44, no. 2 (May 2016): 256, <https://doi.org/10.1093/em/caw045>.

in rural, agricultural areas—blessings on the land.¹⁰ In addition to the solemn versions of the Litany associated with Rogationtide and other great occasions, there also existed *per annum* versions of the Litany of the Saints, which had a simpler musical setting, and were prayed on Sundays and throughout the year.¹¹

Scholars recognize that that variations in the litany of saints provide evidence of personal, local and national devotions at a given time and place. The prayer can easily expand and contract, accommodating different numbers and names of saints. While some figures—Mary, the Apostles, John the Baptist, etc.—are featured in nearly all forms of the pre-reformation litany, other saints are added or dropped depending on the location in which and the occasion on which the prayer is prayed. The presence of Edmund Martyr, St. Thomas Becket and/or St. George, for instance, is often cited as evidence that a missal, antiphoner, breviary, or other book of prayer was intended for the English market; other, more obscure saints sometimes allow us to pinpoint the locations in which they were used with even more certainty. Scholarship by Nigel Morgan allows us to see the impressive variation in the litanies of manuscripts from post-Norman invasion English monasteries. Even manuscripts from the same time and place can exhibit significant differences, with scribes sometimes adding additional saints in the margins and at other

¹⁰ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580*, 2nd ed (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 136.

¹¹ Williamson, 255-256.

times erasing and then replacing other saints' name. Litanies from the same monasteries also change over time, emphasizing how they were historically shaped.¹²

By the time Bale writes *King Johan*, a sizable portion of the laity were also able to hold the prayer in their own hands, just as the members of the religious orders did in theirs. Beginning in the thirteenth century, Books of Hours or *Horae*--simplified forms of clerical breviaries--had been the vehicle by which written prayers such as the Offices of the hours, the Litany of the Saints, the seven penitential psalms, and the Office of the Dead spread from churches and monasteries to private homes. These were used privately and also together in groups. Over 800 manuscript and many more print copies of the *Horae* made for use in England survive; many of these contain marginalia, inscriptions and added material which provide a rich opportunity for the study of lay devotion.¹³ By the 1530s, approximately one hundred and twenty editions of *Horae* (sometimes more colloquially known as "primers") had been printed for the English market; many contained both Latin and vernacular versions of the prayers.

In his study of manuscript Books of Hours, Roger Weick also notes that it is quite unusual for the pages containing litanies to contain illustrations.¹⁴ Likewise, while

¹² Nigel Morgan, ed., *English Monastic Litanies of the Saints after 1100*, I-II (London: Boydell Press, for the Henry Bradshaw Society, 2012; 2013). The third and final volume is forthcoming.

¹³ For a collection of examples of *Horae*, see Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011). For a fascinating account of the various annotations made on a fifteenth century *Horae* as it was passed down through one family in the sixteenth century, see Seth Lerer, "Literary Prayer and Personal Possession in a Newly Discovered Tudor Book of Hours," *Studies in Philology* 109, no. 4 (Summer 2012): 409-428, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24392011>.

¹⁴ Roger S. Weick, *Time Sanctified: the Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life* (New York: George Braziller Inc., 1988), 101.

scrolling through digitized thumbnail images of various printed *Horae*, one soon realizes how very easy it is to distinguish from a distance the pages containing the litany of saints from all the others. Nearly always, these pages appear much more regular and feature less text than the others, since the lists of saint's names do not fill entire lines. While a disappointment perhaps to art historians, the blank spaces which often surround the litanies can also be viewed as evidence of their unique status among the other prayers. Robert Bartlett observes that "there is a sense in which the litany represents the essence of the cult of saints—the invocation of a name."¹⁵ The prayer's highly economical form relies upon much larger and more complex matrices of meaning, some of which I will consider later in this chapter. For now, I note that the Litany of the Saints seems to assume, rightly or wrongly, that a name is enough and that other relevant details are to be filled in by other people and texts: from other experiences of veneration, from hagiography, from local and national histories. Perhaps it even presumes that inclusion in the litany on some level provides, *eo ipso*, context enough: that the particulars of why some long-ago saint was added do not matter as much as the fact of their inscription in the list.

In use, the *Horae* seemed to occupy a nexus connecting an individual and to various of his or her various communities: to family, to the local and universal Church, and to the Church's members in heaven and purgatory. As Kathleen Kennedy explains,

With a Book of Hours the devotee prayed to Mary and the saints as personal heavenly intercessors, and the book itself could act as a sort of virtual shrine,

¹⁵ Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*. (Princeton, CT: Princeton UP, 2013), 126.

including, by means of the Office of the Dead, the departed members of the devotee's family and community.¹⁶

A further communal aspect of these texts involved passing them on from one family member to the next. Some surviving examples contain marginal notes in different hands. Like the monastic litanies, these archives of devotion highlight the potential of the litany for both affirming or denying one's communal bonds. One can accept the particular devotions of one's family members by including their favorite saints as one prays the litany, incorporating their additions made in the margins or between lines. One also has the option, however, of rejecting the favorites of this very local cult. One can always scrape away (and, if desired) replace a saint's name—either literally or simply in the act of prayer.

In *King Johan*, Bale acknowledges this diffusion of the Litany of the Saints throughout at least two of the kingdom's estates when Nobility make his confession to Sediton. After Sediton asks whether the penitent knows his "crede and yowr Laten aue Mary," Nobility responds that he exceeds these minimum expressions of piety: "Yea, and dyrge also, with sevyn psalms and letteny" (1160-1161). These longer prayers are precisely those for which the *Horae* would have served as a guide, and Bale presents Nobility's eager citation of them as further evidence of the influence wielded by the clergy over the laity at the top of society. This exchange between Sediton and Nobility intimates that even those litanies prayed as a private form of penitence did not simply *stay* in Church, as though in quarantine from the rest of society. Instead, Bale's staged

¹⁶ Kathleen E. Kennedy, "Reintroducing the English Books of Hours, or 'English Primers,'" *Speculum* 89, no. 3 (July 2014), 694, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43577033>.

exchange between Sedition and Nobility intimates anxiety over how such prayers help extend a pernicious clerical influence even into the stratosphere of the English socio-economic hierarchy.

The litany, in conjunction with other smokescreens such as images (of spurious saints), candles, and beads, are the means by which the monks “blynd the peple” (725). Having just treated the audience to a snippet of the Latin litany, Dissimulation particularly emphasizes the efficacy of *Latyn* song (715-719). He explains to Sedition that both their distinctive monastic garb and their singing serves well to disguise spiritual apathy and disloyalty to the crown:

We haue many rewelles, but neuer one we kepe;
Whan we syng full lowde owr hartes be fast aslepe.
We resemble sayntes in gray, whyte, blacke and blewe
Yet unto prynces not one of owr number trewe (730-34).

Dissimulation’s exposition sets up the later scene in which Comonalty appears, for the first and only time, on stage bereft and blinded by “pristes, channons and monkes” (1560-1567).

Three Laws (also c. 1538), another of Bale’s morality plays, even more explicitly stresses the extent of the *Horae*’s pernicious influence when Avaritia gloats,

Our lowsye Latyne howres,
In borowes and in bowres
The poore people devowres
And treade them undre fete. (3.234-237)¹⁷

¹⁷ John Bale, *Three Laws in The Complete Plays of John Bale*, vol. 2, ed. H Peter Happé (Bury St. Edmunds: St. Edmundsbury Press, 1985), ProQuest, Chadwyck-Healey English Drama.

Here, the books have invaded the most private spaces of ordinary people's homes, deeply embedding themselves in the devotions of the unsuspecting populace. Meanwhile, says Avaritia, "The byshoppes must holde their prestes in ignoraunce / With longe Latyne houres, least knowledge to them chaunce" (*Three Laws*, 3.360-61). As a key feature of both the Book of Hours and the breviary, the litany in Bale's dramas serves as a means of dulling the senses, and eating up time that the Roman church's hierarchy fears could be spent in such dangerous pursuits as reading scriptures or preaching the truth. In these instances, Bale represents prayers such as the litany as suffusing the entire structure of the church even as he carefully avoids suggesting that the shared practice might result in any kind of useful harmony. Rather, he calls up images of forcible restraint and violent deception: the bishops must on a daily basis use these prayers to "holde" their priests in check; the priests, in turn, deploy the same prayers to "blynd" the people each time they mechanically thumb through their prayer books. In short, Bale in his drama acknowledges people's agency in the relationship they have with their devotional books only insofar as it involves abusing others; he declines to acknowledge the highly interactive relationship many seem to have had with their *Horae*.

Reform Efforts

Many of Bale's contemporary reformers, including the most powerful of them, also recognize the Litany of the Saints' significance as a highly problematic crux of traditional religious practice. Its great popularity, however, seems to have necessitated rather gradual official reform when radical initial attempts failed. The more avant-garde evangelical reformers, who found the cult of the saints especially problematic, were eager

to eradicate the litany of saints altogether. Thomas Marshall, another beneficiary of Cromwell's patronage, publishes a prayer book in the mid-1530s that, in imitation of Martin Luther, entirely omits the litany of saints (although Marshall retains the usual calendar of their feast days). Evidently this move elicits enough of an outcry that Marshall feels compelled to return the litany to its usual place in his reprint, but not without a preface accusing those who had complained of "small judgement and knowledge in holy scripture." It angers Marshall that such people mistakenly believe that prayers said involving the intercession of the saints are less efficacious than unmediated prayer. The litany reappears in the reprint, Marshall insists, only for the "contentation of such weyke minds."¹⁸

Perhaps Cromwell took note of the reaction to Marshall's primer while drawing up the second set of Henrican Injunctions in 1538. The last "item" claims that the practice of praying the litany has become imbalanced but does not forbid the practice outright:

Where in times past men have used to divers places in their processions to sing *Ora pro nobis* to so many saints that they had no time to sing the good suffrages following, as *Parce nobis, Domine* and *Libera nos, Domine*, it must be taught and preached that better it were to omit *Ora pro nobis* and to sing the other suffrages."¹⁹

At the end of a set of injunctions that take a fairly strong stand against the cult of the saints, Cromwell calls specifically for a program of education, strongly suggesting that

¹⁸ William Underwood, "Thomas Cromwell and William Marshall's Protestant Books," *The Historical Journal* 47, no. 3 (2004): 524-525, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4091754>.

¹⁹ "Second Henrican Injunctions" in *Documents of the English Reformation*, ed. Gerald Lewis Bray (Cambridge: James Clark & Co., 2004), 182-183.

that the focus of the faithful should be redirected to the parts of the litany addressed directly to God rather than to the saints. Thus, while the Litany of the Saints is a target of particular interest to more radical reformers such as Marshall, Cromwell, and Bale, praying it has not been definitively outlawed at the point when *King Johan* is first written and staged. Like the practice of auricular confession, which *King Johan* devotes considerable and aggressive energy to satirizing, the Litany of the Saints still enjoys a sort of probationary status.

Indeed, the fall and execution of Cromwell in 1540 seems to have somewhat slowed and tempered official efforts to curb the Litany of the Saints. Thomas Cranmer's version of the English Litany—his initial experiment with an official, vernacular liturgy—is not published under royal auspices until 1544. The occasion that called especially for prayers of intercession was the resumption of Henry VIII's hostilities with France. Diarmaid McCulloch notes that the 1544 Litany's "wonderfully sonorous language conceals the fact that, like all Cranmer's compositions, it is an ingenious effort of scissors and paste out of previous texts."²⁰ It draws on a wide range of sources, including Martin Luther's litany, a text by John Chrysostom, the aforementioned litany in Marshall's primer, and the version of the litany in the Sarum rite.²¹ This pastiche of traditions—East and West, English and Continental—in a way mirrors the original development of the Litany of the Saints.

²⁰ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 328.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Cranmer does not completely eliminate address to the saints but he drastically compresses the section of the litany which Cromwell had identified as getting out of hand. Cranmer's Litany calls by name only on "Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God Our Savior Jesu Christ" before more generally invoking "all holy angels and archangels and all holy orders of blessed spirits" and, finally, "all Patriarchs and prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors, & Virgins and all the blessed company of heaven."²² Cranmer's politic version leaves just enough of Litany of the Saints standing for it to be recognizable, but he also combats that tendency toward the proliferation of saints' names by modelling a sharp shift in the opposite direction. The traditional categories/types of saints remain even as their names disappear. Has their particularity been erased—or simply subsumed? Part of Cranmer's genius in reworking the form, I posit, consists in leaving room for either interpretation. Neither does his Exhortation, which prefaces the Litany, talk directly about this maneuver. Instead, it obliquely instructs the faithful that they should be wary while praying of "multiplying of many words without faith and godly devotion."²³ Hence he treads a middle ground that might provide some hope to those of both an evangelical and a more traditional bent: the cult of saints takes a blow but not a completely decisive one.

With the fall of Cranmer, the death of Henry VIII and accession of Edward VI in 1547, however, official policy makers come to reject such moderation. Under Edward

²² *An exhortacion vnto praier thought mete by the kynges maiesty, and his clerg to be reade to the people in euery church afore processions. Also a letanie with suffrages to be sayd or longe [sic] in tyme of the sayd processions* (London, 1544), Bii.v, STC 10623, Early English Books Online.

²³ *Ibid.*

liturgical processions—including those associated with the litany— are definitively banned, while even the brief mention of Mary and the other saints is eliminated altogether from the Litany. Further, in the first version of the *Book of Common Prayer* (1549), the Litany is banished to an appendix.²⁴

The Persistence and Paradoxes of Processionals

As noted, the practice of praying the Litany of the Saints as a community (as opposed to, say, in one's "bower") was, with a series of other prayers, closely tied to the practice of processing outdoors, not just during Rogation days but also on Sundays throughout the year. The following two fascinating accounts record specific resistances to trying to eliminate processions. Both provide fascinating glimpses into concrete contexts and webs of relationships in which certain people "voted with their feet," and kept up old practices. The first testimony, which contains interesting assertions about the particular dynamics of social pressures, narrates events that occur the year after Cranmer's new Litany is introduced:

Item that I John Stubberd yeoman dwelling in Middleton in Kent, did hear and see the sondaye the [document damaged] of June anno Reg of our sovereign lord King Henry the viijth xxxvij... [the priest] again for to sing the said procession in the church as he had done other Sundays before The sexton bearing the cross went out of the church door and the Clerk and some other would have tarried with the priest to have helped him to sing the said procession, and the said John Lacey pulled him for the, so that the priest abide still in the church alone. And they and other of them went about the church yard with the cross. And yet afore that diverse times the said priest shewed them of the parish that it was better to sing the said procession in the church than out of it. And more he said to them that he

²⁴ See "Introduction" to *The Book of Common Prayer, The Texts of 1549, 1559 and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), xxiv.

was grieved with pain in his eyes it when he went about the churchyard he could not read the said procession and sing it so well as if it was done in the church.²⁵

This priest has been doing his duty in instructing his parishioners on new practice, but on this particular Sunday his efforts have been rewarded only in the echoes of his own voice in an empty Church (or, maybe John Stubberd and a few others remain). The cross-bearer, one of the most important parts of a processional decamps, leading others with him, and a meddling but apparently influential layman, has pressures those who at first had their doubts to follow. The almost plaintive tone of the priest's last ditch argument—about not being able to see well outside—takes on more meaning when one recalls that it is much more necessary to be able to look at the words of a new prayer, especially when one has since childhood heard the previous Latin version.

In autobiographical *The Vocacyon of John Bale*, Bale describes a recrudescence of traditional religion in Ossory, the see in Ireland to which he is appointed during the reign of Edward VI. Bale leaves town (he gives the impression of being gone only very briefly) and, in the absence of their bishop, his flock goes rather astray. Although Bale relies in part on someone else's account of what happened, this remarkably vivid passage suggests he can envision only too well the scene he describes. We see in it something of just how rooted the litany could be in the life and celebrations of a local community:

The clergy of Kilkenney, by procurement of justice Hoth, blasphemously resumed again the whole papism, or heap of superstitions of the bishop of Rome; to the utter contempt of Christ and his holy word, of the king and council in England, and of all ecclesiastical and politic order, without either statute or yet

²⁵ "Depositions on the English litany" (5 July 1545), SP 1/203, f.85r-88v, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/the-english-reformation-c1527-1590/new-english-litany/>.

proclamation. They rang all the bells in the Cathedral, minster and parish churches; they flung up their caps to the battlement of the great temple, with smilings and laughings most dissolutely, the justice himself being therewith offended; they brought forth their copes, candlesticks, holy waterstock and censers; they mustered forth in general procession most gorgeously all the town over with *Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis*, and the rest of the Latin Litany: they chattered it, they chanted it with great noise and devotion; they banquetted all the day after, for that they were delivered from the grace of God into a warm sun.²⁶

One can just see the local civic official dismayed by the deluge of uncouth activity.

While Bale assigns blame in the first sentence to the instigating clergy, it soon become clear that his insistently repeated “they” achieves a wider point of reference as bells call to the people and the procession swells. The mention of the battlements of the temple calls to mind the temptation of Christ. Bale thus suggests that the wayward members of his diocese fail to recognize the magnitude of their own cheerful flirtation with temptation and damnation; they make a terrible mistake in preferring a festival in the ephemeral Irish sunshine to the eternal radiance of God’s favor.²⁷ The processors do not practice any kind of restraint, either in terms of visual spectacle or sound or distance processed; rather, their steps trace “all the town over.” *Pace* Cranmer’s Exhortation and various other official proclamations, noise—and lots of it—is equivalent to devotion.

In this scene resembling the Bakhtinian carnival, the steady intonation of saints’ names alternating with the much-repeated response is conceived of as both chatter and

²⁶ John Bale, *Life in Writings of John Foxe, Bale, and Coverdale* (London: W. Clowes & Sons, 1831) 10, <https://archive.org/details/writingsjohnfox00covegoog>.

²⁷ His annoyance at the breakdown of the pathetic fallacy—how dare the sun smile now on such proceedings?—perhaps also suggests the feelings of someone who views too many months of rain as the crowning injustice of his very difficult post.

chant, a prayer which brings together the high and the low, the everyday and the solemn, the clergy and the laity. The rather paradoxical formal features of the litany of saints and the procession mirror each other, lending themselves to this deep embeddedness within the multiplicity of a community. As I observed, both have rather low minimum thresholds for being recognizably themselves: a cross-bearer and a few parishioners will do; asking for prayers from Mary, the Angels, and all holy men and woman suffice. A litany chanted in procession can also absorb quite a lot of literal chatter without unravelling completely: excited children can pop in and out of line; the elderly can join for a short portion of the walk; a pair of neighbors can gossip in snippets between or among responses of “ora pro nobis.”

The Litany of the Saints presents, it might be said, very overt requests for participation to those involved in praying it. Most obviously, of course, it calls out for the expected response—the “ora pro nobis.” Indeed, the force of this expectation is so strong that a choir or parish member might automatically respond as, or even slightly before, realizing that the leader has added a name that is somewhat surprising, or unfamiliar, or perhaps politically dangerous. Despite this sort of forcefulness, the litany is also a prayer that is highly amenable to modification, so much so that it is theoretically infinitely expandable. As such, it can be seen as one of the prayers that most welcomes active participation, even to the point of rather radical or even subversive innovation.

Seditious Litanies

Indeed, the ease with which the Litany can be changed makes it particularly well suited, for those so inclined, to subtly resisting hierarchical efforts, whether of the Crown

or Rome or the local bishop, to control popular opinion. Local communities could and did make changes to their litanies of saints, as Cromwell's allusion to the tendency toward a proliferation of saint's names suggests, and some of these changes were highly politically charged. Canonization was officially decreed in Rome; nonetheless, the development of local cults of devotion to a departed community member prior to official canonization played an important part in that process of canonization. Moreover, local cults not infrequently dispensed with formal canonization altogether and invoked saints of their own making.

One famous example of a popular political English "martyr" was Archbishop Scrope, whose participation in the Northern Rising against Henry IV resulted in his beheading. His tomb in the York minster subsequently became a place of pilgrimage and a vibrant cult developed, despite the fact that he was never officially canonized. In the turbulence following Henry V's death, the inclusion of Scrope's name in a litany would have been, for some, a means of expressing Yorkist sympathies.²⁸ Other martyr-saints whose names sometimes functioned as code for anti-royal sentiment include Stephen Langton, Thomas of Lancaster, Simon de Montfort, Hugh of Avalon, and, of course, Thomas Becket. Bale has a particular interest, throughout his work, in grouping together and delegitimizing such saints. Never one to shy away from lists (as we saw in the myriad of *-ing* offenses attributed to Theodorus), Bale creates short anti-litanies, setting

²⁸ J.W. McKenna, "Popular Canonization as Political Propoganda: The Cult of Archbishop Scrope" *Speculum* 45, no. 4 (October 1970), 610-611, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2855672>.

them against the rolls of the unnamed Lollard resistance who truly deserved recognition for their holiness:

In England here since the first plantation of the pope's English church by Augustine and other Romish monks of Benet's superstition two kinds of martyrs hath been one of monastery builders and chantry founders whom the temporal princes and secular magistrates have diversly done to death sometime for disobedience and sometime for manifest treason as we have Wallenus of Crowland Thomas of Lancaster Richard Scrope Becket and such other The images of these have been set up in their temples like the old gods of the pagans and have had their vigils holy days ringings sacrificings candles offerings feastings and much ado besides as they had. The other sort were preachers of the gospel or poor teachers hereof in corners when the persecution was such that it might not be taught abroad And these poor souls or true servants of God were put to death by the holy spiritual fathers bishops priests monks canons and friars for heresy and lollery they say These christian martyrs were never solemnized of them no they had not so much as a penny dirge or a groat mass of requiem no more than had John Baptist and Stephen among the Jews but they have been holden for condemned heretics ever since.²⁹

Note that Bale expects his readers to be able to continue his list of well-known political martyrs, suggesting that this particular sort of lineage was a well-known one.

In *King Johan*, an innovative melding of morality drama with new history play, the chief vice, Sediton, has more than one identity; he is also takes on, part-way through the play, the alias of Stephen Langton, the thirteenth-century clergyman whose appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury was a major point of contention in the bitter dispute between Pope Innocent III and the play's eponymous King John. The character King John himself compares his conflict with the Church to that of his father, Henry II, obliquely mentioning Becket as the "captayn" of his father's opposition who wins for his pains a "pared crowne" (1290). Thus, the Becket-Langton similarity is emphasized,

²⁹ John Bale, *Select Works of John Bale, DD: Bishop of Ossory*, ed. Henry Christmas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849), 188-89, <https://archive.org/details/selectworksofbal00baleuoft>.

while John and, to a lesser extent, Henry II become prototypes of Henry VIII, whose own struggles with Rome and programs of incremental reform provide the backdrop for the original performance(s) of Bale's play.

Of particular note with regards this reform was a massive initiative against particular Becket's cult which was being undertaken in 1538 and 1539. His shrine at Canterbury was destroyed and it was decreed that his name be excised from books, his image removed from Churches and his feast day eliminated. Long one of the most beloved and identifiably English saints in England, Becket was singled out for attack precisely because of this reputation for upholding the Church's rights in defiance of the king. Thus, the performance *in Canterbury* of Bale's *King Johan* which sought to rehabilitate the reputation of King John while ascribing guilt to bishops such as Becket who opposed the crown, was involved in this larger initiative.

When it is decreed, far in advance of many other reforms aimed at the cult of saints, that Thomas Becket's name and image, along with any prayers directed to him, are to be removed from all prayer books, we have plentiful textual evidence attesting the compliance of many of his subjects. We also see, however, that while it could be rather difficult to replace an image or lengthier prayer, upon, say, the accession of Mary, it is not particularly difficult to write a name back into the litany of saints.³⁰ Furthermore, it is even easier to add, drop, or replace a name if the prayer is being spoken or sung. In fact, one suspects that a choir or congregation accustomed to praying the litany of saints might already have begun to respond before--if--there was any recognition that a small

³⁰ Duffy, *English People and Their Prayers*, 151-155.

modification of some kind has been made. If, perchance, Thomas Becket's name was still sung during a parish procession after being officially excised from the books, observing the reactions of the various people involved in that procession would have been instructive.

The connection of Langton and Becket appears again near the end of *King Johan*, when the multifarious vice Sediton has been at last sentenced to death:

Sed. Some man tell the pope, I besyche ye with all my harte
How I am ordered for takynge the churches parte,
That I may be put in the holye letanye
With Thomas Beckett, for I thynke I am as wurthy.
Praye to me with candels, for I am a saynt alreadye.
O blessed sayn Partryck, I see the, I verylye. (2587-92)

This peremptory bid for sainthood suggests that Sediton will capitalize on the ease with which a slain clergyman can be added to the Catholic Church's list of saints. The ticket to speedy sainthood? Being put to death for loyalty to Rome during a standoff between the Pope and the English king.

Sediton so streamlines that process that process of being named a saint appears as simple as—or perhaps even synonymous with—adding a name to the litany of saints, with near instantaneous fame, in the form of invocation and veneration, to follow. Thus, Bale tries on a number of fronts to discredit the litany of saints as an accurate index of sanctity. He simultaneously suggests that 1) convincing the pope to add a person to the litany can be incredibly simple, given the myopic standard of admission; and 2) many of the “saints” included in the martyr's section of the litany ought to be viewed with suspicion, as they might have focused in the hour of death on earthly rather than divine judgment and, thus, might carry a taint of off-putting self-promotion. The Vice causes

the audience to imagine “Sancte Seditio, ora pro nobis” being intoned right before or after the name of Sancte Thomas in the section of the litany devoted to martyrs. The contagion of Seditio’s obvious unworthiness, Bale seems to have hoped, would spread by proximity, thus ravaging the posthumous reputations of at least one, and hopefully more than one, political “martyr” who might be enthroned in the prayer.

Seditio’s final performance of the play, his histrionic claim to be already experiencing the company of the saints, also seems designed to render almost unnecessary the papal action he claims to seek. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given his allegorical identity, Seditio’s loyalty to the pope, although frequently emphasized throughout the play, yet exists in tension with a desire for autonomy, an urge toward self-authorized, self-interested sainthood. Dermot Cavanagh provides an excellent analysis of the “paradox” of Seditio in the play:

far from being ideologically resolute, *King Johan* acknowledges how any assault on traditional authority, including its own, can be perceived as sharing the spirit of sedition and correspondences between the Vice and the play’s own scurrilous irreverence for authority cut across and modify its structure of antagonisms.³¹

Seditio’s particular ionization of the Litany of the Saints seems to me rather carefully curated, likely in recognition of the difficulties involved in unleashing speech that challenges well-established authority. Conveniently, parody quite often proceeds in snippets, metonymically mocking a larger form or institution. This technique coalesces for Bale with the nature of his chief vice; Cavanagh reminds us “of the etymology of

³¹ Dermot Cavanagh, “The Paradox of Seditio in John Bale’s *King Johan*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 31, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 175, doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6757.2001.tb01186.x.

sedition: a going apart, a separation. The figure of Seditio works to set an audience apart from the play's action and to divide responses to it."³² Bale, we should note, avoids raising *too* much controversy, as he zeros in on targets he shares with his elite patrons: Becket and Patrick, two important national saints, and St. Francis and St. Dominic, two founders of orders of friars. How much more complicated would it have been had he included John the Baptist or Stephen or Peter or Paul in the portions of the chant he destabilizes?

In other words, *King Johan* skirts around the trickiness involved in distinguishing the true saints, the real heirs of John the Baptist and Stephen from false ones. Seditio proposes that saintliness can in certain circumstances appear as self-authorized: that a mere speech-act can secure a reputation and get one enrolled in the registry of the hallowed few. Yet a longer and more encompassing perspective reveals that the larger problem for Bale was the tendency for discrete yet heterogeneous communities to continue authorizing the saintly status of figures he found to be the opposite of holy. Outside the bounds of his play, Bale also cannot allow the suggestion that the reputations of *every* person named in the litany should be viewed as suspect. Rather, in works such as his *Acts of English Votaries*, *Examination of Lord Cobham*, and *Examination of Anne Askew*, Bale devotes considerable energy both to differentiating among the genuine and false "saints" who had arisen during the course of English history.³³

³² Ibid., 187.

³³ For an overview of Bale's various activities on this front, see Peter Happé, "A Reassessment of John Bale's Rhetoric: Drama, Bibliography, and Biography" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 53, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 259-275.

Bale and Community

As theorists of irony remind us, irony both depends upon and helps create discursive communities. At the same time, it frequently results in or relies upon exclusion. So, precisely what kinds of communities is Bale attempting to address, attack, solicit, in *King Johan*? A range of answers have been given to this question. Sarah Beckwith reads *King Johan* as Bale's repudiation of the kind of English communal theater represented by the York Corpus Christi Cycle, which invited audience members to participate in drama in ways analogous to their participation in sacramental rituals such as the Mass. Beckwith argues that in *King Johan*

[Bale] intends our political education through the total way in which ritual forms are delegitimized theatrically. . . . [the] chronic side effect is the eradication of the community as the very address (audience and medium) of sacramental theater.³⁴

In her view, Bale's iconoclastic strikes against Catholic rituals sever the expansive communal bonds that these earlier dramas drew on and strengthened. Thus, it is not insignificant, according to Beckwith, that the character "Comonalty," the type of the common people, plays such a minimal role in *King Johan*. Giving little credence to the localized forms of community so important for the Corpus Christi plays, Bale instead shifts attention to the more distant and abstract national community, which he allegorizes as the downtrodden widow Englande.

Peter Womack credits Bale with a great deal of inventiveness in devising a political message for an elite audience: "the audience . . . is not invited to recognize itself

³⁴ Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 149.

as a community but to study an externally seen community with the intention of directing it differently.” Womack suggests the abstract didacticism in this regard reflects both the playwright’s own often-fraught relationship with the “polity” and the “general revolutionary moment.”³⁵

Like Beckwith and Womack, I recognize a resistance to portraying any very strong sense of community in this play as a whole, manifesting itself, on a small but telling scale, even in Bale’s attempts to delegitimize the litany of saints in *King Johan*. There too we see, if not total eradication, at least near elision of any suggestion that prayers such as the litany of saints were deeply embedded in distinct local communities. Yet, ordinary English communities both shaped and were shaped by their particular invocations of the saints. Previous discussions of Bale’s theatrical attacks on Catholic prayers and rituals in the play focus on his flashier moments of polemic parody (such as the scenes involving auricular confession) while commenting mostly in passing on his treatment of the litany.³⁶ I have been arguing, however, that investigating Bale’s portrayal of the litany of saints in *King Johan* in light of reform efforts aimed at it can be similarly instructive. It allows us to see that meaning of intoning a particular saint’s name, of responding, or failing to respond, or changing the response can be radically

³⁵ Peter Womack, “Imagining Communities: Theaters and English Nation in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Culture and History 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities, and Writing*, ed. David Aers (Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 1992), 119. See the article by Peter Happe cited in note 33 above, however, for somewhat opposing view on Bale’s relationship with his various audiences.

³⁶ See, for example, Edwin Shepherd Miller, “The Roman Rite in Bale’s *King John*” *PMLA* 64, no. 4 (1949): 802-822. The exception to this general trend is Katherine Brokaw whose views of Bale’s treatment of the litany in this play I mentioned above.

contingent upon when, where, and with whom a given litany is being chanted, read or even “chattered.”

**CHAPTER TWO: THE RESISTANCE OF “HUSBANDMEN UNKINDE” IN
NATHANIEL WOODS’ *THE CONFLICT OF CONSCIENCE***

Claire Colbrook reminds us that irony is inherently social and political:

On the one hand, irony challenges any ready-made consensus or community, allowing the social whole and everyday language to be questioned. On the other hand, the position of this questioning and ironic viewpoint is necessarily hierarchical, claiming a point of view beyond the social whole and above ordinary speech and assumptions.¹

In a sense, the litany of saints is conspicuously a “ready-made” expression of a particular community and, as such, an easy target of irony. In another sense, however, as I took pains to show, its flexibility, adaptability, and simplicity had always meant that it resisted complete consensus, instead creating somewhat different communities depending on context. Bale advocates reform by taking advantage of affordances and constraints constitutive of the form of the Litany of the Saints, of the qualities that make it simultaneously fixed and unfixed, local and universal, everyday and extraordinary. These qualities had already been recognized, used for various purposes, on occasion, mocked by many by the time he writes and stages *King Johan*. He tends to deflect attention from the recognition of this kind of point, taking up his position above and beyond such social complexity.

¹ Claire Colbrook, *Irony* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 153.

In terms of Bale's own purpose, however, there is little doubt: he wants the litany and the cult of the saints to be completely emptied of efficacy and discarded. Thus, Bale's parody of the Litany of the Saints might be placed in Wayne Booth's category of "stable" irony,² since the audience members are highly unlikely to misinterpret his meaning, even if they are offended by his aggressive lack of respect for the Church hierarchy or particular well-beloved saints. We witness a rather more complicated version of ironic religious language in another Protestant morality play, *The Conflict of Conscience*. This staunchly anti-Catholic and strongly Calvinist morality play was written by a divine named Nathaniel Woodes and published in 1581. Little is known for sure about Woodes. We do know that he obtained a bachelor's degree from Cambridge in 1571 and was ordained that same year. He was appointed to the living at St. Mary in South Walsham, near Norwich, holding it from 1572 until 1580. After that point, he is absent from the records until his incorporation at Oxford in 1594.³

The ironized religious language I find most at issue in *Conflict of Conscience* is that of Scripture, particularly the Gospel parables of the Wicked Tenants and Prodigal Son. As I will argue, we cannot reasonably assume that Woodes seeks in any way to discredit its legitimacy or the practice of using it as a point of reference for everything from one's spiritual progress to everyday life to national politics. In fact, the aggression toward it he mounts might be viewed as an expression in unshakeable confidence in its

² Wayne Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), chapter 1.

³ Celesta Wine, "Nathaniel Woods' *Conflict of Conscience*," *PMLA* 50, no. 3 (September 1935): 661, <https://doi.org/10.2307/458209>.

truth and durability, in its resilience in resisting the attacks waged on it by those who attempt to use it for evil.

Woodes' irony is so very aggressive, however, that his play repeatedly risks careening into quicksand of "unstable" irony. Booth notes that although such ironies have some "element of stability—we know that something is being undermined—we don't really know where to stop our underminings." Hence, "we may be dealing with ironies that will turn into infinities if pursued."⁴ Woodes repeatedly demands from his audience robust corrective interpretation of the ironized scriptural passages, along with a strength of conviction in the possibility of divine forgiveness. The likelihood of God forgiving grievous wrongdoing such as apostasy, however, is severely undercut by the events and language of the play itself. Furthermore, this conviction is precisely the sort that proves extra difficult to marshal in an atmosphere hag-ridden with anxiety over predestination. Hence, the kind of audience perhaps most likely to try to respond to Woodes' heavy demands—one that leaned toward strict Calvinism— might also be the same one whose doctrinal allegiances and personal experiences make it difficult to do so. Indeed, the central character of this play is himself a representation of just this kind of community: highly learned, and highly anxious over how to interpret the signs of election or reprobation.

Accounts of Francis Spira

Conflict of Conscience re-imagines in dramatic form a story remarkably famous from the sixteenth on into the nineteenth century, that of Francis Spira (alternate

⁴ Booth, 246.

spellings: Spera and Spiera). Spira, a lawyer from Cittadella, Italy (near Padua) was forced to recant his reformist religious beliefs under pressure from Church authorities in 1548. Spira seems almost immediately to have regretted this public recantation and died of self-inflicted starvation about eight weeks later, convinced that his public failure to act on his conscience bespoke his damnation. After his death, the sensational tale circulated widely throughout both the continent and England. Off-hand references to Spira, which assume the audience's familiarity with the details of his life, appear in a variety of letters, sermons and other texts. Woodes in the prologue to the play itself asserts that this "history" is "to most men fully knowen" (1.1.30). Matteo Gribaldi's detailed, firsthand account of Spira's life and death was translated from Latin to English by Edward Aglionby and published in 1550. This text is a clear source for *Conflict of Conscience*, particularly with regard to the plot in the second half of the play.⁵

John Stachniewski labels Spira's story as the "best known case of a Calvinist culture of despair."⁶ John Calvin himself, who writes the introduction to the Gribaldi text, reads the narrative as a textbook example of the reprobate whose damnation, suggested by his failure to stand firm against persecution, is confirmed by his deathbed

⁵ The story's popularity was then further cemented by a treatise postdating Woodes' play: *The Fearefull Estate of Francis Spira* by Nathaniel Bacon (1638). John Foxe doesn't feel the need to explain who Spira is in *Acts and Monuments*. Of Spira, Robert Burton in *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) writes: "Never pleaded any man so well or himself, as this man did against himself, and so he desperately died." (394). Later on, Spira's story is immensely influential on Bunyan. The experience of reading Bacon's version of Spira's story proves at least partially catalytic in his own spiritual experience, helping to precipitate one of the conversion experiences he relates in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* and allegorizes in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. See M.A. Overell, "The Exploitation of Francesco Spiera" *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 26, no. 3 (Autumn 1995):619-637, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2543142>.

⁶ John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Despair* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 37.

despair.⁷ Understanding Spira's life and death as paradigmatic of persistent and final religious despair was not, however, the only available interpretation circulating. Others, including the influential William Perkins, someone with much to say on the subject of predestination, would go on to say that it was impossible to know for sure: "they are much overseen that write of him as a damned creature. For who can tell whether he despaired finally or not."⁸

Woodes' play, which renames Spira "Philologus," is notable for being published, in quick succession, with two different prologues and final scenes: the first version emphasizes Spira's suicide and persistent inability to believe that God can forgive him the sin of apostasy; the second, however, which manuscript evidence suggests was undertaken hastily and under pressure, describes a moment of last-minute repentance and found forgiveness.⁹ In the original prologue and epilogue, we are told that

Oh dolefull newes, which I report, and bring into your eares,
Philologus by deepe dispaire hath hanged himselfe with coard,
His Wife for dolor and distresse, her yellow haire she teares,
His Children sigh and weepe for grieffe, lyfe is of them abhorde:
But in this man we may descric, the iudgements of the Lord:
Who though he spare his rod awhile, in hope we will amende,
If we persist in wickednesse, he plagues vs in the ende. (6.1.1-7)

In the revised version, we hear:

Oh ioyfull newes, which I report, and bring into your eares,
Philologus , that would haue hangde himselfe with coard,
Is nowe conuerted vnto God, with manie bitter teares,

⁷ Kelly, 403.

⁸ Quoted in Kelly, 103.

⁹ Kelly, 396.

By godly counsell he was woon, all prayse be to the Lorde,
His errours all, he did renounce, his blasphemies he abhorde:
(6.1.1-10)

These alternative views of what happened to Philologus in his final moments account for much of the critical attention the play has received, especially since they constitute the only substantial revisions to the text. Intervening scenes are, arguably at least, sufficiently ambiguous with regard to Spira's salvation or damnation to accommodate either ending. There has been energetic debate over whether a play which manages to lend itself to such minimal revision should be viewed as something of an artistic accomplishment or, rather, as a muddled reflection—in undeniably clunky verse—of a muddled situation, namely, a culture anxious and uncertain about predestination, salvation and reprobation.¹⁰ I will return to engage with this question near the conclusion of my discussion.

Scholars also differ about how early Woodes may have written this play and over whether it was intended for performance or purely as closet drama.¹¹ For reasons I will also discuss in more detail later in this chapter, my own reading provides further support for the thesis that, rather than being a product primarily of his university days, the play is shaped by and trying to intervene in local controversies that emerge during the second half of Woodes' time as rector of St. Mary's in Norwich (1575-1580).

¹⁰ Robert Zaller, for example, contends that confusion reigns in both versions; speaking of the revised ending, he complains: "this awkward shift solves nothing, either dramatically or theologically" in *The Discourse of Legitimacy in Early Modern England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 367. By contrast, Erin Sullivan praises Woodes' ability to "exploit the psychomachic tensions inherent in the story and to maximize the sense of drama, suspense, and contingency," in "Doctrinal Doubteness and the Meaning of Despiar in William Perkins's 'Table' and Nathaniel Woods's *The Conflict of Conscience*," *Studies in Philology* 110, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 550, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sip.2013.0015>.

¹¹ Sullivan, 552-553.

Types of Fathers and Sons

Woodes' dramatic version of Spira's story repeatedly makes mention of scriptural passages involving dysfunctional family relationships. Examples include "David the Sainct" who was "afflicted by his Sonne, / And put from his kingdome I mean by Absolon," Cain and Abel, and Isaac and Ishmael (1.2.42-48).¹² This recurring figural imagery reinforces a focus on Philologus' own family relationships at the level of the plot, which highlights the protagonist's ultimate failures both as a father to his two sons and as a son of God. Indeed, Philologus' climactic moment of despair hinges, Claudius-like, on an inability to match the prayers on his lips with a heart that can truly address God as "father" (4.2.89). Philologus trains his own sons well in the arts of learned disputation, setting them to argue with the incompetent priest, Cacaphonos, over specious, Catholic-leaning doctrine. This precocious ability notwithstanding, however, we also witness those same sons' gratitude to him for giving up his resistance to Catholic authorities and saving them from an impoverished future. While Philologus agonizes over this decision, the vice Suggestion conjures a convincing image of Philologus' family already greatly distressed: his wife has taken to bed on the point of killing herself, while her sons stand around her lamenting that

They are brought to vtter desolation,
by means of their fathers wilfull protestation

¹² Nathaniel Woodes, *An excellent new Commedie, Intituled: The Conflict of Conscience. Contayninge, A most lamentable example, of the dolefull desperation of a miserable worldlinge, termed, by the name of Philologvs, who forsooke the trueth of Gods Gospel, for feare of the losse of lyfe, & wordly goods.* Compiled, by Nathaniell Woodes. Minister, in Norwich (London, 1581), ProQuest, Chadwyck-Healey English Drama. Hereafter cited internally.

Whose goodes they saye, are already confiscate,
Because he doth the Popes lawes violate (5.1.318-23).

Philologus could not inculcate in his sons strength of conviction sufficient to match their clever speeches and support him in his temptation. Thus, Philologus ends up ironically standing by a principle he himself lays out during his own disputation with the Cardinal: “As a good childe of his fathers welth is inheritour / So of his fathers vertues he must be possessour” (4.1.80).

The defining events of Philologus's life are framed a lengthy prologue in which Satan partakes in the morality play tradition of openly exposing his sinister methods to the audience. Throughout the prologue, Satan makes a very great deal of his relationship with his various children and especially with his “heir,” the Pope. While Tom McFaul very briefly notes that Satan thus “ironizes the issue of paternal love,” the pressures Satan's representations of these relationships exert on traditions of scriptural interpretation remain understudied.¹³ Accordingly, I focus on Woodes’ destabilization of Father-Son scriptural typology, with particular attention to Satan’s employment of the Synoptic parable of the “Wicked Tenants” or “Wicked Husbandmen” in the play’s prologue. I argue that the same moves which work well for Woodes as a political argument of communal resistance to corrupt authority also heavily warp the image of God as forgiving father. By systematically assaulting and destabilizing positive images of father-son relationships and smooth inheritance in this instance, Woodes’ play ramps up anxiety over individual salvation. While this feat was perhaps a praiseworthy

¹³ Tom McFaul, *Problem Fathers in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 30.

accomplishment in Calvinist-leaning circles of Norwich, we can also see how it might have made other, more moderate authorities uncomfortable enough to censor the play.

Politics and the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen

Satan opens the prologue by explaining “high time it is for me to stir about / And doo my best, my kingdom to maintaine (1.1-2). He is worried at the particular moment because his “enemies” have been flouting his “laws and Statutes” and attacking his “state” (1.5-6). Representing himself as the legitimate ruler of a kingdom with a fully developed legal system, Satan goes on to provide a mind-bending version of the Parable of “husbandmen unkind” to illustrate just how he intends to respond to these illegal activities. This parable appears in all three Synoptic Gospels. What follows is the 1560 Geneva Bible translation of the Marcan version of this parable. I reproduce it here in its entirety, plus the verses that record the response it elicited, for the purpose of examining the convergence and divergence of Satan's version with the scriptural one:

And he began to speak unto them in parables, A *certain* man planted a vineyard, and compassed it with an hedge, and digged a pit for the winepress, and built a tower in it, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a strange country. ² And at the time, he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive of the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. ³ But they took him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. ⁴ And again he sent unto them another servant, and at him they cast stones, and brake his head, and sent him away shamefully handled. ⁵ And again he sent another, and him they slew, and many others, beating some, and killing some. ⁶ Yet had he one son, his dear beloved: him also he sent the last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. ⁷ But the husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. ⁸ So they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. ⁹ What shall then the Lord of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy these husbandmen, and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ Have ye not read so much as this Scripture, The stone which the builders did refuse, is made the head of the corner. ¹¹ This was done of the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes. ¹² Then they went about to take him, but they feared the people: for they perceived that he spake that parable against them: therefore they left him, and went their way. (Mark 12:1-12)

The hedge, winepress and tower in this vineyard allude to the second verse of the “Song of the Vineyard” in the fifth chapter of the book of Isaiah. In the Song, the prophet on behalf of God reproaches his people for being an unfruitful vineyard despite the care lavished upon them and predicts their destruction. Therefore, when asked, “What shall then the Lord of the vineyard do?,” Jesus’s interlocutors (and, more generally the audiences steeped in Hebrew scripture) would have had easy access to the images of the divine method of dealing with such unfruitfulness:

⁵ And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up: I will break the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: ⁶ And I will lay it waste: it shall not be cut, nor dug, but briars and thorns shall grow up: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. ⁷ Surely the vineyard of the Lord of hosts *is* the house of Israel, and the men of Judah *are* his pleasant plant, and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression: for righteousness, but behold a crying.

This Isaian context summoned by the shared typology, in addition to verse 10’s mention of the cornerstone, helps shape a longstanding interpretation of the parable which views God as the vineyard owner and Christ, the fulfillment of the prophets who prefigure him, as the slain heir who is eventually avenged and exalted.

In the prologue to *Conflict of Conscience*, however, Satan appropriates Christ’s didactic story condemning the Temple elite. He claims the Pharisees as his own, mockingly associates Christ with his earthly father, and glibly places *himself* in the position of the avenging vineyard owner:

My mortall foe, the Carpenters poor sonne
Against my Children, the Pharises, I meane,
Upbraiding them, did vse this comparison,
As in the storie of his lyfe, may be seene,
There was a man, which had a vinyard greene:

Who letting it to husbandmen vnkinde,
In steade of fruite, vnthankfulnesse did find.

So that his Seruants, firstly they did beat,
His some likewise, they afterward did kill,
And heerevpon that man in furie great:
Did souldiers send, these Hubsandmen to spill,
Their Towne to burne, he did them also will.
But out alas, alas, for woe I crie,
To vse the same, farr iuster case haue I,

For where the kingdome, of this world is myne,
And his, on whom I will the same bestow,
As Prince hereof, I did my selfe assigne:
My darling dear whose faithfull loue I know,
Shall neuer faile from mee, but daylie flow:
But who that is: perhaps some man may doubt,
I wil therefore in breefe, protract and paint him out (1.8-26)

Satan's ever faithful heir and darling dear is definitively revealed, after a hardly brief disquisition of his excellent qualities (it lasts 56 lines), to be the Pope. Satan then reiterates that he claims "by right" the "kingdome of the earthly world so round" and so will defend his son against those "divers men of late, of malice most unkinde" who "do study to displace" his son.

The biblical scholar John S. Kloppenborg notes that this parable in its Synoptic versions is an "u-shaped" narrative which both originates and ultimately culminates in an affirmation of social order. Although the narrative progresses through a phase of social destabilization, at no point does it question the vineyard owner's prerogative either to demand fruits or to punish the tenants for their noncompliance. As such, Kloppenborg explains, it is notable how often over the centuries those in positions of social power

employ the parable to justify their suppression of rebels and/or rivals.¹⁴ Taking for a moment a long view of Woodes' context, one sees that sixteenth and seventeenth century English history contains various instances of this interest in employing the parable's "rhetoric of order." In one of the most high profile examples of such a move, Restoration clergy inscribe the parable in the Book of Common prayer on the day set aside to commemorate the "martyrdom" of Charles I.¹⁵ The beheaded king is thus likened to the vineyard owner's heir (and thus also to Christ). The republicans, meanwhile, become examples of wicked husbandmen who, as a result of events ultimately traceable to Divine will, have had the vineyard taken from them for their rebelliousness and poor stewardship.

Much earlier, in 1536, Bishop Hugh Latimer uses the text in a sermon meant especially for the ears of Henry VIII on the subject of the suppression of the minor religious houses. He paints the religious orders as unworthy husbandmen of vineyards that should now be "fearmed and letton to others" whose diligent work might "amende the negligence" of previous centuries.¹⁶ Insofar as Latimer urges the king to exercise his power against those whose religious activities appear to undermine both his kingdom and God's, this sermon fits neatly into Kloppenberg's category, a "rhetoric of order."

¹⁴ John S. Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard: Ideology, Economics, and Agrarian Conflict in Jewish Palastine* (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 29-31

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁶ Bishop Hugh Latimer's sermon is quoted in "William Latymer's Chronyckille of Anne Boyleyn," ed. Maria Dowling in *Camden Miscellany XXX* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1990), 57, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068690500004591>.

A much more complex rhetorical situation emerges, however, when Susan Wabuda painstakingly recreates the immediate political context of this pivotal sermon in her study, *Preaching during the English Reformation*. The bill against the minor houses that had just been introduced to the house of Lords is championed by Cromwell as part of his plan to distribute their wealth as rewards for supporting Henry. Cromwell is also engaged in a pitched struggle with Queen Anne. In one of "her boldest attempts to influence policy," Anne desires that her chaplain, Latimer, publically oppose Cromwell's designs for this particular redistribution of wealth. Only two months later, Anne would be executed. Hence, argues Wabuda, this sermon "helps to reveal why she fell and discloses the nature of the split in the evangelical movement" over what should happen to these religious houses after they are taken from the orders. Strongly condemning the (usually already strong and wealthy) lay people who stood to profit from Cromwell's plan, Latimer recommends instead that these houses be converted to "places of studye and good letres and to the contynuall releve of the poor."¹⁷ In other words, the work of cultivation for the common good--of educating, of forming preachers, and of serving the impoverished--should continue in these vineyards. Latimer's harsh condemnation of Cromwell and his associates as greedy, Wabuda argues, gives "Cromwell a weapon with which to strike back, to convince the king that Anne's desire to divert the wealth of religious houses away from their intended beneficiaries touched Henry's authority."¹⁸

¹⁷ Latymer, *Chronyckille of Anne Boyleyn*, 57.

¹⁸ Susan Wabuda, *Preaching During the English Reformation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 134.

Latimer's assertion that Cromwell will only replace one set of unworthy, greedy tenants with another draws attention to a gap in parable narrative. Who exactly are these "others" to whom the vineyard will be let after the original husbandmen are safely purged? The scribes and Pharisees may be out, but what criteria should designate and authorize a new group of stewards? How, in other words, can the parable be made good given the high-stakes, highly charged moral and political circumstances in which its rhetorical authority has been invoked? The question of who can claim to be true heirs to *The kingdom* is, of course, massively contested in this era of Reformation, one that solicited a tremendous expenditure of energy in interpreting scripture and Church history. In the particular case of applying this typology to the Tudor court (or to any human situation, really), the narrative is complicated because the vineyard owner, Henry, does not, like God, judge and exact justice and select tenants on his own. Rather, he is surrounded by various factions hoping to influence his choices.

Trembling Typology

Latimer's sermon and its context highlight a fork in the road, presenting competing versions of how justice is to be restored. Thus, in application to an earthly kingdom, the U-shaped Wicked Husbandmen narrative becomes less neat. Satan's version in *Conflict of Conscience* destabilizes the narrative much more radically. In order to explore how Woodes' particular recasting of the parable reverberates, I adopt for the moment a structuralist approach to looking at typology suggested by James Paxson.

His discussion helpfully allows us to see some of the workings of a great many instances of the “ironic” typology we witness on the medieval English stage, particularly in the cycle plays.

Typological/allegorical interpretation of scripture (and, indeed, of many other texts) was a dominant mode in the Middle Ages. In his famous explanation of the different senses of scripture, Aquinas cites as precedent St. Paul (specifically Hebrews 10:1), as well as Church fathers such as Augustine. Aquinas writes, “For as the Apostle says that Old Law is a figure of the New Law and Dionysius says ‘the New Law itself is a figure of future glory.’”¹⁹ Although high-profile Protestant reformers often excoriated the elaborate hermeneutic practices of Catholic scriptural interpretation, scholars have also not infrequently demonstrated that many Protestant own practices relied heavily on typological readings that were not entirely dissimilar from the earlier “allegorical” models.²⁰ As Thomas Luxon explains it,

The principle dodge that allowed Protestantism to attack allegorical interpretation as a “licentious system” devised by Satan and the equivocating “Papists” while simultaneously preserving the absolute otherness of God and “the world to come” is called typology. I call it a dodge because it is largely a euphemism for allegory designed to mask Protestantism’s continued commitment to allegorical structures

¹⁹ ST1.1.10

²⁰ This topic is a very broad and complex one. I paint in the broadest of strokes here such that I can move on to examining particular Protestant uses of a particular parable. For engaging discussions, see Thomas Luxon, *Literal Figures: Puritan Allegory and the Reformation Crisis in Representation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995) and Lisa Freinkel, *Reading Shakespeare's Will: The Theology of Figure from Augustine to the Sonnets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

of thought and representations of reality or truth even as it constituted itself under the antiallegorical banner of the one true literal sense of God's word.²¹

Paxson helpfully codifies some of these heterogenous allegorical practices in the Middle Ages, setting up two typological axes, one temporal and the other ethical. The first axis is emphasized in many traditional explications of typology which identify, for example, Moses—an Old Testament type—as the prefigurement of Christ, and Christ—the New Testament antitype—as the fulfillment of what Moses prefigured and promised. Paxson points out, however, that there also exist figures which are “imagistically linked but ethically opposed”; these he labels “countertypes.” Absolon, like Christ, hangs from a tree but one could not reasonably say that Christ “fulfils” the older figure's rebellious conspiracy against his father, King David. Furthermore, Paxson also proposes another term, “allotype” for the relationship between similar antitypes: for example, Moses and King David who both prefigure Christ. Paxson argues that the imaginative uses of these various kinds of resemblance in Medieval English drama often results in a “generically-novel rendering of scripture” that “bends or trembles as a didactically pure and precise means of symbolic instruction.”²²

²¹ Luxon, 40. Luxon engages with and at points seeks to upset distinctions made in such seminal texts as Barbara Lewalski's *Protestant Poetics and Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), distinctions that she draws in part from Erich Auerbach's essay “Figura” in *Scenes from Drama in European Literature* (New York: 1976), 11-76. In what might be evidence of Protestantism's enduring success in convincing many of us even today of the confessionally-inflected distinctions between allegory and typology, an audience member at a conference where I presented an early version of this paper remarked, “Wow, Woodes seems so medieval; it really does seem like a Catholic thing to do!”

²² James J. Paxson, “A Theory of Biblical Typology of the Middle Ages” *Exemplaria* 3, no. 2 (1991): 366-371, <https://doi.org/10.1179/exm.1991.3.2.359>.

Paxson cites as an example the introduction of Cain's rebellious servant Pikeharnes into the Wakefield cycle's *Mactatio Abel*. Cain, particularly in medieval typology, appears as an archetypal rebel, oft-associated with others who refuse to acknowledge God's sovereignty such as Satan, the anti-Christ, etc. Yet, in the medieval cycle play, Cain's position as the master of his own surly, rebellious servant causes him to resemble God, becoming God's allotype (ethically similar) as well as countertype (ethically opposed). Thus, Cain in this version is both the rebel and the rebelled against and the play does not teach a "pure" lesson about how one ought not resemble him.²³

Similarly, in *Conflict of Conscience* when Satan casts himself as the vineyard owner, a figure his audience was accustomed to thinking of as God, we recognize a quintessentially hubristic Satanic move. As such, we might say that Satan has a "countertypical" relationship to God, given their ethical opposition. Yet, at the same time, Satan's clever claim to be the vineyard owner does not ring completely false and so cannot be summarily dismissed. After all, Christ himself asserts to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Revelation reports, "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations" (13:7-8). Thus, Satan becomes, at least in a limited sense, a plausible "allotype" of God, a master in his own right and not even a completely illegitimate one at that. God's faithful, in turn, become the tenants who *should* refuse to acquiesce to the demands of Satan's servants (the Catholic clergy) and heir (the Pope). Unlike the deployment of the parable as a support for the Stuart monarchy or even as a

²³ Paxson's view of Cain resembles that of Robert S. Sturges, with whose reading I engage with more thoroughly in the final chapter of this study.

hard-hitting attempt to influence Henry VIII, this inverted version preaches not a “rhetoric of order” but instead a rhetoric of justified rebellion against Satan’s lordship.

A useful comparison to Satan’s appropriation of the parable exists in the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas. The parable of the tenants also appears there with the same basic figures and relationships: the vineyard owner, tenants, servants, and heir. It differs in notable ways from the Synoptic versions, however, lacking the typological allusions to Isaiah, the description of the vengeance visited upon the tenants, and any mention of the heir’s exaltation. Even more significantly, this version is part of a series of parables which emphasize the *foolishness* of property owners and usurers.²⁴ In this context, the identification of the vineyard owner as God becomes far less compelling and the relationship between the owner and the tenants becomes murkier. It opens up space for considering, for example, whether the tenants might not have some legitimate complaints against such an absentee landlord. Perhaps, for instance, the owner unreasonably expected a return too soon after the vineyard was planted, or perhaps he unjustly demanded the entire yield from the tenants. The version of the parable in the Gospel of Thomas further illustrates how easily, in the absence of a firm tether to Isaian typology, its “good” and “evil” valences can be switched or at least considerably muddled.

If the Gospel of Thomas version of the parable raises strong reasons for questioning the legitimacy of the landlord, Woodes’ version takes this opening and runs with it. One of the effects is increased emphasis on the apparent solidarity of the

²⁴ See Kloppenborg’s discussion, 43-45.

“unkinde husbandmen.” They seem to act with one accord in ejecting the multiple messengers and the heir, uniform in their resistance. In the usual way of interpreting and interacting this parable, a Christian is likely to locate oneself in the position of the “others,” those shadow figures in the wings who wait to take over the vineyard after the evil tenants have been destroyed. When one suddenly is forced into the position of being an original tenant, however, action rather than passive waiting is required.

Woodes’ revision also shifts the temporal axis of the parable’s typology. For, in its usual Synoptic form, the parable of the Evil Husbandmen belongs as Kloppenborg notes, not to Christianity’s “apocalyptic and revolutionary rhetoric” but rather to the genre of “retrospective historiography.” He notes that,

the reader of an apocalypse . . . might locate herself in the middle of the temporal scenario that is sketched, in the midst of the persecutions and tribulations, looking forward to the predicted deliverance. The Christian reader of Mark 12,1–11, however, already knows that the killing of the Son was overcome by his subsequent exaltation (12,10–11) and that the wicked were destroyed.²⁵

Satan’s appropriation of the parable, however, by casting the faithful Protestants as the husbandmen, jolts an audience member back into the apocalyptic and revolutionary mode, into acute awareness of present persecution.

Herein then, lies a great didactic success of the Woodes’ ironic retelling of the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen: rather than letting the audience become complacent in their knowledge of the ultimate conclusion of the story, it emphasizes that the battle rages *now* and stresses the need to come together in resisting and ejecting those who unjustly enjoy temporal authority. This message neatly complements the scenes from

²⁵ Kloppenborg, 30.

Philologus/Spira's life which follow, scenes in which a Cardinal and other of the pope's henchmen try to convince him to renounce his Protestantism as allies such as Theologus and Eusebius try to bolster his resolve.

In a thought-provoking piece of research that dovetails nicely with my own reading of this play, Arata Ide argues that the local context of 1570s Norwich can do much to explain Woodes's dramatic choices, particularly in his innovative presentation of Philologus as a Protestant martyr in the style of John Foxe's famous *Actes and Monuments*. The deployment of such rhetoric at this point was deliberate and somewhat dangerous, writes Ide:

The succession of Elizabeth theoretically had to be the end of Protestant martyrdom in the "national" history of England. Urging another Protestant martyr was not necessarily timely, but rather irrelevant or even politically troublesome to the authorities, for the audience could have picked up from the Foxeian rhetoric of the play the cue of resistance rather than conformity.²⁶

Of particular topical interest, argues Ide, is the death of Bishop John Parkhurst in 1575 and subsequent appointment of a new bishop, Edmund Freke. This turn of events "seriously impeded the Puritan ascendancy of Norwich." Under orders from Queen Elizabeth and Burghley to dampen the region's Presbyterianism, Freke allied himself with pro-Catholic local powers and suppressed Puritan preachers. These actions seem to elicit grave concern from the same aldermen who had approved Woodes' appointment several years earlier and also spurred some wider popular protest. Thus, suggests Ide, *The Conflict of Conscience* participated in these protests as "Woodes appropriated

²⁶ Arata Ide, "Nathaniel Woods, Foxeian Martyrology, and the Radical Protestants of Norwich in the 1570s" *Reformation* 13, no. 1 (2009): 126.

Foxeian rhetoric to promote Puritan view and share among the audience awareness of the *imminent danger*“ (emphasis added).²⁷ The startling inversion of the parable of the Husbandmen is one way in which the play urges a community to come together at the present moment and act “unkindly” to resist a vineyard owner whose actions are unjust and whose doctrinal positions are distasteful.

Individual Salvation and the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen

While social applications of the parable of the wicked tenants constitute one major vein of its interpretive history, another rich vein co-exists with it. Dating in England at least back to Bede is a practice of reading the parable as an allegory of an *individual*'s spiritual life.²⁸ In the officially promulgated Elizabethan sermon entitled “On the Declining from God,” we see the parable understood in terms of a chronology of God's dealings with those who persistently resist his attempts to help them cultivate holiness:

if we which are the chosen vineyard of GOD, bring not foorth good grapes, that is to say, good workes that may bee delectable and pleasant in his sight, when hee looketh for them, when he sendeth his messengers to call vpon vs for them, but rather bring foorth wild grapes, that is to say, sowre workes, vnsauery, and vnfruitfull: then will hee plucke away all desence, and suffer grieuous plagues of famine, battell, dearth, and death, to light vpon vs. Finally, if these serue not, he will let vs lie waste, he will giue vs ouer, he will turne away from vs, he will dig and delue no more about vs, hee will let vs alone, and suffer vs to bring foorth euen such fruite as wee will, to bring foorth brambles, bryers, and thornes, all

²⁷ Ibid., 103. The circumstances under which Woodes is eventually removed from his post in Norwich are not clear. He does not appear again in records until 1594, suggesting he was unable to secure another post.

²⁸ Kloppenborg, 26.

naughtinesse, all vice, and that so abundantly, that they shall cleane ouergrow vs, choke, strangle, and vtterly destroy vs.²⁹

Being suddenly left to one's own sinful devices, after failing to respond appropriately to warning phenomena, should be taken as a very bad omen indeed. The sermon does not follow the parable and Isaian song in presenting God's direct, active destruction as the final stage of his dealings with the wicked. Rather, it is the homily's anaphoric amplification of what happens when God finally withdraws from the vineyard that is so chilling here. Having once had a vineyard "let" to each one of us, we ought to shudder at being suddenly "let" alone.

The congregation ought to remember how human fathers deal with their sons: And the father, as long as he loueth his childe, he loketh angerly, he correcteth him when hee doeth amisse: but when that serueth not, and vpon that he ceaseth from correction of him, and suffereth him to do what he list himselfe, it is a signe that he intendeth to disinherit him and to cast him away for euer.

The paternal prerogative to disinherit, like the landlord's prerogative to expel the tenants, remains unquestioned. The sermon does proceed, however, to urge the sinner seize upon this moment of realization that he is on the brink of disinheritance: "Then specially it is time to cry, and to cry againe, as Dauid did: Cast mee not away from thy face." Similarly, near the end of the play, Philologus' godly counselors suggest he has been chastised by God only in order that he might be corrected and then saved, as in the case of King David and others. Philologus replies, "That is not Gods intent, with mee though it be so with some, / who after bodies punishment, haue into fauour come." His conscience is

²⁹ "Homily on the Declining from God" STC 13675, Renaissance Electronic Texts 1.1., ed. Ian Lancaschire, <http://anglicanlibrary.org/homilies/bk1hom08.htm>.

sure: David was always elect, while he has been condemned “to perpetuall griefe and fears” (4.2.244).

The sermon’s application of the Wicked Husbandmen parable to the spiritual life seems a bit reluctant to relinquish the idea that a change in behavior prompted by seeing the signs of impending doom might result in a change of outcome. It asks the listener to imagine being one of the evil husbands (an *actually* evil husbandman this time) and to rewrite the end of the parable such that the landlord will no longer visit destruction upon one.

Erin Sullivan helpfully reads *Conflict of Conscience* in the context of these “paradoxes of despair and predestination” associated with the ratification of the Thirty-nine articles in 1653. She explains that

doctrinal complexities quickly became bound up in the problem of narrative storytelling, with writers looking for recognizable sequentiality in the unfolding of the spiritual life even as the underpinning theology refuted it.³⁰

Even though human action is theoretically inconsequential, people are still encouraged, obligated even, to devote tremendous energy to reading the signs of their election or reprobation. Despair is a particularly tricky sign to read:

The crucial distinction . . . is between utter despair ‘in respect of ourselves’ and utter despair in respect of God’s forgiveness. Despair in oneself was seen as a necessary event in the path toward election, since it possessed the power to drive out pride and presumption as it humbled the soul and prepared it for grace. The important thing was for believers to recognize the difference between a self-abasing form of despair that would eventually ease and make them better, more pious Christians and the kind that would coalesce into a final turning from God,

³⁰ Sullivan, 538.

causing them to commit the dreaded sin against the Holy Ghost and confirm themselves as reprobate.³¹

The revised ending to *Conflict of Conscience* suggests that the alternative interpretation of Philologus' state of despair as temporary, as suggested by Theologus and Eusebius, finally wins out. We are told to believe that he finally overcomes his own inability to imagine he might be destined for forgiveness. The body of the play, however, which, as mentioned, remained completely unrevised in the second edition, provides no real reason to suggest that Philologus had reason to adjust his view. In presenting an image of a man who responded to God's corrections and repented, the small revisions to the play bring it slightly more into line with officially sanctioned discussions of predestination such as "Of the Declining Against God." The body of the play, however, which, as mentioned, remained completely unrevised in the second edition, provides no evidence that Philologus was likely to adjust his view of how his story would end.

Playing at Repentance

Indeed, Woodes' play up to this point has energetically undercut suggestions that reconciliation with God might have been ordained for Philologus' future as it systematically distorts the biblical images of the *forgiving* father. Hypocrisy, one of Satan's other henchmen, ironically eviscerates the image of the prodigal son, the

³¹ Ibid., 548.

Gospel's most famous parable of divine forgiveness.³² Hypocrisy says all the right things and means none of them:

Oh Loving Father and mercifull God,
We through our sinnes thy punishment deserue,
And have prouoked to beat with thy rod:
Us stubborn Children, which from thee do swerue:
.....
But now if thou wouldest of thy fatherly beneuolence
Thy purposed iugements in wrath for to stay:
The part of the prodigall son we would play:
With bitter teares before thee would fall,
And in true repentaunce for mercy would call.
In our prosperitie we woulde not regard,
The words of the Preachers, who threatned the same
.....
So that the Romish Pharao a Tirant most cruell,
Hath brought vs againe into captiuitie. (3.1.1-23)

Hypocrisy draws specific attention to the ease with which one can act out the part of the repentant prodigal. This performance of mock repentance is so convincing that his fellow vices, Tyranny” and Avarice, are ready to dispatch him before they realize who is and hear his reassurance that “I meant not good earnest” (3.1.87). As it turns out, he is simply training them for their mission, which he and the Pope have devised to trap both the clergy and laity. Now, they are “imbouldened, to practise all euill” (3.1.45). They should be ready to deal with those who, like Philologus, view their subjugation to Catholic authority as a divine corrective but who, unlike Philologus, presume to call upon God for mercy. Such moves obviously endanger the stability of the diabolical kingdom, so the Vices are instructed to overcome any penitential impulse—of the sort so

³² On the many dramatic riffs on the parable of the Prodigal Son in Early Modern England, see Michelle M. Dowd, *The Dynamics of Inheritance on the Shakespearean Stage* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

convincingly aped by Hypocrisy—either by appealing to the sinner’s desire for temporal goods or by exerting force.

Erin E. Kelly advances the thesis that flashy, memorable moments such as these, when Hypocrisy successfully imitates godly Protestant behavior in the service of Satan, help to explain why Protestants abruptly stop trying to use morality drama for the purposes of religious reform around 1580. While dramatists such as Bale had long associated deceitful theatricality with the Catholic clergy, “Woodes’s play exposes the fact that Protestant religious behavior had as much potential as Catholic rite to become mere performance.” This dawning awareness—of the tendency of dramatic performances to “highlight the instability of religious identity” of all sorts—helps explain the increasingly vocal evangelical opposition to the theatre.³³ The fact that Philologus’ actions, which frequently look virtuous, might equally be interpreted as signs of reprobation or election is even more disturbing.

Kelly also suggests that Woodes’ play opens up more ambiguity than “reform-minded” Protestants were able to tolerate at this point. As we might already have had reason to suspect, given how well Paxson’s theory of typology works for *Conflict of Conscience*, Woodes’ play is just a little too medieval for comfort. Following James Simpson, she asserts that it is broadly accurate to “describe the shift from medieval religious drama to reformation drama as characterized by stronger attempts to delimit audience interpretation of plays.” Medieval Catholic drama,” she writes,

³³ Kelly, 390.

seems willing to confront its spectators with an ambiguous range of experiences without making too much effort to contain their responses. For example, cycle plays include doubting characters who condemn Christ's miracles as magic tricks and weeping women as mere actors, thus metatheatrically generating doubt about the authenticity of any religious signs. Such doubt and ambiguity is in keeping with the tendency to value heterogeneity, addition, inclusion, and complex consensus.³⁴

English Protestant Reformers sought more tightly controlled doctrinal messages than Woodes provides on the subjects of reprobation, salvation, and election. His play is “too complex to serve as a lesson for a general audience, or even as reassurance to the godly.” The flamboyant ironizing of forgiveness looms much larger than quiet reminders about David and others who actually receive it.

Another major method of distortion of the image of the forgiving father is the intense focus on Satan's perverse relationship with his heir. To hear him tell it, they always act in perfect harmony, bound by their shared vices and never-failing love (1.29-34). In fact, the doting Satan's prologue begins to cloy, studded as it is with iterations of “my son,” “my boy,” and “my darling.” This irony forces the audience into the uncomfortable position of recognizing that, if Philologus is to be saved, he somehow needs to utter the same words as Hypocrisy. He also needs to believe that God loves him as much as Satan “loves” the Pope/Antichrist. In a bizarre twist, the play obliquely suggests the impossibility of keeping up with these diabolical Joneses, the family that never really falls out. There only is inheritance assured and forgiveness unnecessary. It begins to look like the possibilities for reconciliation with God once a rift has taken place

³⁴ Kelly, 406.

are foreclosed, leaving no room for the possibility that a son who strays might yet be elect.

This impression that forgiveness has been eliminated as a real possibility is fostered further by that temporal suspension produced by the play's ironic typology in the wicked husbandmen parable. As discussed, the realignment of the godly with the husbandmen works to privilege the "now." If one tries to pursue this version of the parable past the present, however, the prospects of a happy ending for the resistance, for the stalwart "unkinde" husbandmen are murky. When Satan becomes the landlord, and he seeks to elevate the *Pope* as the cornerstone, where ought the embattled husbandmen look for salvation? They resist; and then what? Where does the narrative go?

Satan, of course, can only really make use of the parable of the wicked husbandmen—only really makes sense as an allotype of God—insofar as he ignores (or is ignorant of) any apocalyptic revelation to the effect that his earthly authority is both temporary and highly contingent. Indeed, Satan consistently neglects to include the endings of the stories as he dwells on his clever attempts to derail the godly work of various key figures in salvation history. For example, he brags about getting Eve to eat the fruit on the promise that she will not die and does not mention the small detail that she, in fact, dies and the even more inconsequential detail that this transgression leads to death for the whole human race. Likewise, Satan boasts, "Nembroth that Tyrant, fearing Gods hande, / By mee was perswaded to builde vp high Babell : / Whereby he presumed Gods wrath to withstande" (50-52). The audacity is reported; the aftermath is not. Satan also reveals that he encouraged Moses to focus on the benefits of his position of privilege

among the Egyptian elite: “By accompting himself the sonne of Pharoa / To make him loth Egipt to forgoe” (1.76-77). Satan does *not* mention that Moses ultimately gives up this position (and the posh pad that goes with it) in favor of the one which promises a land of the Israelite’s own. Of course, Woodes could reasonably expect his audience to fill in the missing details of these stories, completing the truncated narratives.

The narrative of one’s own individual salvation or reprobation, however, is much harder to complete. As the phrase “accounting oneself a son” alerts us, being a son, and even more particularly an heir, involves calculation and anticipation. It is lonelier than being an unkinde husbandman, where at least one is part of a community with a common purpose of resisting corrupt Catholic (or Catholic-leaning) authority. Woodes’ play demands that the elect in his audience first recognize the useful social lesson to be gleaned from Satan’s version of the parable of the wicked tenants. Then, however, the parable must be tipped back over, as it were, the original valences restored. At that point, the elect must locate themselves in the community of those shadowy “others” who take over the vineyard and partake of the Son’s elevation.

They must also maintain faith that not all who act like the prodigal son do so hypocritically. They must love the Word much better than Philologus does. They must reclaim these parables from irony and so reclaim the possibilities of being sinful but forgiven heirs. They must do all this—while in the midst of frequent warnings against presumption and while embroiled in the “paradoxes of despair and predestination.”

So, is this a good play or a bad one? Somewhat curiously, we continue to insist on posing this question about this play. Sullivan concludes that

though Woodes's play is by no means one of the more remarkable literary achievements of its age, it does highlight in the most extreme way possible the doubleness produced by despair within the framework of predestinarian thinking and the drama that resulted from this split vision.³⁵

Kelly very enthusiastically proclaims,

if this text is unsuccessful, it is because it is a religious play that discovers that the goals of a coherent sermon are incompatible with key elements of dramatic form. By offering such a multivocal, irresolvably ambiguous, theatrically sensitive exploration of a complex character's rise and fall, *Conflict of Conscience* succeeds as a play, indeed as the type of drama we celebrate as typical of the Elizabethan stage.³⁶

I myself, who have a fondness for the ambiguities of Medieval English drama and am not immune from the postmodern fascination with unstable irony, also find its brashness and clever reworking of narratives well worth our careful attention.

I also strive to recognize and remember, however, that this is play whose original audience, so far as we know, did not react simply with delight in its literary qualities. Indeed, the only record of a response to it we have is one of censorship, perhaps spurred by fear of the kind of self-transcendence preached and soliticed from a stalwart community of Protestant "husbandmen unkinde."

Furthermore, if we grant to Francisco Spira, to the fictional character of Philologus, and to Woodes and his circle their religious belief, ambiguity leading to despair appears terrifying. Philologus' inability to determine whether his view of his penitential encounters with God or that of his friends is more accurate points out some of the difficulties involved in knowing how—in practice—it was possible to form a

³⁵ Sullivan, 557.

³⁶ Kelly, 419.

community of believers committed to strongly Calvinist tenets of predestination and reprobation.

**CHAPTER THREE: “MUCH ADO TO GET BELIEF”: ABRAHAMIC
(UN)CERTAINTY AND COMMUNITY IN A WOMAN KILLED WITH KINDNESS**

Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603) occupies an interesting place in our array of Renaissance English drama. It has been noted that it incorporates many techniques from the morality tradition, particularly in the plot concerning Charles Mountford and his sister Susan.¹ Yet it also seems fairly far removed from something like *The Conflict of Conscience*, with its lengthy theological disputation and often heavy-handed didacticism. The two plays do share, however, an interest in the topic of forgiveness. Heywood's domestic tragedy interrogates both human and divine forgiveness, recognizing that the two types of relationality are frequently entangled.

When John Frankford first hears from his servant that his wife is cuckolding him with his beloved houseguest, the master repeatedly emphasizes his incredulity:

What didst thou say? If any word that touched
His credit or her reputation,
It is as hard to enter my belief
As Dives into Heaven. (8.60-63)²

¹ Michael Wentworth, "A *Woman Killed With Kindness* as Domestic Morality," in *Tradition and Innovation: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. David G. Allen and Robert A. White (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1990).

² All quotations from the play are from the following edition: Thomas Heywood, *A Woman Killed with Kindness* in *A Woman Killed with Kindness and Other Domestic Plays*, ed. Martin Wiggins, 70-718 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Frankford goes so far as to aver that even direct revelation from a divine messenger would have to be far more than usually persuasive to convince him that this cuckoldry is taking place under his own roof:

Thy eyes may be deceived I tell thee,
For should an angel from the heavens drop down
And preach to me that thyself hast told,
He should have much ado to win belief,
In both their loves I am so confident. (8.81-84)

Somewhat refreshingly, for those more accustomed to husbands and lovers that seem to snatch at suspicion as they stalk across the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, Frankford follows through on his claim that his certain belief is hard to come by. He is no Othello, Leontes, Claudio, or, to look forward to the next chapter, Posthumus. Even up to the moment before Frankford actually discovers his wife and friend in bed, he seems to hold out some slight hope that the report of the servant might have been mistaken.

Philologus desired absolute certainty with regard to the state of his soul; Frankford desires absolute certainty with regard to the faithfulness, or lack thereof, of his wife and friend. His default is a trust he represents in terms that may strike us as both hyperbolic and unwise. From the looks of it, Dives is never, ever getting into heaven. The rich man must instead watch in torment as Lazarus, the poor man he neglected during his life of privilege, is comforted in the bosom of Abraham (Luke 16:19-23). Doubting or resisting the message of an actual angel of heaven also appears, based on available Scriptural evidence, to be a foolhardy move. Even more shockingly, Frankford veers into treacherous theological territory when he declares, “Though I durst pawn my life, and on their / faith Hazard the dear salvation of my soul, / Yet in my trust I may be

too secure” (8.74-75). If he truly means what he says, as his wife seems to when she repeats the line later in the play, he wagers his (eternal) future with reckless abandon, as he tries to erect a bulwark against creeping doubt. In short, Frankford asserts as strongly as he can that he wants badly to keep believing what he has henceforth believed.

Critics have said that Frankford’s extravagantly expressed trust arises from naiveté or even neglectful ignorance: he does not really know how properly to appreciate his wife; or he does not know how to keep her happy; or he does not know how to set up appropriate boundaries in his household. All of these points, I concede, seem true enough, to one degree or another. For example, his description of his happiness prior to his discovery both idealizes Anne (as “perfection all, all truth, all ornament”) and disturbingly includes her in a list that also includes his wealth and education (2.12). And yet, there is also something fascinating, something worth pausing over, with regard to Frankford’s particular commitment to being certain about whether he is a cuckold. He might be wrongheaded in relating to his wife, but to me and a number of others, he still seems generally reasonable, good-willed even.³ At the very least, he seems to *resist* entangling his desire to know for sure with any wild frenzies or morbid obsessions over Anne’s chastity.

³ Nancy Gutierrez neatly enumerates how the play has tended to provoke “distinctly polar” scholarly interpretations: “the play’s marriage is patriarchal in nature from beginning to end, or it is a patriarchal entity subverted by a wife’s self-assertion; Frankford is a generous and forgiving husband, or he is an unbending and unfeeling monster; Anne is a stereotypical woman who is fated to fall, or she is a woman pushed by her husband to accept his best friend as her lover; Anne is saved by her act of self-contrition, or she is damned as a suicide; the play is straightforward domestic tragedy, or it displays the irony of topical commentary.” “A Response to Lisa Hopkins,” *Connotations* 4, no. 3 (1994/95), 242-43. See also the introduction to Margaret Jane Kidnie’s new Arden edition (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017, Kindle) for an overview of these critical cruxes.

Modern criticism of the play has been often preoccupied with the question of how Heywood's contemporary audiences would have reacted to Frankford's response once his wife's infidelity is definitively established and exposed. What would they have thought of the insistence by various characters (including Anne herself) that Frankford is truly, even exceptionally, merciful in his choice to provide for but cut off all contact with his wife? Several decades ago, Laura Bromley argued that Frankford was, in fact, remarkable only in how well he managed to exemplify the widespread advice of early modern conduct books regarding how husbands and heads of household ought to act. More particularly, she asserted, Frankford was practicing the essential gentlemanly virtue of "moderation" and acting with reasoned judgment in his rightful authority as head of a Christian household—an authority that could have demanded her death.⁴ Critics since have found plenty of fault with Bromley's argument.⁵

I agree, again, that Bromley's account should be corrected or at least complemented by the acknowledgement that conduct literature itself varied considerably; furthermore, it is one type of a multiplicity of available discourses in Early Modern England surrounding the question of what to do with an adulterous wife. In the words of Robert Miola, who draws on a wide range of primary sources as he considers the question in reference to *Cymbeline*,

⁴ Laura G. Bromley, "Domestic Conduct in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *Studies in English Literature* 26, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 259-276, <https://doi.org/10.2307/450507>.

⁵ See, for example, Jennifer Panek, "Punishing Adultery in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *Studies in English Literature* 34, no. 2 (Spring 1994), 363, <https://doi.org/10.2307/450906> and Kidnie's Arden introduction, 29-36.

the ethical teaching of the Mosaic law and Protestant Europe, the admonitions of contemporary (especially Puritan moralists), some legal traditions in Europe and England, and the literary example of the Italian novella and stage—all, then, render intelligible the operatic wrath of Shakespearean husbands and lovers who think themselves betrayed.

....

Another ethical tradition, however, also assuming the sanctity of marriage and equally well derived from scripture and patristics, pushed in the opposite direction. This tradition denied the husband's right to kill an unfaithful wife, challenged prevalent assumptions about divorce and gender inequality, and urged forgiveness for sin, even for adultery.⁶

Nevertheless, I do think it worth retaining and building upon Bromley's insight about the importance for Frankford of the virtue she designates "moderation" and to continue investigation into models of Christian husbands and householders that might be relevant to *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. I propose to do so by paying careful attention to the constellation of scriptural references and allusions by which Frankford styles himself a kind of Old Testament patriarch, particularly those in the mold of Abraham. This typology, which peppers his speech, appears vital to his conception of himself, a conception he is committed to disseminating among the community of his household and Yorkshire neighborhood. Frankford's desire for certainty, for a "faith" that validates his actions, intersects in a variety of ways with some of the complex iconography and discussions that surrounded the figure of Abraham in Heywood's time. The character, like Abraham, is associated (by himself and other characters) with hospitality, with the privilege of speaking directly to God, with the virtue of patience, and, of course, with

⁶ Robert S. Miola, "Wrying but a Little? Marriage, Punishment and Forgiveness in *Cymbeline*" in *Shakespeare and Renaissance Ethics*, ed. Patrick Gray and John D. Cox, 187-209 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 194-195.

faith.⁷ In light of this scriptural, typological focus, I seek to reconfigure Bromley's emphasis on "moderation" with a consideration of "patience," arguing that the latter virtue's complexity in the Jewish, Roman, and Christian tradition more suggestively sheds light on Frankford's attempts to navigate a course among passion and reason.

Heywood's play showcases a man who strives to follow the example of Abraham—and who fails. Frankford's context and community thwarts his attempts to embody an Abrahamic certainty and Abrahamic patience. Frankford fails partially because the age of patriarchs is long since passed, and it is highly unclear *how* one ought to act as Abraham did in post-reformation England. He fails also because his wife and community actively resist being incorporated into his patriarchal vision. The latter part of this chapter consequently turns to examine Anne's response to Frankford, one that counters his attempts to embody a God-given patience with a very passionate, very human impatience. She appears more successful in validating the certainty of her repentance through affective contagion. This intricate, double-plotted play shows that her bids for certainty and Frankford's resemble one another in their attempts to wield social power; moreover, in the context of the play as a whole, these attempts together suggest the dangers of both individually discerned judgments and socially constructed ones.

A Woman Killed and Early Modern Typology

In the previous chapter we saw that medieval and early modern habits of thinking typologically could function in a variety of flexible ways. As I shall emphasize

⁷ Abraham, of course, is a complex figure in a complex narrative and a type of a great many things: hope, obedience, etc. I focus here on that typology that is emphasized in the play germane to Frankford.

throughout this chapter, typology—in this broad sense of emphasizing a resemblance between figures, objects, and events outside of scripture to those in scripture—is a means of both interpreting one’s world and also rhetorically intervening in it. Richard B. Hays helpfully notes that, when comparing a contemporary person, object, or event to a figure, object, or event in scripture,

these broad characterizations can only be matters of degree, since all typologies, being metaphorical, spring from a perception of likeness between dissimilar entities. Thus, antithesis does not eliminate all ‘elements of likeness,’ nor does a positive correlation completely erase difference.⁸

Satan, we recall, “works” as a type of God as the vineyard owner only up to a point. Rhoda Cairns extended Hays’ claim to “posit an inherent tension in a typological correlation that gives a rhetor the power to determine where exactly on that spectrum of likeness and difference the parallel to biblical history will be constructed.”⁹ Heywood’s play appears very interested in the *potentiality* of this power of precision but rather more skeptical about any given rhetor’s ability to exercise definitive control over how their typology will be understood. Crucially, *A Woman Killed with Kindness* repeatedly illustrates the flaws or even arbitrariness of a community’s acceptance or rejection of various typologies. The characters in *A Woman Killed* do evince varying degrees of willingness to extend the typological mode beyond the realm of mere words into a kind of incarnational form that certifies the likeness or difference. Put another way, they

⁸ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 101.

⁹ Rhoda F. Cairns, “The Exegesis of Experience: Typology and Women’s Rhetorics in Early Modern England and New England” (Ph.D. diss., Miami University, 2008), 12.

exhibit various degrees of commitment to and various methods of ensuring conformity between their typologies, actions and thinking.

Frankford, as I have already suggested, is extremely committed to his patriarchal typology; on the other end of the spectrum, his traitorous friend Wendoll seems always to be slipping free of the typologies that attach to him—even of those that he himself adopts. Thus, before treating Frankford's patriarchal typology in more depth, it is helpful briefly to examine Wendoll, a foil to Frankford (and also to Anne). Like many of the other characters, Wendoll easily shifts into the typological mode but does not seem compelled to take his typology very seriously.

Wendoll as Judas, Cain, and the Devil

Wendoll is compared at various points to two famous types of despair, Cain and Judas. He is even compared to the devil himself. Unlike his social betters, the servant Nicholas is not taken with Wendoll, early on professing, "I could fight with him though I know not why / the devil and he are all one in mine eye" (4.86-87). When Nick's intuition is confirmed, and he realizes that the Frankfords' guest is indeed seducing the mistress of the house, he declares, "It is that Satan hath corrupted her / For she was fair and chaste" (6.177-78). In their final meeting, Anne also tells her lover,

The devil doth come to tempt me, ere I die.
My coach! This sin, that with an angel's face
Courtied mine honour, till he sought my wrack,
In my repentant eyes seems ugly black. (16.107-110)

Anne here alludes to the proverbial verse in 2 Corinthians 11.4: "Satan himself is transformed into an Angel of Light," suggesting her inability to see a purely evil nature behind his façade.

Both Wendoll and, even more significantly, the larger structure of the play itself ultimately resist the extreme characterizations of the character as the devil, however. Wendoll is, in fact, manifestly *not* a devil: soliloquies granted him at crucial moments—as he struggles and then gives in to his own temptation (scene 6) and after being chased out of the house by Frankford (scene 16)—establish that Wendoll falls far short of the dedication to evil that might qualify him as an actual devil. In fact, given that Nick’s extreme dislike seems to be based primarily on a gut-feeling and precedes Wendoll’s inability to resist temptation, would it not have been unfair to deem him devilish earlier? After the exposure of the affair, it might be comforting for Anne and the rest of the neighborhood to re-position Wendoll as a devil vanquished and expelled from their midst. John Cox describes how in the English mystery plays, “Where society was concerned, the devil’s opposition defined the community by default, illustrating emblematically what the community was not by opposing what it was.”¹⁰ In the case of *A Woman Killed*, the community would *like*, it seems, to define itself as one that identifies and roots out immorality and offenses against the social order, but we see plenty of evidence to the contrary. Sir Charles, who is willing to prostitute his sister, and Sir Francis, whose dedication to revenge is rather terrifying, both sit secure at the play’s end. So, we are left in uneasy epistemological territory regarding Wendoll: he’s not a devil; rather he is somewhat too like the others.

Wendoll resists as well the despairing biblical types of Judas and Cain. Frankford admonishes Wendoll to be unlike the *Judas* he already resembles in repenting rather than

¹⁰ Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred*, 19.

killing himself: “Go, to thy friend / A Judas; pray, pray, lest I live to see / Thee Judas-like hanged on an elder tree” (13.69-71). Frankford’s typology here draws on the long theological tradition that held Judas’ greatest sin was not the betrayal of Christ, but rather his despairing failure to ask forgiveness. Wendoll, however, seems equally as disinclined to despair that drives him to desperate measures as he is to true resentment made manifest in anything other than words.

Even Wendoll’s self-referential typology seems to carry little actual force with regard to how he conceptualizes himself and plans to proceed with the rest of his life. For instance, he claims to be tortured by guilt one moment, and then tries to reassign that guilt to his parents in the next:

Pursued with horror of a guilty soul
And with the sharp scourge of repentance lashed,
I fly from my own shadow. O my stars,
What have my parents in their lives deserved
That you should lay this penance on their son? (16.31-35)

In this rather odd allusion to the exchange between Christ and his disciples over the blind man, Wendoll asks a similar question but eliminates the either/or of the original: “And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” In the Gospel, Christ’s answer suggests that this is the wrong kind of question: “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be showed on him” (Geneva, John 9:2-3). Better, instead, to focus on God’s healing power—but here in Wendoll’s case there is a clear guilty party, so the parents are even more irrelevant. While Wendoll often references God’s wrath, we never see him follow Frankford’s admonition and call upon God for forgiveness, however. Wendoll seems

equally as disinclined to despair that drives him to desperate measures as he is to true repentance made manifest in anything other than words.

In a further example, Wendoll's final comment of the play comes after he has witnessed Anne's declaration that she will never eat again:

She's gone to death, I live to want and woe,
Her life, her sins, and all upon my head,
And I must now go wander like a Cain
In foreign countries and remoted climes,
Where the report of my ingratitude
Cannot be heard. I'll over, first to France,
And so to Germany, and Italy,
Where, when I have recovered, and by travel
Gotten those perfect tongues, and that these rumours
May in their height abate, I will return
And I divine, however now dejected,
My worth and parts being by some great man praised,
At my return I may in court be raised. (16.122-134)

Wendoll begins figuring himself as an Old Testament-style scapegoat, saddled with his sins and Anne's; banished like Cain, he doomed to live forever as an itinerant outcast.

Yet, by the end of this speech, we see that he neither embraces nor truly anticipates any very long future of "want" and "woe;" instead, he will turn his exile to his advantage, into a proto-type of the Grand Tour, using the opportunity to acquire the kind of veneer by which a man might gain access to the most exclusive of English communities: the court.

Wendoll's is a chameleon-like practice of briefly taking up but then quickly discarding or mostly subverting the meaning of the typology he uses to explain his own life. Having once impressed a wealthy gentleman enough to be welcomed into his household,

Wendoll counts on being able to do so again, banking on the combination of his own abilities and the limits—temporal, spatial, perceptual, and even ethical—of communal

judgment. He refuses really to accept the moral implications of his typologies, the resemblances he seems most to earn by his wrongdoing. Those who dislike him initially cannot really explain why; and those who dislike him after he seduces Anne and betrays Frankford seem unwilling to grapple with what it means to reconstitute themselves against an erstwhile intruding devil who is not a devil. Thinking of oneself as having been self-tricked by Satan is easier than admitting one has been hoodwinked by a social climber.

Faith, Works and the Example of Abraham

Frankford, perhaps, is the most willing to reckon with Wendoll's complexity, with a man who was not always a traitorous adulterer and who might in the future be better—or might end up hanging himself. The possibility Frankford raises of a guilt-ridden Judas suggests as much. In comparison to Wendoll, Frankford is far more committed to taking seriously and to publicly staging the typologies he connects to his situation. When an unnamed maid in a smock prevents Frankford from stabbing the half-clad Wendoll as he flees from the Frankfords' bed in the middle of the night, the master of the house thanks her in the following terms: "Thou like the Angel's hand / Hast stayed me from a bloody sacrifice" (13.67-68). Having been prevented (unlike Charles Montford, the male protagonist of the play's parallel plot) from a crime of passion and choosing to interpret this incident in terms of divine intervention—an answer to his prayer for patience—Frankford recommits to being a righteous patriarch, an Abraham accountable to God rather than to his emotions. Thereafter, Frankford withdraws to his study to deliberate about what "sentence" he should pass on his wife; upon reemerging, he reports that his

decision has been already “registered in heaven” (13.147) He ensures that her humiliation and the declaration that he has decided to “kill her with kindness,”—by continuing to provide for her materially while cutting off all contact with her—takes place before the household servants, before the couple’s children, and before their neighbor Master Cranwell who is a guest for the evening.

A variety of the features of this scene and others connects with Abrahamic typology, a typology that suffused the culture of Heywood’s England. At the time of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*’ first production, James I would have just inherited the English throne a set of ten famous tapestries that depicted scenes from the story of Abraham, a set originally commissioned by Henry VIII. Julia Reinhard Lupton provides an account of why Henry VIII found Abraham a particularly appealing model for his own reign: “Abraham, unlike David and Solomon, was a patriarch and not a king: the leader of a seminomadic household in a prepolitical domain marked by transitory alliances and the hazards of hospitality.” Hence, “choosing Abraham as his representative meant electing a powerful father, husband, and host whose direct covenanting with God rendered him subordinate to no priest.”¹¹ In Heywood’s play, the Frankfords’ home is removed by a “three hours ride” from the political center of the region, York, which is

¹¹ Julia Reinhard Lupton, “Soft Res Publica: On the Assembly and Disassembly of Courtly Space,” *Republics of Letters: A Journal for the Study of Knowledge, Politics, and the Arts* 2, no. 2 (2011): 103-104. James will display these tapestries with much fanfare later, in 1621 in his new banqueting rooms at Whitehall designed by Inigo Jones.

itself, of course, notoriously far removed from the country's capital.¹² In fact, "transitory alliances and the hazards of hospitality" would not be an inaccurate subtitle for this play. In addition to that most hazardous hospitality extended by Frankford to Wendoll, the other plot features the numerous rejections by family and friends experienced by Charles and Susan Mountford.¹³ Thus, Heywood's setting and two plots map with some ease onto a background of the story of Abraham.

Even more particularly, Frankford represents himself a "powerful father, husband, and host whose direct covenanting with God" refuses the input of others. In a much-remarked upon interjection, Frankford's neighbor Cranwell tries to say something right after Frankford has declared that he will kill Anne with kindness but is immediately shut down by his host (13.154). In discussing the impenetrability of the householder's private space in this play, Lena Orlin writes:

In the privilege of his study, Frankford has reached his "judgment" unadvised, taking counsel only of himself and his conscience in a space that precludes any

¹² On the significance of the setting, Lisa Hopkins suggests, "it is also possible to read the play in terms of the specific connotations which the north of England would have had for a contemporary audience. The area was prominent in early Jacobean consciousness primarily for its continuing adherence to the "Old Religion," Catholicism, and its associated tendency to recalcitrance and rebellion: its tenacity in refusing to embrace the tenets of the Reformation had led to a series of politico-religious disturbances such as the Pilgrimage of Grace and the Rising of the Northern Earls, and it continued profoundly resistant to social or religious change. In most domestic tragedy, the setting is predetermined by the actual locality in which the historical crime took place; here, the area near York has been deliberately selected. Although Catholicism is never mentioned in the play, the 1991 Royal Shakespeare Company production at The Other Place did much to bring out its potential applicability for readings of the play. Liberally sprinkled with crucifixes, genuflections, characters crossing themselves and chanting, Katie Mitchell's interpretation situated Anne's self-starvation firmly in the context of Catholic ideology about the female body and the question of the relative superiority of words and deeds in the process of repentance and redemption." "The False Domesticity of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *Connotations* 4, no. 1 (1994/95), 4-5, www.connotations.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/hopkins00412.pdf.

¹³ Susan, for example, receives this rejection from her relative, "Old Mountford" when she solicits help for her brother: "Money I cannot spare. Men should take heed: / He lost my kindred when he fell to need" (9.16-17).

influence or intervention. The point is underlined by Cranwell's aborted interruption of the announcement, which seems to suggest that he would have argued with it, given the opportunity. But the study exerts its preemptive authority.¹⁴

Knuteson more strenuously complains, "Frankford most hypocritically thinks that his decree and God's are one."¹⁵ Similarly, referring to the passage with which I began this chapter, Knuteson also asserts that, "the Dives metaphor allows [Frankford] to associate his own mind with Heaven."¹⁶ While, as I suggest later, I think Heywood takes pains to show that Frankford's adoption of Abrahamic typology is unfeasible, I nonetheless think it worth examining carefully—granting Frankford his choice for the time being—rather than dismissing it hastily. In the story of Dives told by Christ, Abraham succors Lazarus at his bosom and serves as the gatekeeper who will not allow Dives in, both *knowing and conveying* God's judgment (Luke 16). If we allow that Frankford not unreasonably sees himself as a kind of Abraham, his actions might be rendered somewhat more intelligible.

Genesis 18: Abraham Entertains Angels and Bargains with God

The Genesis narrative is clear that Abraham does, at points at least, enjoy the special privilege of knowing God's mind. This is particularly apparent in Genesis 18 when the three angels of the Lord, in the guise of men, come to visit him and foretell (for a second time) the birth of Isaac. Abraham and Sarah entertain them handsomely, an example that is alluded to by Paul in Hebrews 13:2 which directs his readers to "be not

¹⁴ Lena Cowan Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 188.

¹⁵ John Canuteson, "The Theme of Forgiveness in the Plot and Subplot of "A Woman Killed with Kindness," *Renaissance Drama* 2 (1969): 138, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41917041>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”

Felicity Heal notes that this verse was very frequently cited in early modern English discussions of hospitality, for it “supported a very broad definition of the desirable guest.”¹⁷ After the angels complete their meal, they proceed to tell Abraham that his wife Sarah will have a son, at which Sarah, who overhears this part of the conversation, laughs. Perhaps because of this expression of disbelief, the next part of the conversation happens farther out of her earshot:

¹⁶Afterward, the men did rise up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. ¹⁷And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do, ¹⁸Seeing that Abraham shall be indeed a great and a mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? ¹⁹For I know him that he will command his sons and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord to do righteousness and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham, that he hath spoken unto him. ²⁰Then the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gommorrah is great, and because their sin is exceedingly grievous, ²¹I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to that cry, which is come unto me: and if not, that I may know. (Genesis 18)

In this Geneva translation, the Lord does not hide his intentions from Abraham, granting him special privilege of direct conversation precisely because he is the patriarch who will bring blessings and good instruction to his descendants. A gloss on this passage from the 1599 Geneva Bible is of particular note; it refers to verse 19 and translates this extraordinary privilege into the contemporary domestic domain: “He showeth that fathers ought both to know God’s judgments, and to declare them to their children.” Similarly,

¹⁷ Felicity Heal, “The Idea of Hospitality in Early Modern England,” *Past & Present* 102 (1984), 72, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/650760>.

but in a more egalitarian manner, Thomas Bentley in a 1582 conduct book, or “mirror” addressed to “maidens and matrons” counsels,

the master or mistres ought both to know both gods judgements & lawes, & also to declare them unto their familie: & to bee in their houses as Preachers to their children & families, that from the highest to the lowest, they may all obey the will of God: so did Abraham.¹⁸

The remainder of Chapter 18 concerns the famous instance of Abraham bargaining with God over the fate of the cities as the conversation increases yet further in intimacy: “And the men turned thence, and went toward Sodom: *but Abraham stood yet before the Lord*. Then Abraham *drew near* and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?” (22-23; emphasis added). Abraham’s example in this passage is taken up in Robert Milles’ sermon preached at Paul’s Cross and published in 1612 entitled “Abraham’s Suite for Sodome”:

As among sundery signes of Gods fauour to Abraham, God was never more familiar with him then in this Dialogue, and neighboury parlee, betwixt them two in behalf of the Sodomites. For when God purposed in his secret and sacred wisdom to destroy the City of Sodome, (whose sinnes cryed for vengeance from heaven) he first after the manner of men paused on the matter, and was loth to doe it, before he had taken the advise of a friend, or before he had Abraham (whom the Apostle tearmeth Gods friend) privie to his purpose. Shall I hide from Abraham that which I doe?

Hereupon Abraham assured of Gods love, began to argue, and to reason the case with God, and often craving pardon for his bouldnesse, he told the Lord that it

¹⁸ Thomas Bentley, *The sixt lampe of virginie containing a mirrour for maidens and matrons: or, the seuerall duties and office of all sorts of women in their vocation out of Gods word, with their due praise and dispraise by the same: together with the names, liues, and stories of all women mentioned in holie Scriptures, either good or bad*. (London: Henry Denhem, 1582) 47, Early English Books Online.

stood not with his iustice and credit (who is high Lord chief Iustice of the whole world) to destroy the righteous with the wicked.¹⁹

In Milles' account, Abraham himself engages in neighborly, rational conversation with the Almighty even as he apologizes for what he fears might be presumption in doing so. Milles admonishes the congregation of the just to follow Abraham's example by interceding for *and* convincing their neighbors to give up their sinful ways. The first point of similarity makes some sense, although, on the face of his argument at least, Abraham is concerned with saving the righteous, not with sparing the unrighteous so that they might convert; but the second seems even more tenuous. In Genesis, Abraham never addresses or goes anywhere near the sinful residents of Sodom and Gomorrah. Nevertheless, Milles identifies having "compassion" for the sinful as the pertinent similarity.

Unlike his nephew Lot, whose own hospitality and dealings with the Angels sent to save him are recounted in Genesis 19, Abraham remains always removed from the iniquity and resulting destruction of the cities. This point is emphasized in Genesis 19:27-29:

And Abraham rising up early in the morning went to the place, where he had stood before the Lord. And looking toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, behold, he saw the smoke of the land mounting up as the smoke of a furnace. But yet when God destroyed the cities of the plain, God thought upon Abraham and sent Lot out from the midst of the destruction.

Associating Abraham with this position of distanced intercession, a later sermon by Thomas Fuller complains of preachers who have fled London during the plague and

¹⁹ Robert Milles, *Abrahams suite for Sodome A sermon preached at Pauls Crosse the 25. of August. 1611* (London, 1612), Early English Books Online.

seems subtly to charge them with a dereliction of their duty: “Those greater and more glorious Luminous are retired to their private orbes, there praying and interceding with Abraham in the fields for threatnd Sodome.” Yet, depending on how much irony one perceives in it, the next clause seems to excuse these ministers somewhat: “wisely careful, according to the advise of Soloman, not to expose their bodies to these arrows of God.”²⁰ Hence, these instances illustrate again the flexibility of early modern typology and also indicate some disagreement about whether or not following the example set by Abraham necessitates direct interaction with the sinful—particularly if that sinful person is one’s spouse.

The conversations surrounding what it meant to practice an inclusive, Abrahamic sort of hospitality and to confer with God as Abraham does are, similarly, fraught ones in Heywood’s England. One complicating factor: the theological tension over whether or not it was literally possible anymore to “entertain” or otherwise interact with angels. As we observed in this study’s first chapter, angels were closely associated with the saints in prayers such as the Litany, as the faithful called upon them for intercession. Like certain saints—the Apostles, for example—there was an undeniable scriptural precedent for angels’ existence and holiness; thus, unlike later saints, legendary saints or saints with inconvenient politics, angels could not be simply jettisoned from the discussion, even by the most zealous of evangelical reformers who were likely to be uneasy about their association with the cult of the saints. The “official” line held by many prominent

²⁰ This part of the sermon quoted and explicated by Kevin Killeen, *The Political Bible in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 79-80. Killeen’s is the astute point about simultaneous criticism and exculpation.

Protestant theologians (and, indeed, by King James himself) posited that once Christianity was firmly established, angelic apparitions were no longer required for God to work in the world. Thus, continued angelic intervention—if it was still allowed at all—was of the more subtle sort, discerned, in the words of Henry Ainsworth, “by faith, not by ey-sight.”²¹

Peter Marshall, Alexandra Walsham and others have demonstrated that, as is so often the case, official doctrine and practice did not always exactly correlate with one another. According to Walsham,

Ultimately it is vital to stress that angelic intervention was entirely compatible with Reformed providentialism, and to emphasize once more the escape clause which the theologians built into their theory that visible apparitions of angels had ceased more than a millennium before. When confronted by the messy realities of belief as it manifested itself outside their textbooks, Protestants were obliged to carve out a place for the possibility that instances of the appearance of these celestial creatures . . . might just be phenomena that did indeed come from God. The trouble was it was equally, indeed even more, probable that they were of satanic origin.²²

In short, to stay safely within the bounds of mainstream Protestantism, one had to be wary of apparent angels but need not rule out the possibility of their intervention altogether. Heywood, and indeed Frankford himself, are measured when it comes to the question of angels and providentialism in the play. Frankford *does* demonstrate a suitable wariness for his post-patriarchal (in both senses of the term) age, aware that, unlike

²¹ Quoted in Alexandra Walsham “Invisible helpers: Angelic Intervention in Post-Reformation England,” *Past & Present* 208, no. 1 (August 2010): 82, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtq002>. Walsham further describes other influential views on the subject: “Other godly ministers like William Perkins and John Rogers were equally emphatic: ‘at this day, the Angels appeare not unto us’ In his *Demonologie* of 1597 King James VI declared no less definitively that ‘since the comming of Christ in the flesh, and establishing of his Church by the Apostles, all miracles, visions, prophecies, & appearances of Angels or good spirites are ceased.’”

²² *Ibid.*, 108.

Abraham, he receives his privileged intelligence not from angels but from his servant. Consequently, Nick's account must be verified and the master of the house takes elaborate pains to do so. Once alerted by Nick, Frankford is willing to entertain the possibility that he entertains "seeming angels," in the form of Wendoll and his wife, thus demonstrating a proper Protestant distrust of appearances. (We might note that the phrase again hedges, allowing for multiple layers for resonances: his wife and friend, obviously not angels, seem like angels, so shining were their qualities; or, they seem like devils who seem like angels.) Finally, Frankford shrouds his initial discussion of angelic intervention in the conditional "for should an angel from the heavens drop down"; likewise, Frankford says that the maid in the smock has acted "*like* the angel's hand."

And yet, if Frankford and the play demur on whether or not the audience is supposed to recognize an actual embodied angel in the maid, he does seem convinced that God has intervened definitively in his life. Furthermore, his assertion that "my words are registered in heaven already" bespeak confidence that an intimate conversation with God has taken place while he was alone in his study (13.151). The audience is given no glimpse into what transpires in that time and space, waiting with Anne and the assembled household to hear what he decides. Perhaps the relevant parallel here is that most famous Abrahamic instance of the Sacrifice of Isaac recorded in Genesis 22. There is no bargaining with God in this part of the narrative: Abraham simply follows the command. Famously, the story also lacks explanation of what Abraham was thinking

and feeling during the incident.²³ His conversations, with the servants he brings partway to the appointed place of sacrifice and with Isaac, simply convey, in vague rather misleading terms, what is going to happen: “And he said unto his servants, Abide you here with the ass: for I and the child will go yonder and worship, and come again unto you. . . . Then Abraham answered, My son, God will provide a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both together” (Genesis 22:5; 8).

Likewise, Frankford gives extended, detailed directions for what is (and is not) going to happen to Anne: She is to leave him and the children, but take all her things and the servants “she likest best.” She will live in a “manor seven mile off.” She is not to leave anything behind that might remind him of her. She is not to contact him by any means: “never after this sad day . . . move me by thyself or by thy friends” (13.172-76). He provides very little insight into why exactly he has made his particular decisions, however. He clearly does not want to be reminded of her and he suggests that he is choosing a course in part because it is the “more humble” one:

With patience hear me: I'll not martyr thee
Nor mark thee for a strumpet, but with usage
Of more humility torment thy soul
And kill thee even with kindness. (13.152-155)

Does Frankford bargain with God in the study? How hard does he have to work, to “get belief,” with regard to the divine will for himself and his wife? Does he really discern that a kind of “torment” might be necessary for her salvation? Is Frankford convinced he has made a proper sort of compassionate “suite” for his sinful wife, as per the

²³ The most famous discussion of this aporia occurs in the first chapter of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

recommendations of preachers such as Milles? We do not know. Frankford's decision, like Abraham's faith is largely inscrutable.

Patience and the Patriarch

We do know, however, that in more public displays of prayer, Frankford has prayed three times for "patience." Recognizing the force of this prayer, I suggest, can lend somewhat more insight into Frankford's somewhat befuddling conception of godly behavior, for it is itself a paradoxical virtue. It is both passive and active, both an accomplishment of human reason and something that is not quite reasonable, at least in any conventional sense. Although Job is well known for being often held up as the quintessentially "patient" Old Testament figure, Abraham not infrequently is cited as a kind of prototype of Job, the original taker and passer of divine tests of faith.²⁴ The first time Frankford prays for patience, he is about to enter the bedroom where he expects to find Wendoll and Anne:

Astonishment,
Fear, and amazement play against my heart,
Even as a madman beats upon a drum.
O keep my eyes, you heavens, before I enter,
From any sight that may transfix my soul;
Or if there be so black a spectacle
O strike mine eyes stark blind; or if not so,
Lend me such patience to digest my grief
That I may keep this white and virgin hand

²⁴ Influential texts that connect Abraham to patience are Tertullian's *De Patientia* and Prudentius' *Psychomachia*. For a discussion of patience in the context of early modern dramatic context see, for example, chapter one of Richard Strier's *The Unrepentent Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) and chapter seventeen of Judith K. Anderson's *Reading the Allegorical Intertext* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

From any violent outrage or red murder.
And with that prayer I enter. (13.23-33)

After he enters the room and sees the two asleep, he comes out, reveals that he would have killed them “but that [he] would have sent two precious souls to hell.” Then, Frankford says he must “pause awhile” and again prays: “God give me patience, / for I will in to wake them” (13.63-64). As these passages suggest, “patience” is often explained as the opposite of “rage,” or more generally, of uncontrolled passions. The patient person controls the passions, rather than the other way around. More specifically, in the Old Testament context, the righteous man does not allow his passions to ever take him to the point of cursing God, even when, as in the case of Abraham, there seems no way to reconcile His command and His promise. The interesting number of alternatives provided here by Frankford suggest he cannot confidently reason his way to any surefire means by which his violent emotions might be overcome. Hence, Frankford’s request for patience recognizes, reasonably, that outside intervention will be required and it further seems to understand that this intervention will need to take a form quite other than a conventional human control of the passions with reason.

Etymologically, the “patience” is rooted in the deponent Latin verb with the principle parts “patior, pati, passus sum” meaning “to suffer.” Thus, patience and passion have a common root. One primary association of patience for Christians would have been the Passion of Christ. In the Crucifixion, Christ embodies extremes of both passivity and agency: he both suffers under the incomparable weight of all sin, and completes the most efficacious of all human actions. Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac, which is a type or prefigurement of Christ’s sacrifice, likewise up-ends binaries:

his extreme act of faith, which must, we assume, require immense effort to control his emotions, is halted on the point of no return by an outside force, the angel who declares Abraham already to have accomplished what God required of him.

Abraham is certain in his faith, certain enough to control or overcome or transcend his passions and act decisively, and this, I suggest, is the kind of certainty Frankford desperately seeks. Unlike Abraham, however, no “bloody sacrifice” has been commanded of Frankford. In fact, Frankford is convinced that killing in this instance would be wrong. Thus, the angel-like maid’s intervention is, in his view, of divine origin, an answer to his prayers for patience, in a form he could not foresee.

After this point, he does not leave off either his plea for divinely-lent patience or his rational attempts to control his passions. The third time Frankford asks for patience is a preface to his decision to “debate with” his wife: “My God, arm me with patience” (13.105). In the conversation that follows, Frankford repeatedly reproaches his wife and, despite his stylized speech, seems in danger of losing control of himself: he finds himself exclaiming (“O Nan, O Nan; Away with them!”) and in tears (13.113-115). He has then to pause again, saying he “will do nothing rashly” and removing himself to his study. I suggest then, one way to understand Frankford’s subsequent actions: he is convinced the godly decision is to banish his wife, but remains aware of his susceptibility to passion that might undercut his resolve to carry it out. His minutely detailed directions regarding all the ways she is to proceed and refrain from attempts to “move” him are in themselves a rather desperate attempt to maintain control. His frantic search through the house and determination to rid it of every last visual reminder of her a couple of scenes later

reinforces this reading: “I loved her dearly, / And when I do but think of her unkindness, / My thoughts are all in hell” (15.4-6). The lute becomes an emblem of their broken love: “these frets have made me pleasant, that have no / Frets of my heartstrings made. O Master Cranwell” (15.16-17). Frankford is failing to be patient, and so seeks to reinforce his resolve; in an un-Abrahamic but perhaps understandable manner, given that no angels are evident and the Lord himself does not appear, Frankford also continues to seek some human validation for his resolve from his neighbor and servant, Cranwell and Nicholas.

Anne’s Impatient Tears

Nicholas’ delivery of the lute to Anne opens the way for her to find a way to circumvent her husband’s prohibitions designed to seal out the passions that might weaken his resolve. Anne seemed initially to take very seriously her husband’s commitment to acting as a certain and patient Patriarch who confers with God. She says, for example, that she is as far from hoping for his pardon “as Lucifer from heaven” (13.80). In the play’s sixteenth and penultimate scene, Anne Frankford travels toward the manor to which she’s been banished. The scene involves some complex staging, and it is here that Anne declares her intention of giving up all food and rest, a decision that will eventually ensure Frankford has literally “killed her with kindness.” Scene 16 begins with Anne’s entrance, accompanied by two servants, Sisley and Jenkin, along with a coachman and three carters, all unnamed; this small party is soon joined by Nicholas, who has been sent after them by Frankford. Wendoll watches from afar.

Scholars often see this brief intersection of Anne's and Wendoll's journeys as designed primarily to focalize gender-specific options after the discovery of an affair in early modern England. According to Diana Henderson, the situation

does not allow Anne a chance to renew her social identity through total relocation (as Wendoll intends to do) . . . Removed from her social world, she must go to a house . . . where in solitude she will be unable to regenerate her name. . . . Anne becomes an exile whose sin and whose sex bar her from any action to retrieve her status within human society.²⁵

Yet others, such as Thomas Moisan, emphasize "the degree to which it is Anne who dictates the terms on which the play concludes." Moisan continues,

Denying herself even such "kindness" as her husband has prescribed, Anne starves herself, winning the sympathy of all, forcing a deathbed reconciliation with Frankford, and, with a command of the stage worthy of a nobly fallen nineteenth-century operatic heroine, retaining a visibility her husband had been determined to deny her.²⁶

While granting that Anne's options are indeed severely limited in comparison to Wendoll's, I contend that a major point of this scene, which is not particularly necessary in terms of plot function, is the self-conscious care with which both Anne and Wendoll attempt to orchestrate social redemption. Anne adopts and expands upon some of her husband's habits of public rhetoric and behavior, that behavior that bespeaks a certain kind of failure to act like Abraham. This scene provides an important frame for understanding that more spectacular deathbed reconciliation, for it shows us how Anne

²⁵ Diana E. Henderson, "Many Manions: Reconstructing *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 26, no. 2. (Spring 1986): 287, <https://doi.org/10.2307/450508>.

²⁶ Thomas Moisan, "Framing with Kindness: The Transgressive Theatre of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," in *Essays on Transgressive Readings* (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1997):171-84.

accomplishes her feat by means that involve her small community *and their passions* in the effort to gain her husband's forgiveness.

If Frankford is serious about staging or enacting typology he adopts, Anne is even more committed. Immediately prior to Nick's arrival with the lute, her servant Sisley admonishes her: "Good mistress, be of good cheer. Sorrow you see hurts you, but helps you not. We all mourn to see you so sad" (16.10-11). Anne takes issue with Sisley's aphoristic attempt at comfort; indeed, Mistress Frankford stakes her chances at reconciliation on the opposite belief that "sorrow you see," and, significantly, the mediating reaction to that sorrow on the part of her small community will serve precisely as the means by which she can "help" herself by convincing Frankford to forgive her. Upon receiving her lute, she asks the servants to "Gird me about, and help me with your tears / To wash my spotted sins" and begins to play her lute (16.26-29). It seems not too far-fetched to speculate that, in the midst of her melancholy song, an idea strikes her regarding how she might succeed in achieving her reconciliation to her husband. Whatever the case, the unexpected appearance in the woods of Nick, the servant whom both the audience and Anne know to be most in her husband's confidence, presents a new opportunity to convey to Frankford radical evidence of her contrition.

Her lute song becomes the prelude for a "play" in miniature in which she acts as protagonist, director, and chorus. Anne gives directions to a servant, like her husband, commanding a symbolic act; she also, like him, guards against possible misinterpretation of that symbolism by her small audience, particularly by Nick, its most important member:

Go break this lute upon my coach's wheel,
As the last music that I e'er shall make,
Not as my husband's gift, but my farewell
To earth's joy; [*to Nicholas*] and so your master tell. (16.70-73)

In fact, Anne stops repeatedly during this scene to enjoin Nicholas to tell his master what he has “seen,”

unto your master, say
(Though not from me, for I am all unworthy
To blast his name so with a strumpet's tongue)
That you have seen me weep, wish myself dead.
Nay, you may say too, for my vow is passed
Last night you saw me eat and drink my last.
This to your master you may say and swear,
For it is writ in heaven and decreed here. (16.57-64)

Like her husband, Anne presents her vow as already absolutely decided upon. Yet, she differs in that she disqualifies herself as a credible voice that might dare directly address Frankford. Anne wishes also to erase from Nick's report any acknowledgement that her words have instigated—indeed, have directed in fairly minute detail—the telling of it.

Near the end of the interview with her husband's servant, Anne strikes a choric note, distilling the image she wants portrayed for Frankford:

You have beheld the woofullest wretch on earth,
A woman made of tears. Would you had words
To express but what you see. My inward grief
No tongue can utter, yet unto your power
You may describe my sorrow and disclose
To thy sad master my abundant woes.
(16.76-81)

A “woman made of tears”: silent, nearly insubstantial, reduced to one dimension, Anne becomes, an icon of sorrowful penitence. Having discarded the type of the irredeemable Lucifer, she chooses rather to conceive of and present herself as a much less particular

type, one that creates the impression at least of having tipped the balance of the power of interpretation in her neighbor's favor.

For while Anne's voice will be stripped from Nick's report to Frankford, her performance opens space to be augmented in the retelling by the uncontrolled passions of others. Nick assents to his mistress' request by echoing her language while incorporating immediately his own affective response to what he has witnessed: "I'll say you wept; I'll swear you made me sad" (16.65). This addition Anne never requests explicitly; instead, she asks only that he do his best at describing her visible tears and relaying her intention of starving herself, both of which are metonymic for an inexpressible "inward grief." Although Nick's own tears of empathy the rather gruff servant finds initially surprising (16.66-67), the force of his emotion evidently has become strong enough only a few lines later that he anticipates it will overcome him again when he recounts the scene to his master (16.74). The prediction grants a proleptic glimpse into yet another conversation with Frankford which Heywood does not allow the audience to witness but which we trust that Nicholas will ensure takes place.

The play's final scene reveals that Nick's emotional communication about Anne prepares the way for others like it which eventually convince Frankford to soften his determination to "ne'er more . . . see" his wife (12.179). Malby, another neighbor, relates to the dying Anne how it came to be that her husband has reconsidered his position and decided to come see her:

divers gentlemen,
Your loving neighbours, with that just request
Have moved and told him of your weak estate,
Who, though with much ado to get belief,

Examining of the general circumstance,
Seeing your sorrow and your penitence,
And hearing therewithal the great desire
You have to see him ere you left the world,
He gave us his faith to follow us.
(17.42-51)

We see in the exchange with her brother the effect she has on her visitors; he admits he “came to chide” but finds his “words of hate / are turned to grief” and his “brawls / melt[ed]” into tears” (17.62-64). Thus, Nick has been apparently only the first of many interviews with Frankford, confirming that the “tears” which *remake* Anne are not only—are not even primarily—her own. Her tears demand a response, a visible validation that her penitence is genuine. Gruff Nick cries; even her “rough carters” cry (16.55). Anne’s community, not a company of angels, has ensured through their aggregated reports that she can once again be “seen” back in the house from which she’s been banished. She has created around herself a kind of local cult; by “much ado” her exile has been transformed into something more like a penitential pilgrimage which inspires others to make their own pilgrimages both to bedside and to Frankford’s house where he is determined to maintain his distance.²⁷

How do we “get belief”?

Examining the relationships of Wendoll, Frankford, and Anne to typology offers, I hope, insight into how they perceive their very different roles within a community and

²⁷ At least slight revision, then, is required I think of Lena Orlin’s discussion of the impenetrability of Frankford’s private space and decision-making process in this play. This point certainly holds true in the immediate aftermath of Frankford’s discovery of the adultery, but Orlin sees it as confirmed by the end of the play as well: “Frankford is confident in a self independent of its inscription by society. His conviction of his invention of his judgment is revealed in his declaration of responsibility for its result” at the end of the play (Orlin, *Private Matters*, 189).

into the epistemologically fraught world they all inhabit. Wendoll is placed at the end of the play in the position of an outsider who says he, unlike her servants and neighbors, “cannot weep” with Anne (16.68). In a recent study of Shakespeare and emotion, Steven Mullaney writes,

Do we weep when we see others weep? Of course we do—sometimes. We do unless we live in a time or place where “we” has become a vexed question rather than a social given. When a culture’s sense of a collective identity is unsettled in more than customary ways, its cultural performances take on new forms. In England, the Elizabethan stage was one of those emergent forms.²⁸

The figure of dry-eyed Wendoll reminds us of the tenuousness of this particular Yorkshire community in this play written just as power was passing from Elizabeth to James. Neither will Wendoll follow the example of Frankford and take his typologies seriously. Only the most superficial resemblance between himself and Cain are acknowledged. Viewing communities as something to be manipulated through deception and polished manners, his typology is perfunctory, unwilling to accept the moral judgments and ethical demands it might involve.

Frankford and Anne are more demanding of their community than Wendoll, as each tries to others to validate their convictions. Anne’s more passionate, more human, more inviting and less rigid typology seem to prevail over her husband’s, as in the end he must revise his understanding of how he must act. Certainly, as we shall observe in the next chapter, the idea of socially constructed redemption that relies primarily on human beings’ passionate exchanges appeals to a variety of modern scholars of the early modern period. Frankford’s desire for a relationship with the divine that takes into account neither

²⁸ Stephen Mullaney, *The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 62.

human counsel nor human emotion seems, like that of the figure of Abraham himself, an unfeasible example in all sorts of ways as a foundation for a workable human community. Yet the affective contagion on which Anne relies is at least as problematic in its own right. Tears, even though they be genuine ones, are not always reliable either. Characters do not entirely seem to know why they are crying in response to her, and these same characters have patently failed to cry in response to the misfortunes of her counterpart, Susan Mountford. Both forms of self-transcendence seems arbitrary, unable to be developed into social norms. Hence, the play concludes without having presented any very persuasive articulations of how more reproducible community formation might proceed in the sorts of domestic and “neighborly” communities depicted on stage.

**CHAPTER FOUR: THE *DE PROFUNDIS*, COUNTERFACTUAL
COMPARISON, AND FORGIVENESS IN *CYMBELINE***

While the ambiguous morality of a husband's "forgiving" response to his wife's infidelity provides considerable dramatic energy in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, *Cymbeline* raises the possibility of a more radical forgiveness. Frankford relents, to the extent that he does, in response to the repeated, often oblique, interventions staged by those in his family, household and neighborhood; Posthumus demonstrates a more self-motivated movement. Comparison of the two characters—Shakespeare's Posthumus to Heywood's Frankford—and the two plays raises questions about how and to what extent the larger community can or ought to be involved in processes of forgiveness and reconciliation between two of its members, especially when severe wrongdoing has taken place.

Cymbeline is famed for the pyrotechnics of forgiveness in its final recognition scene and for the declaration of its titular character that "Pardon's the word to all" (5.5.422).¹ A series of intertwined confessions and revelations allow the characters finally to see clearly what has transpired and to forgive one another for wrongdoing. The various perspectives are highly complementary, as one narrative fills in the gaps of

¹ I quote throughout from *Cymbeline*, ed. Roger Warren (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

another. The marriage of Posthumus and Innogen, which has been thwarted throughout the play, finally appears to be viable. Yet, before arriving at that point, Posthumus has already attempted to extend and solicit forgiveness in a soliloquy, without any of this immediate communal context. Perhaps he is not so very different from Frankford—who decides on the form of his forgiveness alone—in his study, after all.

At the beginning of *Cymbeline*'s final act, we witness a remarkable about-face, one that Robert Miola deems a "moral transformation without parallel on the early modern stage."² When we last saw Posthumus, he was piling one vituperative complaint about women upon another. Now, having received a bloody cloth as confirmation that his faithful servant has obeyed the order to kill Innogen, Posthumus comes—too late, he believes, although the audience knows better—to forgive his wife's transgression and to regret deeply his violent reaction to it. This forgiveness which, we should remember, is extended before Posthumus has any sense that his wife has been chaste all along after all, sets the stage for the reunion of the couple and the chain-reaction of forgiveness in the final scene. What are we to make of his solo, initial attempt at forgiveness in light of the later, more fully realized one?

Janet Adelman has argued that, remarkable though this forgiveness may be, taking place as it does *before* Posthumus knows Innogen is innocent, the play as a whole yet remains committed to upholding male authority by suppressing female sexuality and agency. We might say, in other words, that, Posthumus' singular soliloquy notwithstanding, the play never fully forgives Innogen for simply possessing the *capacity*

² Miola, 188.

to do what she is mistakenly thought to have done. “Posthumus’ return to Imogen,”

writes Adelman,

is in fact thoroughly mediated by her victimization, as though victimization were its precondition: he returns to her in imagination only when he thinks her dead, only when he is given safe passage by the bloody cloth that ambiguously signifies both her wounded sexuality and his punishment of her.³

Adelman implies, reasonably enough, that there is something second-rate about Posthumus’ forgiveness and desire for reconciliation, intense though it may be. Namely, she stresses that it comes after his retaliation has eliminated the possibility of being wronged a second time and, concomitantly, that it therefore cannot be expressed directly to the person who has been wronged. Although certainly better than nothing, of how much worth, really, is Posthumus’ imperfect, belated, extra-communal, non-dialogic forgiveness? Can one effectively act upon the desire to extend and receive forgiveness when the person with whom one needs to reconcile is dead?

My own investigation into this question proceeds from the observation that, at this critical juncture, Posthumus echoes Psalm 130 (*Vulgate* Psalm 129), commonly identified by its Latin incipit: *De Profundis*. Early modern English translations of the psalm’s third verse, though they vary somewhat, constitute some of the language’s most recognizable “if-then” conditional questions. The Coverdale Great Bible translation, used in the Psalter that accompanied the *Book of Common Prayer* reads, “If thou wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it?” In the course of this soliloquy, Posthumus addresses in similar form first the audience and then the gods:

³ Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare’s Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 209.

You married ones,
If each of you should take this course, how many
Must murder wives much better than themselves
For wrying but a little!

.....

Gods, *if* you
Should have ta'en vengeance on my faults, I never
Had lived to put on this. (5.1.2-5; 9-11; emphasis mine)

I argue that we benefit from attending to Shakespeare's syntactic and thematic echoes of this famous psalm. More particularly, I suggest that examining interpretations of and uses to which the *De Profundis* was put offers perspective on several interrelated aspects of forgiveness the late play asks us to confront. I also use several other, more contemporary lenses, from the cognitive sciences and contemporary philosophy and theology, to engage with these questions. In addition to the queries I just set forth—about the importance of the communal context for forgiveness and the particular value of Posthumus' forgiveness—we encounter several other questions. What ought we do with the (seemingly ubiquitous) human impulse to compare one person's virtues and vices, acts of aggression and forgiveness, to those of others? Furthermore, what links human forgiveness to divine mercy at this point in post-Reformation history and, more particularly, in Shakespeare's career? In other words, do the characters' relationships with the divine still matter in this play, as they conceive of and enact forgiveness of one another? Or, is the allusive flash more a nod to traditions whose relevance to everyday and political interactions appears to be fading?

Both the *De Profundis* and *Cymbeline* propose to us that the urge to compare our sinful actions to those of others can, *if carefully circumscribed*, be usefully employed in attempts to understand, seek, and extend the forgiveness required to repair broken

communal bonds. This regulation of the comparative impulse involves an interaction with the divine capable of upsetting our usual thinking about human wrongdoing, in terms of scope, valuation, and its temporal dimensions. Our intimate look into the phenomenology of Posthumus' turn back to Innogen proposes a type of forgiveness radically different from—and not necessarily inferior to—the anthropocentric version we see in the final scene.

The *De Profundis* as Penitential Psalm

Shakespeare's audience really knew, prayed, sang, and riffed on their psalms. For example, various iterations of "Sternhold and Hopkins" or *The Whole Book of Psalms*, which contained simple musical settings, went through 149 printings between 1562 and 1602. Such popularity makes it one of the most printed books—and the most familiar book of verse—of the Elizabethan period.⁴ A great many English households, from the lowly all the way up to the royal ones, owned this complete collection. Certain individual psalms and subsets of the psalms, however, were more frequently excerpted, translated, and used than others. Such is the case with the Penitential psalms.

The *De Profundis* is one of a non-sequential set of seven psalms (6, 32, 51, 102, 130, and 143) known, since at least the sixth century, as the Penitential Psalms. They were popularly attributed to King David, emerging from his remorse over his lust-fueled, murderous machinations in the Bathsheba affair (2 Samuel 11-12). Claire Costley

⁴ For an extended study of various editions of "Sternhold and Hopkins," see the first chapter of Hannibal Hamlin, *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 19-49. See also Beth Quitslund, *The Reformation in Rhyme* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

King'oo provides an informative account of the efforts undertaken by patristic and medieval writers to create cohesion among a set that, on the face of it, is “rather uneven, perhaps even inorganic.” The particular psalms are actually quite inconsistent, she points out, in regard to the “the degree to which the psalmist first rationalizes his abject circumstances as the result of his own iniquity and then attempts to do something about it.” She suggests that the psalms can be imagined to lie “along a continuum” from highly penitential to barely penitential, with the *De Profundis* somewhere in the middle.⁵

She argues that, this variation notwithstanding, patristic and medieval thinkers (biblical exegetes, liturgists, as well as producers of more literary texts) created strong coherence among the set with a consistent “penitential hermeneutics,” strongly grounded in Augustine:

the Augustinian understanding of the problem of suffering in the Penitential Psalms—an understanding that construes the psalmist’s pain as the direct result of a juridical confrontation between God’s wrath and human sin—essentially smoothes out the many variations in the sequence. To be even more direct: when the psalmist’s abjection is viewed as a symptom of his iniquity, and when his enemies are read as agents of temptation, the seven separate psalms are all but transformed into one long and unbroken prayer of confession.⁶

In other words, while the psalms themselves are not always completely clear about causation—about why the speaker suffers—a vibrant interpretive tradition supplies a clear link between affliction, God’s wrath, and human sinfulness. In the case of the *De Profundis*, for example, many Christian writers and preachers adopt from the Jewish tradition a practice of identifying the “depths” out of which the speaker cries with story

⁵ Claire Costley King'oo, *Miserere Mei: The Penitential Psalms in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 6-8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

and canticle of Jonah. The narrative there more clearly identifies his harrowing journey into the depths of the sea as a result of his disobedience to God.⁷ Another Augustinian method of creating coherence involved setting the penitential psalms in the context of the Day of Judgment, creating an urgency and immediacy to the need for repentance that is not in fact present in some of the psalms themselves.⁸

During the Middle Ages, the Penitential Psalms became firmly entwined with both the penitential liturgies and the private devotions of the English faithful. In the Sarum Rite, for example, the recitation of all seven is prescribed for Ash Wednesday, the start of the Lenten season.⁹ They were assigned as penance by confessors in auricular confession, and the laity also prayed them privately as a way to express penitence during the intervals between their formal confessions. As noted in this study's first chapter, the Penitential Psalms appear as part of a sequence with the Litany, *Placebo*, *Dirige*, and Commendations in late medieval and early modern *Horae*.

In addition to their usefulness in expressing contrition for one's own sins, the penitential psalms were also employed as prayers on behalf of the deceased. Here, *De Profundis*, was especially singled out. The full psalm is as follows:

⁷ Augustine, "Psalm CXXX" in *Expositions on the Book of Psalms in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series 1*, vol. 8, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), Kindle.

⁸ King'oo, 8-9. For other excellent discussions of the penitential psalms, see Lynn Staley, "The Penitential Psalms: Conversion and the Limits of Lordship," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37, no. 2 (2007): 221-269.

⁹ Charles Whitworth traces the changes in the uses of the psalm in that service in "The Penitential Psalms and Ash Wednesday Services in the Book of Common Prayer, 1549-1662" *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique* [Online], XXII (2017), <https://doi.org/10.4000/rfcb.1222>.

1 Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice. 2 O let thine ears consider well the voice of my complaint. 3 If thou, Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it? 4 For there is mercy with thee; therefore shalt thou be feared. 5 I look for the Lord; my soul doth wait for him. 6 In his word is my trust. 7 My soul fleeth unto the Lord before the morning watch, I say, before the morning watch. 8 O Israel, trust in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. 9 And he shall redeem Israel from all his sins.

After all, what were souls in purgatory if not souls very much “in the depths” who needed others to call out to God on their behalf? The psalm featured in votive masses for the dead and would have been often heard in chantries, as people left money to religious orders to ensure it would be prayed for them after death. Less formally, it was common practice to say a *De Profundis* with grace before meals in remembrance of dead relatives and benefactors; likewise, the psalm was called for in passing a graveyard. These quotidian “papist” practices evidently proved something of a nuisance to eradicate in the Elizabethan Church, as various reforming bishops had to issue injunctions against them.¹⁰ For instance, Archbishop Grindal’s injunctions to the recalcitrant in York (1571) specifically prohibits the “saying of the *De Profundis* for the dead”¹¹

Given all these associations with the sacrament of penance and with prayer for souls of the dead, scholars of the reformation register surprise at the remarkable post-Reformation staying power of the Penitential Psalms. They somehow remained, in the words of Brian Cummings, “eminently respectable for any side of the religious and

¹⁰ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 328-29, 572, 578.

¹¹ David Cressy and Lori Ann Ferrill, *Religion and Society in Early Modern England: A Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 107.

political divides.”¹² Even as reformers sought to cleave this unit of psalms from objectionable Catholic practices and theology, they integrated them with their own doctrines of repentance and economies of salvation.

Luther’s first published book was a commentary on the Penitential Psalms. His verse translation of Psalm 130 became his famous hymn, “Aus tiefer Not,” which was sung at his own funeral service. As one would expect, Luther’s interpretation of the *De Profundis*, in contradistinction to Catholic interpreters such as John Fisher, stresses the penitent’s need for grace and inability to perform efficacious works (including saying the psalm itself). Further, he warns against even trying to merit forgiveness, for attempting to do something to effect forgiveness makes one guilty of unforgivable arrogance since the action is God’s alone. Luther also recovers from the Jewish tradition of interpretation of the psalm an emphasis on the “fearfulness” of God’s forgiveness, an important point to which I shall return later in his chapter.¹³

In England, the persistent popularity of the penitential psalms is all the more surprising given that their status as a set was not in any way retained in the *Book of Common Prayer*’s directions for praying the psalms. While the *De Profundis* would have come around every month in Matins and Evening Prayer, it was no longer yoked to the other penitential psalms in the liturgy. Nonetheless, the group remained popular. The penitential psalms became richly productive of vernacular poetry, with such luminaries as Edmund Spenser, Thomas Wyatt, Mary and Philip Sidney, Anne Locke, John Harington

¹² Cummings, *Literary Culture*, 224.

¹³ See chapter two in King’oo for a discussion of Luther’s commentary in comparison to John Fischer’s.

and George Gascoigne turning their hands to verse versions of some or all of them. The *De Profundis*' various verses were not infrequently extracted and recombined with other prayers and scriptural verses, as for example in the Elizabethan prayer book composed for the monarch's personal use. In the first English prayer of that volume, the speaker recognizes her sinfulness and asks, "Where then is my hope? She supplies a familiar two-part answer: "If thow Lorde wilt be extreame, to marke what is doon amisse, who may abide it? But thou art gracious and mercifull, long suffering, and of greate goodnes, not delighting in the death of a Sinner."¹⁴

To sum up some reverberations of Posthumus' echo of the *De Profundis*, then: At a moment of deep remorse for his actions, Posthumus calls up one of the most famous of a famous set of psalms, one considered appropriate to the penitent, whether one saw it—following Luther, Calvin and many other reformers—as an appropriate acknowledgement of a need for forgiveness or, in keeping with Roman Catholic theology, thought the prayer itself could be an effectual work of penance. Perhaps more controversially, Posthumus evokes a prayer long associated with intercession on behalf of the dead as he forgives his murdered wife who might not, he assumes, have had a chance to repent fully before her death.

Counterfactual Thought

The emotions and types of reasoning displayed by the speaker of *De Profundis* and Posthumus in his soliloquy intersect in suggestive ways with a vibrant interest of the

¹⁴ Quoted in William P. Haugaard, "Elizabeth Tudor's Book of Devotions" *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1981), 24, <http://jstor.org/stable/2539502>.

contemporary cognitive sciences: the variety of uses to which human beings put our capacity for counterfactual thought.¹⁵ Thus, in this section, I use some theories of and research into counterfactual thinking as a means of exploring the phenomenology of forgiveness in psalm and soliloquy. My intention in doing so is twofold: first, it allows for a helpfully close examination of these texts and, second, it provides groundwork for examining some recurring Christian worries over misinterpreting the psalm, worries that have a number of parallels in *Cymbeline*.

Thinking counterfactually, about alternatives to reality, especially about *what might have been*, takes up a considerable amount of our time. We very frequently imagine some alternate past, for example, “if I had started that essay earlier, I would not now be working on it at 3 a.m.” This type of thinking appears to be very important for emotional regulation and our understanding of causation and is crucial to various everyday activities and social interactions. The ability to engage in counterfactual thought requires complex sets of skills developed relatively late in childhood; the absence of this capability in those who are cognitively impaired often proves problematic.

The example about essay writing just given is an instance of an “upward” counterfactual, that is, one that imagines a past that would have led to a *better* outcome. Most typically, we tend spontaneously to generate upward counterfactual thoughts after an adverse event, especially one about which we feel regret. These upward counterfactuals appear involved with goal-setting and efforts to improve future

¹⁵ For an overview of the research on and theories of counterfactual thought, see Ruth M.J. Byrne, “Counterfactual Thought,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 67, no. 7 (2016): 135-157, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-122414-033249>.

performance. We imagine we might have done better, making ourselves feel a little worse about how we *did* act, so that we might take steps to *actually* act better (i.e., in the way we imagined) in the future. By contrast, downward counterfactuals, that is, imagining a past that would have led to a *less favorable* outcome, are often generated when we experience a positive event or experience something like a near miss: “That accident could have been so much worse; what if another car had hit us as we slid across the highway on the ice?” or “Thank goodness I attended that conference and met so-and-so! If I hadn’t, we wouldn’t now be working on this project together.”

Furthermore, it is germane to my discussion here to note that “counterfactual representations are much more likely to embrace antecedents that seize upon an unusual, exceptional, or abnormal event and to return it to its normal state than vice versa.”¹⁶ When something really out of the ordinary occurs and prompts counterfactual thought, we usually try to “right” the past in some way. We tend, in other words, to imagine alternatives that closely align with our expectations about what is normal, in terms of the world and other people.

As is probably particularly obvious to everyone who studies literature and narrative, we also are more than capable of counterfactual thought that does not follow these typical patterns. Significantly, various studies suggest that sometimes “when time and effort permit, individuals modify their counterfactual responses so as to achieve

¹⁶ Neal J. Roese, Lawrence J. Sanna, and Adam D. Galinsky, “The Mechanics of Imagination: Automaticity and Control in Counterfactual Thinking” in *The New Unconscious*, ed. Ran R. Hassin, James S. Uleman, John A. Bargh, 138-170 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 141.

particular affective goals.”¹⁷ An important point I wish to make is that counterfactual thought involved in the *De Profundis* and Posthumus’ repentance is not the spontaneously generated sort; rather, it is the kind that takes *time and effort*. These particular instances of counterfactual thought are also particularly complicated by an awareness that divine causation and divine power do not always follow human expectations. After all, what exactly constitutes an “unusual, exceptional, or abnormal event” when we are talking about God or the gods?

Technically, the Coverdale translation of the third verse is a kind of “prefactual” conditional construction, given its use of the future tense: “If thou, Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it?”¹⁸ Arguably, however, its focus is at least in part on past events. The counterfactual thought engendered by the verse might be rendered thus: “if God was absolutely committed to and always undertook strictly just retributive action for our sins, then exactly nobody would be standing here today.” This downward counterfactual imagines a worse alternative of extraordinary magnitude. This, we should recall, is not the most usual response to an adverse event; we more spontaneously imagine an alternative that would have had a better outcome, not a worse one. It is also somewhat unusual in that it contains an antecedent that imagines an “unusual, exceptional, or abnormal event.” The obvious wholesale administration of God’s justice is not an everyday occurrence; as such, it takes more effort to imagine—no

¹⁷ Ibid., 155.

¹⁸ Kai Epstude, Annika Scholl, Neal J. Roese “Prefactual Thoughts: Mental Stimulations of What Might Happen,” *Review of General Psychology* 20, no. 1 (March 2016): 38-56, <https://doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000064>.

matter how much the discourse of a given Christian community might be in the habit of thinking about and referencing it.

This kind of thinking does, however, make plenty of sense as an affective measure, for it is a means of generating some comfort. The continued existence of oneself and one's neighbors, as well as the apparent ability of most of prior generations to survive beyond the moment their first, inevitable sins can provide some relief to the sinner convicted of her own sinfulness. This comforting realization prepares the way for the turn that happens immediately afterward in the first half of verse four: "for there is mercy with Thee."

The mention of the inevitability of sin brings up another facet of counterfactual thinking. When we engage in it, we can focus different elements of the alternative past we imagine: on those elements that seem like they are under our control and/or on those out that appear to be outside our control. Thus, to take up again the example of a car wreck, I can imagine that I could have left earlier and driven more slowly on the ice (thus avoiding the wreck), or I can imagine that another driver drove more recklessly (and hit my sliding car rather than avoiding it). In the case of imagining the just retribution of the divine, the possibilities of imagining away my sinfulness altogether are, in a final sort of sense, foreclosed. I can often readily imagine and fervently wish that I had not committed a *particular* sin, for which I now repent. It is a major point of verse three, however, that neither I nor anyone else can really imagine never having sinned *at all*. Thus, it makes sense that the focus in this particular imagined alternative state of affairs focuses on God, on the party who does seem to have alternate avenues open to Him. We

should also note that while some counterfactual thinking can be generated from this verse, future-oriented, apocalyptic thinking is also readily generated, given that it evokes a time of universal judgement.

Counterfactual thoughts make us more acutely aware that the antecedent (the alternate event) did not, in fact, occur. Gascoigne's *De Profundis*, which stretches the psalm's various verses into stanzas, translates this heightened awareness into literary form:

If thou, good Lorde, shouldst take thy rod in hande,
If thou regard what sinnes are daylye done,
If thou take hold where wee our works begone,
If thou decree in iudgment for to stand,
And be extream to see our 'scuses scand, —
If though take note of euerythinge amisse,
And wryte in rolls how faile our nature is,
O glorious God! O King! O Prince of power!
 What mortal wight
 May then haue light
To fee thy frowne, if thou haue list to lowre?¹⁹

He creates a foliation, a repetitive layering, of alternative divine action, that builds up the tension before arriving at the question about who deserves to withstand divine wrath; it is a question that only expects one answer: not one of us.

Calvin's Commentary on Psalm 130

The path that originates in notice that nobody is without sin can be a fraught one, however. Relevant here is Calvin's commentary on Psalm 130's third verse, warning against the dangers involved its interpretation:

¹⁹ *Select Poetry, Chiefly Devotional, of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. by Edward Farr. Cambridge: University Press, 1845; Bartleby.com, 2011.

Yet doth not the prophet wrap others in with him, to the intent to lessen his own fault as hypocrites do, who when they dare not utterly exempt themselves from judgment, make this their starting-hole. Am I the first or only man who has sinned? And so while they crowd themselves into the throng, they believe they have half obtained their quitsest.²⁰

Arthur Golding's translation of Calvin's Latin is here wonderfully evocative. "Starting hole," a legalistic synonym for our "loophole," has its origins in the idea of a hiding place for an animal or fugitive.²¹ Thus, he creates a vivid image: in matters of penitence, the wrong kind of self-serving comparison can shrink the place of the sinner from fathomless "depths" down to a grubby little hole, where perhaps the Almighty just won't notice one's sordid affairs, given all the other iniquity going on. The acts of "wrapping others in with him" and "crowding themselves into the throng" look rather in tension, but describe the same sorts of self-serving actions; in the first, the grasping sinner pulls others toward him, as cover; in the second, said sinner slips into the crowd, again as cover.

Calvin proceeds to outline the correct way of reading this verse:

That of all mankind not so much as one is able to escape eternal damnation. As if he had sayd, whosoever presenteth into the sight of the Lord, although he excel in rare holiness, yet shall he be cast, and what then shall become of me, which am not one of the best.²²

The person meditating on the psalm should carefully regulate the mind-stretching task of imagining everyone ever—the whole human race—by 1) deliberately directing attention

²⁰Jean Calvin, *The Psalms of David and others. With M. Iohn Caluins commentaries* (London: 1571), 209, STC (2nd ed) 4395, Early English Books Online.

²¹ "starting-hole, n.". OED Online. March 2018. Oxford University Press.

²² Calvin, *The Psalms*, 209.

to a select few—the best—and 2) immediately thereafter, removing oneself from that group. There is a certain usefulness in comparing oneself to one's most admirable neighbors and then recalling that even the best, the one who is without a doubt, literally holier-than-thou, is still a member of the race that deserves perdition. In this way, one can try to counteract the all-too-human temptation, even when crying out to God from the depths, to look toward others' wrongdoing, seeking a kind of discount salvation in the masses.

Posthumus' Move to Forgiveness

Upon being convinced of his wife's infidelity, Posthumus quickly questions whether she is the first or only woman who has sinned, answering with an anguished, resounding no. He does not content himself with accusing many or even most women of being unchaste; rather, he perceives an absolute contagion. Consequently, he and every man must claim his place in the community of "all bastards" (2.5.2). In a version of the kind of excuse which so worries Calvin, he sees the magnitude and ubiquity of human wrongdoing and fails to regulate his response appropriately. Rather than turning at once toward his own sinfulness, he dwells upon that of others. He does, however, use some mechanisms very similar to those proposed by Calvin in trying to grasp how he might fit within this huge, sinful community. Posthumus idealizes his parents, setting them up as the most superlative examples of chastity and venerability, before asserting that even they cannot be exempted from the stain:

Is there no way for men to be but women
Must be half-workers? We are all bastards;
And that most venerable man which I
Did call my father, was I know not where

When I was stamp'd; some coiner with his tools
Made me a counterfeit: yet my mother seem'd
The Dian of that time so doth my wife
The nonpareil of this. (2.5.1-8)

The next move he should make, if he were following Calvin's instructions, would be to compare his own sinfulness to the (putative) sinfulness of Innogen and his mother.

Instead, he tries to slip into a "starting-hole," by making a distinction between all those who commit sin (women) and all those who are wronged by it (men).²³

Up until this point, Posthumus has been focusing on one particular kind of sin, that of infidelity. As his soliloquy proceeds, however, he attempts to consolidate the blame for *all* vice into one half of humanity, thereby exculpating himself and all men. This move half-dodges and half-confronts the comparative urge that might (and later will) lead him to reflect on the magnitude of his own transgressions:

Could I find out
The woman's part in me! For there's no motion
That tends to vice in man, but I affirm
It is the woman's part: be it lying, note it,
The woman's; flattering, hers; deceiving, hers;
Lust and rank thoughts, hers, hers; revenges, hers;
Ambitions, covetings, change of prides, disdain,
Nice longing, slanders, mutability,
All faults that may be named, nay, that hell knows,
Why, hers, in part or all; but rather, all. (2.5.19-28)

He wavers slightly on the question of whether men's missteps can be attributed in "part or all" to the woman's part in them, but finishes strong, overcoming the hurdle of potential self-awareness. Perhaps this hitch suggests that even with the wrathful

²³ Adelman observes, "The gap between the opening question . . . and the answer . . . contains a submerged if: if there is no way for men to come into being without the half work of women, then we are all bastards." This conditional again, I would posit, engages in a kind of counterfactual thought, the parthenogenic fantasy that would allow men to escape sin" (212).

momentum generated in the throes of immediate betrayal, it is a little difficult to stay the course that ends in such hyperbolic misogyny. It requires real effort to imagine a world in which half the inhabitants are entirely excused from blame.

After Posthumus' exit at the end of Act Three, we do not see him again until the beginning of Act Five, leaving the audience to conjecture about his reflections in the meantime. His soliloquy soon suggests that he has somehow managed to retrace his thought process and identify that crucial moment when, instead of partitioning humanity and portioning out all sin to women, he should instead have recognized that it is distributed widely, if not exactly evenly:

You married ones,
If each of you should take this course, how many
Must murder wives much better than themselves
For wrying but a little! O Pisanio!
Every good servant does not all commands:
No bond but to do just ones. Gods! if you
Should have ta'en vengeance on my faults, I never
Had lived to put on this: so had you saved
The noble Innogen to repent, and struck
Me, wretch more worth your vengeance. But, alack,
You snatch some hence for little faults; that's love,
To have them fall no more: you some permit
To second ill with ill, each elder worse,
And make them dread it, to the doers' thrift.
But Innogen is your own: do your best wills,
And make me blest to obey! (5.1.2-16)

Posthumus' first counterfactual thought, in which he explicitly invites the "married ones" of the audience to participate in imagining, is downward directed, like the one in Psalm 130:3. The psalm prompts reflection on an alternative world in which everyone receives their due from a God who keeps a perfect ledger. Posthumus also imagines a worse, more blood-soaked world. If all the husbands whose wives were unfaithful killed their

spouses, then we would have a situation in which lots of wives were lost and lots of killers remain.

The affective consequence of this counterfactual is somewhat complicated. The audience he addresses, one gathers, is supposed to feel a sense of relief, glad that they do not inhabit that other world. Perhaps Posthumus also derives the slimmest sort of similar comfort. Yet, in seeing that he is not one of those that react less violently to being wronged, he also “increases his obnoxiousness to punishment.” He is most definitely *not* one of the best, and this realization begets deep repentance.

In a case, perhaps, of still incomplete transformation, Posthumus loses sight somewhat of his own culpability in the subsequent lines, turning to examine the actions of others that might have resulted in a different outcome. He wishes that Pisanio had defied him. He regrets that the gods did not intervene. The second counterfactual thought is an upward one, as he imagines that he might have been prevented from ordering Pisanio to kill Innogen if the gods had intervened as soon as he had that terrible intention. And it is not only that hate-filled desire that marks Posthumus as worthy of being struck down: his “faults” are plural here. He also refocuses on his culpability when he admits that he is “more worth” the gods’ vengeance than his wife.

As I observed in my discussion of Woodes’ *Philologus* and the *Homily on the Declining Against God* in this study’s third chapter, the temporality of divine chastisement can be a very unnerving topic to contemplate. Is one being allowed to pile sin on sin so that repentance will follow, or has God completely abandoned the project? In the case of the gods’ dealings with his wife, Posthumus at first suggests that Innogen

needed more time to repent but then reconsiders, conjecturing, hoping, that she was actually saved from more sin by being “snatched” when she was. In that case, *he* might be the one who has been allowed to continue piling sin upon sin, so that perhaps he can repent. Ultimately, the best conclusion he can draw—“But Innogen is your own; do your blest wills”—is one of resignation that might be an expression of hope or dread, or, as I shall presently suggest, both. Syntactically, it echoes the turn in the fourth verse of the *De Profundis*: “But mercy is with thee; therefore you are to be feared.”

On the Dangers, Inexactitude and Uses of Comparison

In the most surprising moments of the soliloquy, Posthumous has come to view infidelities like those committed by Innogen as “wrying but a little” and “little faults.” How is such radical revaluation possible? The answer, I have suggested, lies at least partially in the kind of deliberate, albeit imperfect, emphasis now on his *own* wrongdoing. Yet the equation that leads to Innogen’s fault seeming so diminished still also involves as an important variable the sinfulness of others on a grand scale. His to situate himself in the crowd hag-ridden by sinfulness has not been completely eliminated.

Cymbeline that insistently points out the flaws inherent in its characters’ obsessive weighing of one person against others. After all, the boast that his wife is the less “attemptable” (1.4.61) than others is what gets Posthumus into trouble in the first place. He also, rather bizarrely, insists to Iachamo that Innogen “exceeds in goodness the hugeness of your unworthy thinking,” (1.4.138-9) which seems like a goad to extend that unworthy thinking as far as possible and also, of course, to test that incredible, nearly impossible-to-imagine goodness. Anne Barton notes that in these late plays,

although the syntax often appears to be setting up a clear-cut polarity (honest-dishonest, chaste-falsely accused), in fact the figure slides off into the oblique. The terms compared are not really antithetical: they are merely *different* in a way that makes one wonder why these particular instances have been made to confront each other at all.²⁴

In this case, the skewed not-quite-polarity opposes Innogen's actual virtue to Iachamo's filthy imagination. Yet, over and over again, the characters insist on trying to compare qualities that are only notionally related and to quantify the unquantifiable. Thus, Shakespeare renders apparent the dangers of the intersubjective comparative project. For example, Cloten's rage over being unfavorably compared to Posthumus contributes to his grisly end (4.1.1-25).

Bradley Ryner, who reads the play against a background of emerging British mercantile practices, writes, "All attempts by the characters . . . to chart and predict fluctuations of value are defeated by the fact that they can never truly occupy a godlike vantage point from which to view the system in its entirety."²⁵ Drawing on Michel de Certeau, Ryner notes that even the theodicy of Jupiter takes on the form of a "tour" rather than a map. It provides information only about a sequence of events and action; thus neither we nor the characters are "given access to the range of options presented by the synchronic and multivectorial space of a map, which allows its viewer to plot one course

²⁴ Anne Barton, "Leontes and the Spider: Language and Speaker in Shakespeare's Last Plays" in *Shakespeare's Styles: Essays in Honor of Kenneth Muir*, ed. Philip Edwards, Inga Stina-Ewbank, and G.K. Hunter, 131-150 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 145.

²⁵ Bradley D. Ryner, "The Panoramic View in Mercantile Thought: Or, a Merchant's Map of Cymbeline" in *Global Traffic*, ed. Barbara Sebek and Stephen Deng, 77-94 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 56

out of a range of alternative courses.”²⁶ Similarly, in her study of the play in reference to early modern accounting practices and a culture of credit, Patricia Parker emphasizes the limitations of human judgments and perspective when it comes even to the most crude categorization and valuation:

The foregrounding within [*Cymbeline*] of the difficulty of "distinction" or "partition" (1.6.37), amidst proliferating simulacra and doubles, underscores that the definitive separation of "counterfeit" from "true" awaits the ultimate Revelations or unmasking, where the Luciferic lookalike (and dissimulating accountant) will be replaced by the Redeemer called Faithful and True" (Revelation 19:11) By *Cymbeline*'s end, however, even the New Testament Epiphany is still in the future, awaiting a Nativity that has not yet occurred. In the play itself, there is no final (or true) "debtor and creditor," Audit or Reckoning, and no perfect "Faithful and True.”²⁷

The play reminds us over and over again that attempts to assign relative value are doomed to failure. And yet, as Valerie Wayne points out, Posthumus' revaluation of his wife is itself "distinctly comparative."²⁸ His imagining of a world in which every wronged husband murders his wife (5.1.2-5) has salutary effects, leading him to recommend and to wish he himself had chosen an alternate course: forgiveness. Furthermore, he comes to see his own sin as so large that hers shrinks in comparison.

What Kind of Forgiveness Are We Talking about, Anyway?

To further consideration of this relationship between comparison and forgiveness, I turn now to two sensitive readers of the play: R.G. Hunter and Sarah Beckwith. Both have bent their contemporary critical discussions of *Cymbeline* and the other late

²⁶ Ryner, 90.

²⁷ Patricia Parker, "Cymbeline: Arithmetic, Double-Entry Bookkeeping, Counts, and Accounts," *SEDERI Yearbook* 23 (2013): 113-114, www.redalyc.org/pdf/3335/333538759005.pdf.

²⁸ *Cymbeline*, Arden Third Series, ed. Valerie Wayne, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 13.

Shakespearean plays toward consideration of forgiveness within a Christian context. In their different emphases, they provide points of reference with regard to the degree of secularity in this play.

Over fifty years ago, R.G. Hunter coined the classification “comedies of forgiveness” and singled out *Cymbeline* as the “most overtly Christian” of the romances (the ostensibly pagan setting notwithstanding).²⁹ Refuting the notion that something resembling “modern relativism” motivates Posthumus’ changed estimation of his wife’s betrayal, Hunter glosses the speech thus:

By comparison with murder, adultery is “wrying but a little.” This is certainly not an amoral view of the matter, nor does it suggest that adultery is not wrong. Adultery is a sin, an offense against God which God will forgive if the sinner’s repentance (or faith) justifies forgiveness. Adultery is also an immoral act and an offense against man—which man will forgive if he has the slightest sense of his own moral condition.³⁰

Hunter paints the movement from recognizing God’s forgiveness of sins to forgiving the wrongdoing of others as intuitive and nearly automatic. Even someone with only a modicum of self-awareness should be able to grasp this concept. Yet it remains unclear whether the body of evidence can support the weight of Hunter’s superlative “slightest.” Hunter also hedges on the “faith vs. works” debate, suggesting that *any* Christian, no matter what credence she gives to the efficacy of her own repentance, ought to be able to reason her way to this conclusion along with Posthumus. True enough, this understanding of divine and human forgiveness as both analogical and inextricably

²⁹ Robert Grams Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 176.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

intertwined *is* fundamental to Christianity: “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,” Christ Himself instructs His disciples. Further, the concept does have a sort of simplicity to it—especially within the discourse of believing Christians, whatever their stripe. Nonetheless, I hasten to add a qualification: however much sense the obligation to forgive might make, even slight experience in life brings awareness of how difficult it is to stay focused on this obligation and even more difficult to act upon it, particularly when gravely wronged. Certainly, many people who do, in fact, have a sense of their own moral shortcomings, nonetheless struggle to forgive an adulterous spouse.

By contrast, Beckwith, sees “the concept of the simultaneity of sin against God, self, and neighbor” as already severely damaged in the world of Shakespeare’s late plays. Reformed theology tends to emphasize the exclusive relationship of God and the individual. The romances, in her view, attempt to repair the injury to communal bonds inflicted by the Reformation’s dismissal of various salutary practices such as the sacrament of penance. She writes,

We might say that in the grammar of forgiveness a king pardons, a priest absolves, but only humans and God forgive. And the Christian God . . . has been banished from the stage. The Shakespearean grammar of forgiveness is up to humans.³¹

Human beings accomplish this forgiveness, according to Beckwith, by acknowledging one another’s “passionate utterances,” perlocutionary speech acts far less prescriptive than the illocutionary utterances used, for example, in auricular confession. *Cymbeline*,

³¹ Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 117.

with its cascade of confessions and reconciliations of the final scene, represents for Beckwith the extraordinary accomplishment of a human community restored through their creative and generous perlocutionary speech. This argument dovetails rather neatly with Anthony Dawson's argument about Shakespeare's secularity more generally; Dawson earthily declares that Shakespeare is "neither Catholic nor Protestant because his fidelity is to the sweaty transcendence offered by theatre."³²

We have, then, one claim that *Cymbeline* is Shakespeare's best representation of an ideal of Christian forgiveness and another claim that the play is Shakespeare's most advanced representation of the best secular forgiveness can do. I do not think it wise to simply explain away the discrepancy by attributing it solely to the variation in critical praxes and preferences of different generations of critics. Hunter, we should note, emphasizes Posthumus' soliloquized repentance of forgiveness of Innogen, while Beckwith focuses on the final scene. In a way, then, we have returned to the question raised at the beginning of this chapter over the relationship between these types of forgiveness. Are they related or comparable in any way? Is the later, more humanist, more inclusive scene privileged?

One way to approach this question is to adopt a way of investigating forgiveness recently proposed by the philosopher Charles Griswold. He sets out a division between "paradigmatic forgiveness" and "nonparadigmatic forgiveness." The former is an ideal of what forgiveness between two human beings would be if it were perfectly enacted.

³² Anthony Dawson, "Shakespeare and Secular Performance" in *Shakespeare and the Culture of Performance*, eds. Paul Yachnin and Patricia Badir, 83-97 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 87.

“Non-paradigmatic” forgiveness is that which falls in some way short of this ideal. In his view, both kinds of forgiveness requires, at a minimum:

- 1) the willingness of the victim to try to lower her pitch of resentment, as well as her ability to do so to some minimal degree, and to forswear revenge;
- 2) the willingness whether in fact, or as imaginatively reconstructed by the Victim, of the offender to take minimal steps to qualify for forgiveness (picture the victim being presented with the offender’s death-bed letter of contrition, for example, one that supplies a basis for reframing her view of the offender);
- 3) that the injury be humanly forgivable.³³

More particularly, his idea of paradigmatic forgiveness, which in many ways closely resembles Beckwith’s account of forgiveness in *Cymbeline*, meets all of these conditions in the best possible ways. Paradigmatic forgiveness is conceived of as interpersonal, as involving the emotions (the lowering of resentment and feeling of contrition), and as resulting in reconciliation of the offender and victim. Hence, forgiveness that relies on a mediator, rather than being expressed directly from victim to offender is less than ideal; likewise, forgiveness that occurs after the offender is dead is also nonparadigmatic, etc.³⁴ A number of Shakespeare’s plays present unparadigmatic instances of forgiveness; in fact, one might fairly safely argue that they are far more interested in those than in anything approaching an ideal sort of forgiveness. One can think, for example, of the Friar’s rather bizarre plan to encourage Claudio to forgive Hero and the famous silence of Hermione in *The Winter’s Tale*.

³³ Charles Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 115.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

Posthumus' initial forgiveness of Innogen certainly does not qualify as a paradigmatic instance of human forgiveness. Innogen is (so far as he knows) dead, and he does not have any way of knowing whether she repented and so qualified for forgiveness. Yet, he forgives her anyway, in a forgiveness that does not emerge from a particularized interpersonal encounter or an exchange of narratives, but rather from a triangulated contemplation of generalized sin, of his own sin, and of the unfathomable workings of the gods. This kind of forgiveness involves a circumscribed comparison, a sideways glance toward one's neighbors along with a complementary, upward gaze toward the divine. The contemplation of divine dealings with human beings should, ideally, curb any leanings toward the extenuation of one's guilt and withholding of forgiveness from others to which we are so tempted. It should help prevent one's sins from fading into the background of ubiquitous wrongdoing or seeming less terrible than the wrongs done to us by others. At the same time, a sweeping glance over one's community of fellow sinners can provide reassurance about the possibilities of divine mercy that might otherwise be difficult to keep in sight. It stretches the capacity of the imagination, presenting and then rejecting another more terrible world in which a meticulous accounting of sin and vengeance holds sway.

The Fearfulness of Forgiveness

The theologian Sarah Coakley offers a midrash on the fourth verse of the *De Profundis* as a means of investigating "the seeming impasse that often confronts post-holocaust Jewish-Christian discussions of forgiveness": an insistence on one side that only the victims could truly offer human forgiveness, thus rendering it "impossible," and,

on the other side, the assertion that forgiveness yet must be extended. Her discussion is grounded in part by her notice, as a child growing up in the Anglican Church, of the strangeness involved in the hinge in the middle of the verse of the psalm: “For there is mercy with thee; *therefore* thou art to be feared.” She was confused as, within a modern context, fearing the Lord did not seem to be a natural result of experiencing His mercy.

Coakley provides a selection of rabbinic, patristic, and reformation responses to the verse, showing that Jewish and Christian traditions, while both quite complicated, are far from completely disjunctive and often overlap with one another. In particular, she highlights how certain hermeneutic traditions, both Jewish and Christian, suggest that sometimes a kind of human participation in that divine forgiveness results from this “intense collocation of fear and forgiveness” (as, for example, in the case of Joseph’s forgiveness of his brothers). Coakley concludes by suggesting,

There is a costly chronology of forgiveness . . .; to know divine forgiveness is no less to know purgative terror. In short, for the phenomenological ‘impossibility’ of forgiveness to be sublated, I must pass through a transformation well beyond that of a good hearted fiat of the will, let alone of ‘cheap grace,’ to what I might call the ecstatic dimension of forgiveness. I must, thereby, in some anticipatory sense, glimpse—eschatologically or christologically—the divine perspective of mercy itself.³⁵

Posthumus’ unparadigmatic intimation of transcendent forgiveness, I conclude, deserves attention as a very different *kind* of forgiveness than that in the final recognition scene. It is a kind of forgiveness that one can offer *back* to one’s community but is only in a very oblique way generated out of that community. To put it another way, these

³⁵ Sarah Ann Coakley, “On the Fearfulness of Forgiveness: Psalm 130.4 and Its Theological Implications” in *Meditations of the Heart: The Psalms in Early Christian Thought and Practice: Essays in Honor of Andrew Louth*, ed. Andreas Andreopoulos, Augustine Casiday, and Carol Harrison, 33-52 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2011), 34.

considerations necessitate a re-calibration of Hunter's notion of forgiveness as readily prompted and actuated by "the slightest sense of one's own moral condition." In a part of the Christian tradition particularly associated with the *De Profundis*, "the slightest sense of one's own moral condition" is both about the best we can hope for and terrifying. Still, that glimpse can be transformative.

As such, and as part of the process—even, arguably a necessary part—of Posthumus' move to forgiveness, I argue we ought not to assume that the later, more secularized, human-enacted forgiveness is the only kind in which this play (or playwright) put faith. Communities that require reconstitution through forgiveness—such as the marriage of Posthumus and Innogen—might sometimes require a self-transcendent encounter with the divine before more paradigmatic, dialogic forgiveness is possible.

**CHAPTER FIVE: STATES OF EXCEPTION IN JACOBEAN ENGLAND AND
THE LAND OF NOD: CAIN FIGURES AND POLITICAL THEOLOGY
WEBSTER'S *THE WHITE DEVIL***

Cymbeline concludes with the titular King declaring a general pardon, a suspension as it were, of the usual laws of his court, while also acquiescing to the demands of the Roman empire in agreeing to provide tribute—this despite the Britons having beaten the Romans in battle. This contrast—deciding to make an exception, on the one hand, and deciding *not* to, on the other—calls to mind Carl Schmitt's now famous formulation of sovereignty.¹ This final chapter turns to consider some aspects political theology, particularly as discussed by Giorgio Agamben, who both critiques and extends the scope of Schmitt's thought. The play under consideration is John Webster's *The White Devil* (1612), which enjoyed little success during its initial run at the Red Bull and, while far more appreciated by modern scholarship, still tends to be somewhat overshadowed by the brilliance of the playwright's next solo endeavor, *The Duchess of Malfi*.² Webster, as is well known, frequently employs his legal training and knowledge in his plays, interrogating the workings of the law and politics. Hence, in this study of

¹ "Sovereign is he who decides the exception," Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 5.

² John Webster, *The White Devil in The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays*, ed. René Weiss, (New York: Oxford UP, 2009).

community and religion that has heretofore primarily examined local communities such as the parish, family, household, and neighborhood, I conclude by more directly focusing on Webster's critiques of the overtly political and juridical, on reservations expressed in his play about certain processes involved in the constitution of the early modern state in the early decades of the seventeenth century. In previous chapters, we encountered the political more obliquely: Henry VIII's court and injunctions; the Elizabethan settlement, etc. In *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, the official workings of the law and the machinations of the royal court are both far distant from the Frankford's rural household.

Here, I examine concerns about sovereignty, and the policies and practices emerging from that sovereignty that seem designed to extend the *length* of life for its vulnerable citizens, while also ensuring—often deliberately—that the conditions of their life remain precariously situated on the threshold of despair and death; and that, forever indebted, they are stripped of hope of eventual freedom from the circumstances of their degradation. In this frenetic play, Webster's frequent recurrence to this topic offers a fascinating perspective on Agamben's claim, to which I shall return later, that "*the ordinary relation of law to life is not application but Abandonment*" (*Homo Sacer* 29; italics original).

Scholars such as Victoria Kahn, Julia Reinhardt Lupton, Graham Hammill, Ken Jackson and others have sparked lively and insightful discussions of political theology

and early modern drama in recent years.³ In the introduction to a recent collection,

Hammill and Lupton explain their understanding of the term:

We take the phrase “political theology” to identify the exchanges, pacts, and contests that obtain between religious and political life, especially the use of sacred narratives, motifs, and liturgical forms to establish, legitimate and reflect upon the sovereignty of monarchs, corporations, and parliaments. Political theology is less a concept like sovereignty or the state of exception; or a form of government like monarchy, theocracy, or republicanism; or even a moment of historical transition from a worldview that is primarily theological to one that is primarily political. Rather it is more like a coupling or entanglement of ostensibly discrete domains—the political and the theological—out of which early modern and modern concepts, forms of government, and views of history are born.⁴

They emphasize particularly the conflict (rather the “exchanges and pacts”); these “recursive crises” that they see as constitutive of modernity. Likewise, many influential accounts of Webster proceed along similar lines, with arguments erupting over the extent to which he jettisons “Christian” worldviews and morals, even as he extravagantly employs Christian symbolism and language.⁵ My reading of *The White Devil* consequently situates Webster as at once the heir and executor of certain Christian traditions—particularly in medieval English cycle drama—that recruit the scriptural figure of Cain for purposes of social critique as well as anticipating and interrogating

³See Jennifer Rust, “Political Theology and Shakespeare Studies” *Literature Compass* 6, no. 1 (2009): 175-190, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2008.00596.x>.

⁴ *Political Theology and Early Modernity*, ed. Graham Hammil and Julia Reinhard Lupton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 2.

⁵ On the one end of this argument, for example, see the editors’ introduction to *The Works of John Webster*, vol. 1, ed. David Gunby, David Carnegie and Anthony Hammond (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) for an argument that Webster ultimately seeks to uphold traditional religious values. For a contrasting view, see John R. Mulryne in *Jacobean Theatre*, ed. John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (New York: Capricorn Books, 1967). Mulryne argues that Webster has a “sensibility” that “demanded the creation of a world in which no set of values is shown as the ‘right one, no attitude as intrinsically better than any other; a world of, in the most literal sense, moral and emotional anarchy” (204).

some themes of political theology as formulated (most conspicuously and exhaustively) by Agamben.

Some Key Concepts in Agamben's Political Theology

Agamben's best known discussion of political theology occurs in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Agamben generalizes Schmitt's formulation of the sovereign as the one who decides the exception, seeing a "paradox of sovereignty" as a key structuring feature of the modern state and of Western politics, more generally. Sovereign authority is paradoxical because, given its power to suspend the usual rule of law, it therefore exists both inside of and outside of the law. Agamben further identifies a fundamental similarity between the sovereign and *homo sacer*, an obscure legal designation in ancient Rome of a "life that may be killed and yet not sacrificed."⁶ Like sovereigns, *homines sacri* are also both inside and outside of the law, excluded from participating in the rituals that would legitimate membership in the community but still perceptible in the eyes of the law as objects of a legal abrogation whereby no one who kills such a person can be prosecuted for murder. The exposure of *homines sacri* to being killed but not sacrificed, in other words, means that the category of homicide becomes inapplicable to *homo sacer*. Following Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt, Agamben also draws upon a distinction, which descends ultimately from Aristotelian political ontology, between *bios* and *zoē*; the former refers to the political and cultural existence of people living in common, and the latter to "bare life," or simple biological existence.

⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 8.

Agamben seeks to correct and build upon Foucault, who argued that the modern state was distinctive in its foregrounding of bare life and making it the primary focus of the state's various expressions of power. Agamben instead insists,

The decisive fact is that, together with the process by which the exception everywhere becomes the rule, the realm of bare life—which is originally situated at the margins of the political order—gradually begins to combine with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, *bios* and *zoē*, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible [indifferentiation]. At once excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception actually constituted, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested.⁷

This paradoxical situation, according to Agamben, structures sovereign authority and characterizes the history of western political philosophy. A modern democracy might be particularly “characterized” by the fact that it is “constantly trying to transform its own bare life into a way of life and to find, so to speak, the *bios* of the *zoē*” but it also tends to remain blind to the chaotic “zone of indifferentiation,” that remains at its heart.⁸ On this basis Agamben can even scandalously declare “the inner solidarity of democracy and totalitarianism”⁹ Examining *Homo sacer* and the sovereign, then, makes more apparent this often obscured but fundamental foundation.

The Figure of Cain: Arbitrary Preference and Family Ties

Far less obscure than *homo sacer*, Cain in the western Judeo-Christian tradition also appears as a figure both included and excluded, popping up here and there in scriptural and cultural narratives just when it seems he has been definitively banished

⁷ Agamben, 9.

⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁹ Ibid.

from them. Along with Judas, Cain is the only scriptural figure overtly named in *The White Devil*. The mention comes during the scene of climactic struggle between Flamineo and Vittoria, the siblings who are the play's most vibrant figures. Prior to that point, Flamineo also alludes to Cain's murder of his brother Abel, asserting, "Religion! O how it is commeddled with policy. The first bloodshed in the world happened about religion" (3.3.34-35).¹⁰

Flamineo refers in his complaint about religion to the rather opaque explanation for the first murder provided in Genesis: Cain in anger kills Abel after each brother receives from the Lord a different response to his sacrifice, the latter a favorable one, the former an unfavorable one. Genesis points out that the two brothers born to Eve are differentiated by their occupations: "Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground" (4:2). The text continues,

Cain brought the fruite of the ground, an offering vnto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flocke, and of the fat therof: and the LORD had respect vnto Abel, and to his offering. But vnto Cain, and to his offring he had not respect: and Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said vnto Cain, Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doe well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sinne lieth at the doore: An vnto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule ouer him. And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him (KJ Gen 4:3-8)

Scriptural exegetes of the passage offer various explanations and conjectures for why Cain's sacrifice is not respected: for example, tilling was not an acceptable occupation; or

¹⁰ That the play's themes so often intersect with those in the Cain-Abel myth gestures toward Ricardo Quinones' claim that it is "poised to acknowledge any dissatisfaction experienced with the more traditional religions and moral values . . . and to dramatize the struggle on the part of a character, offended by the conventional moral code, to create a new moral center that has a basis that is violent, dire and problematic, as paradoxical and contradictory as the character of Cain himself." *The Changes of Cain: Violence and the Lost Brother in Cain and Abel Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 19-20.

Cain did not offer the best to the Lord; or he offered an acceptable sacrifice with an unacceptable attitude, etc.¹¹ Quinones argues that the ambiguity is part of the point: “Difference between brothers is rendered more grievous by what I call the arbitrariness of preference, the fact that some arbiter, divine or paternal, but always fatherly—and hence authoritative and decisive—is rendering judgment vis-à-vis the difference”¹² God’s response to their sacrifices destroys the “original equality” into which the two brothers are born.

The White Devil insistently interrogates the legitimacy of the arbiters of preference, those who declare what exceptions they will. At the same time, however, Webster also emphasizes that because men are not born into original equality, arbitrary preference also is the means by which some might advance themselves. Webster signals in the first line of his first scene that the play’s action will be concerned with apparently arbitrary “banishment” (1.1.1) and with the uneven rulings of “courtly reward and punishment” (1.1.4-5). The newly banished Ludovico seems little interested in the explanation of his friends who point out that he deserves to be punished and that his fate could, in fact, be worse (he has not, after all, been sentenced to death although he himself has killed). Ludovico wonders,

Why then some great men scape
This banishment; there’s Paulo Giordano Orsini,
The Duke of Bracciano, now lives in Rome,
And by close panderism seeks to prostitute

¹¹ For an overview of the interpretive tradition, see the second chapter of John Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition: Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the First Sibling Rivalry* (Leiden: The Netherlands, Brill, 2011), 39-62.

¹² Quinones, 12.

The honour of Vittoria Corombona,
Vittoria, she that might have got my pardon
For one kiss to the duke. (1.1.39-44)

Ludovico suggests some means by which banishment might be avoided in this corrupt Italian setting. One might enjoy some immunity if born into the position of a Duke (or achieves a comparable position in the Church). Alternatively, one has a chance of procuring a repeal if one is proximate enough to and can find favor with a Duke, Cardinal or Pope such that “kisses” or some other currency might be successfully used in bargaining for a reduced or overturned sentence.

When the Duke of Bracciano becomes aware of the imminence of his own death by poisoning, his death scene throws the paradoxical nature of his sovereignty into relief: “I that have given life to offending slaves / And wretched murderers, have I not power / to lengthen mine own a twelvemonth?” (5.3.23-25). Only a few lines later, Bracciano issues the command, “On pain of death, let no man name death to me / It is a word infinitely terrible” (5.3.40). Yet the very fact of his obvious dying threatens to empty out his privileged claim to control language and to nullify his ability to make his threat of capital punishment legally binding.

Bracciano’s servant, Flamineo, gleefully remarks on this reduction to “bare life,” pleased “To see what solitariness is about dying princes. As heretofore they have unpeopled towns, divorced friends, and made great houses unhospitable, so now, O justice! Where are their flatterers now?” (5.3.41-44). Flamineo’s invocation of “justice,” in the abstract, and his neatly balanced rhetorical statement about the universal state of dying princes who suddenly find themselves abandoned has, as is so often the case with

the lines in Webster's plays, the sound of a commonplace saying. The detached tone is belied, however, by our knowledge that Flamineo in fact has a particular, highly personal reason (beyond even his default state of perpetual disgruntlement) for rejoicing at Bracciano's realization of his impotence. After Flamineo, one of those "offending slaves" and "wretched murderers," kills his own brother, Bracciano metes out a sentence for this fratricide designed to remind the offender over and over again of two realities: first, of the tenuousness of continued existence, and second, of the one to whom that liminal survival is owed. Bracciano deigns to grant "Only a lease of your life. And that shall last / But for one day. Thou shalt be forced each evening / To renew it, or be hanged" (5.3.72-74). Thus, Bracciano's death means Flamineo need no longer offer up his daily petition. He need not repeat the galling reminder, that, at least on the level of daily lived existence, "justice" is neither abstract nor impartial; rather, it is all too embodied and capricious.

Webster's audience in London might perhaps have been put in mind of the pardoning practices of their own sovereign. In a high-profile and sensational treason case right at the outset of James' reign, Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Griffin Markham, Lord Grey, Lord Cobham (and some others) were convicted of treason in the "Main" and "Bye" case. James apparently sought to set a certain tone and precedent in his active and elaborate staging of the pardon granted these men.¹³ Although James draws up a warrant for the stay of executions addressed to the presiding sheriff three days prior to the scheduled execution, he actually signs and sends the death warrant to the sheriff two days prior to

¹³ James references this case nine years later in the pardon he issues the diggers, discussed below. He expected everybody, even those in the far reaches of the realm, to know and remember what had happened.

their scheduled execution. The day before the execution he confided his plans for pardon to only a single Scottish page.

The messenger with the stay of execution arrives dramatically at the scaffold just as Markham is about to be beheaded, this despite Markham's bitter complaints that he was unprepared to die because his friends had led him to believe they would be successful in their suits for his pardon. In fact, the messenger encountered some delays and was later than planned—almost too late. Markham is then told he will have “two hours respite” and is led away to another building to wait. The next condemned man, Grey is allowed to make his scaffold speech and prayers before being told that the order of execution was being changed and they wished to execute Cobham before him. He too is led to the building to wait and told he has an hour's respite. A similar pattern is repeated with Cobham: allowed to make his final speeches and prayers, the ritual of execution is then interrupted. Subsequently, Markham and Grey are brought back to the scaffold and a messenger reads a series of reproaches from the king: “Are not your offenses heinous? Have you not been justly tried, and lawfully condemned? Is not each of you subject to due execution, now to be performed?” They all admitted their fault and were told “then, see the mercy of your Prince, who himself hath sent hither a countermand, and hath given you your lives.” Raleigh, who could see the scaffold from his prison window, soon after learns that his execution has been delayed indefinitely.¹⁴

¹⁴ This summary of events based on that in Craig A. Bernthal, “Staging Justice: James I and the Trial Scene in *Measure for Measure*” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 32, no. 2 (Spring, 1992), 247-269, <https://doi.org/10.2307/450735>.

Analogously, in the world of *The White Devil*, Bracciano's indefinite "lease" on Flamineo's life and his command that it be renewed every day is only a more extreme (although less elaborate!) display of the sovereign power to decide the exception. Both James I in this instance and Webster's fictional Duke seem to act on the principle that they should endeavor to "mark" as many hours as possible with the explicit threat of execution. To Flamineo's list of the expressions of power—the unpeopling of towns; the divorcing of friends; the rendering inhospitable of great houses (5.3.41-44)—we can now additionally remark power's ability to exert itself over the way in which its subjects experience temporality. For Webster, for Agamben, as well as for James I, it looks as though sovereignty consolidates itself as sovereignty by relentlessly constituting life as bare life. Moreover, by a stroke of fiendish ingenuity, it achieves this consolidation by means of the ongoing, continually reasserted, and indefinite *temporalization* of that life qua bare life. In other words, power signifies itself not only by exerting itself over bodies in space, but also over bodies in time. Even the indefiniteness of the punitive sentence is a brilliant piece of power's self-assertion: for, from the perspective of the subjugated, there is no substantive difference, between an *indefinite* sentence and an *eternal* one. In both cases, one's perception of temporality is indefinitely homogenized, forced into an aporia of perpetual subjection to power's unrelenting behest.

And yet, soon after Bracciano's death, Flamineo claims he wishes he were still able to speak with "this Duke" (5.3.205). Why would Flamineo seek a return to a state of affairs in which his hold on life is *more* tenuous? Flamineo at all moments is asking

“Who shall do me right now? Is this the end of service?” (3.3.3).¹⁵ As I shall discuss shortly, Flamineo seems acutely aware that his position is only one rung above the kind of “bare” existence of beggars—of “unaccommodated man,” to borrow the language of *King Lear* (3.4.105)—that seems to haunt him and into which he can imagine slipping. A dead Duke dispenses neither punishments nor rewards, and this disintegration of “qualified” political life (*bios*) into unqualified bare life (*zoē*) foils for a moment Flamineo’s plans to overcome the disadvantages he inherits. He has, however, buttressed his plans by almost incestuously ensuring that the executor of Bracciano’s will is Vittoria, Flamineo’s own sister.

This play makes much of the dynamic intersection between familial, sexual, and political relationships. Indeed, the language frequently shifts from the register of *zoē* to the register of *bios*. Biological phenomena such as conception, birth, and nursing are set against legal and courtly terminology, such as conveyances, patrimonies, patents, advancement, and pardons. This linguistic tension reflects conflicts in Webster’s play between existence and authority that spring from and are preserved by “natural” means versus existence and authority that are extended by some “unnatural” means. Some of those latter means are exceptional; supernatural; *divine* (as in the case of biblical story of Cain). Some belong to human invention, as in the case of pardons granted by authorities. Such contrasts, which Webster takes pains to prevent from appearing as neatly

¹⁵ On the changing nature and views of service in the period, see Judith Weil, *Service and Dependency in Shakespeare’s Plays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

dichotomous, create in aggregate a drama in which we witness both spectacular fractures of familial bonds and evidence of their enduring power.

Flamineo complains that his father has sold the family's land and used up all the money, leaving nothing to his son (1.2.309-311). Flamineo also wishes for a different story of his own generation, telling his mother that

I would the common'st courtesan in Rome
Had been my mother rather than thyself.
Nature is very pitiful to whores
To give them but few children, yet those children
Plurality of fathers; they are sure
They shall not want. (1.2.326-331)

In imagining the biological impossibility of a “plurality of fathers,” Flamineo conjures a self free from the blood ties he sees as fetters. An enterprising soul as well as a bastard, he might be clever enough to make lucrative filial claims on more than one man. Yet, while he functions at points as a “dedicated disintegrator of his own family,”¹⁶ Flamineo also realizes that ultimately one is powerless to completely sever blood ties: they are one of those facts of existence with which one can quarrel, against which one can rail, but the hold they exert is indissoluble.

Those who find themselves in such a situation can, at best, try to turn it to their advantage in much the same way they can try to capitalize on and manipulate the sovereign arbiter's power. Hence, Flamineo becomes the perpetrator of the “close panderism” mentioned by Ludovico in that first scene. Flamineo thus seeks to replace his absent father with an authority more easily manipulated and capable of bestowing the

¹⁶ B. J. Layman, “The Equilibrium of Opposites in *The White Devil: A Reinterpretation*,” *PMLA* 74, no. 4 (1959): 338.

kinds of favors he seeks, but he realizes that his sister provides essential insurance in this project. In his dual role as both servant and brother, Flamineo believes he is doubly positioned to benefit from the union of Vittoria and Bracciano. Because Bracciano does not advance him during life, Flamineo visits his sister, “my lord’s executrix” to demand “Reward for my long service” (5.6.7-8).

Flamineo’s relationship with his sister has some parallel in the many stories of Cain who paint him as accompanied in his wandering and sojourning by a “sister-wife”; if Adam and Eve are the generators of the entire human race, goes the argument, then Cain must father with a sibling (or, in a more horrifying version of events, with his own mother) Enoch and the other children that Genesis insists he fathers (Williams 28). In this tradition of interpretation, Cain could not entirely leave his family behind, but involves at least one of them in the new life he makes for himself. Flamineo similarly claims that, in acting as pander for his own flesh and blood, “I made a kind of path / To her and mine own preferment” (3.1.33-34). Marcello, the third sibling in this family and the eventual victim of Flamineo’s fratricide, foresees such a path leading to a rather different final destination, namely, to “your ruin,” the “your” being a collective one, meant to parallel Flamineo’s “her and mine” (3.1.35). Marcello sees the fate of Flamineo and Vittoria as inextricably linked, whether they are destined to rise or to fall together. They do both, together; but not before a thrilling showdown that involves broken suicide pacts, feigned deaths, and the attempt by Vittoria to give her brother the mark of Cain.

The Law and the Mark of Cain

After receiving from God a sentence of banishment for killing his brother, Cain expresses a fear that he will, in turn, be killed. In response, he receives a sign of protection from God: “And the LORD said vnto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him seven fold. And the LORD set a marke vpon Cain, lest any finding him, should kill him.” Cain’s mark does indeed allow him to live for many years after that seemingly decisive event of fratricide (Gen 4:12-25). Again, traditions vary widely as to what form this mark took, and significantly, as to whether this care to preserve Cain’s life should be viewed as an amplification—in the now-familiar form of temporal prolongation by authoritative fiat—of his punishment or an act of mercy.¹⁷ From the perspective of the present discussion, of course, it doesn’t much matter that Yahweh’s dispensation as regards Cain, as well as the Divine subjectivity that underwrites it, remains in itself inscrutably opaque and therefore open to endless scholarly argument. What does matter here, by contrast, is the sheer efficacy of what Agamben, and Carl Schmitt before him, would designate as the “sovereign decision.” At the level of the scriptural *ur*-narrative, Cain uses the extension of his life to build the city of Enoch in the land of Nod and to father a new line of men. I claim, then, that the characters populating the community of *The White Devil* are locked into an ongoing competition with each other wherein all attempt to emulate their figural precedent, Cain. For all of them scheme and scabble to extend their lives and avoid the fate of being murdered by others. Thus, while it is important to recognize a more “Judas-like,”

¹⁷ See Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain* (Berkeley, CA: University California Press, 1981).

suicidal despair that always lingers at the edges of this play, it is primarily the archetype of Cain that proves relevant to Webster's most arresting characters such as Flamineo, Vittoria, Ludovico and Francisco profess to follow. Like Cain, they dwell, so to speak, in a paradigmatically corrupt earthly city, St. Augustine's "City of Man," a latter-day, notional Enoch in a notional Land of Nod.

When the brother comes to claim his reward from her after Bracciano's death, she scoffs at his claim:

VITTORIA: There.

FLAMINEO: Ha, have you done already?

'Tis a most short conveyance.

VITTORIA: I will read it

[*Reads*] 'I give that portion to thee, and no other,
Which Cain groaned under, having slain his brother.'

FLAMINEO: A most courtly patent to beg by.

VITTORIA: You are a villain. (5.6.11-16)

Vittoria's deictic "there" carries an aggressive note of triumph, for she thinks she will at least surprise her brother by the clever means with which she has contrived to repudiate his claims. Cain receives as his portion the eponymous mark, granted by God: a mark at once signaling 1) his pariah-status as a murderer; and 2) his God-given indemnity from this-worldly, City-of-Man style retribution for his commission of fratricide. In its indemnifying aspect, the mark's peculiar efficacy is to furnish Cain—whether as punishment or reward, boon or bane—an unspecified extension of his biological life. Flamineo, however, appears aware that a game is afoot, shrewdly noticing that she cannot possibly have taken the time to write out a real conveyance of goods. He responds, without a moment's hesitation, to her angry attempt to equate him with Cain, bitterly ironizing her double-edged magnanimity as well as the status of this "most courtly

patent”: in effect a figural anti-type of the “portion” of Cain that Vittoria extends to Flamineo. His retort can have several meanings. On the one hand, her refusal to help him means he might *actually* have to go beg for a living. On the other hand, while she would bestow on him a mark that hampers and punishes him forever, he might be coolly pointing out that in the world in which they both live, the mark of Cain can be put to good use. If all those with sovereign power are also Cains, a “courtly patent”—that admits him to their company and authorizes him to beg there—might be just what is needed.

Webster in fact has an English precedent in the Cain tradition for this exchange: the medieval mystery play *Mactatio Abel* also connects the biblical “mark of Cain” which shields him from vengeance to English traditions of legal practices and documents. This play I mentioned previously, in the second chapter, an illustration of the kind of “trembling” or multivalent typology that often appeared in the cycle drama, typology that was also at work in *Conflict of Conscience*. As discussed in that earlier chapter, *Mactatio Abel* includes an addition to the scriptural narrative: Pikeharnes, Cain’s servant, who proves less than obedient to his master. In particular, he is reluctant to help Cain bury Abel’s body, apparently aware that doing so would make him an accessory to the crime. Thus, Cain tries to grant himself and Pikeharnes first a “release” and then a pardon. Cain employs language that, according to Brockman, the fifteenth-century audience surely would have seen as a parody of the royal patents of protection and of pardon, both of

which were notoriously abused. For instance, kings sometimes seemed more interested in recruiting for their armies through the use of pardons than upholding the law.¹⁸

Pikeharnes' interstitial asides mock Cain's overweening claims of sovereignty.

Bennett Brockman also raises another fascinating possibility for the servant's mockery:

It is possible that the "release" [Cain] offers Pikeharnes is to be distinguished from the "peasse" the servant requests. The playwright perhaps knows that the judicial writ of release (*de homine replegiendo*) specifies homicide among the offenses "or which, according to the custom of England, [a prisoner] is not replevisable." If so, it is possible that Cain is to be seen offering Pikeharnes a doubly worthless document which the servant, a knowledgeable citizen of Cain's city, obliquely refuses, demanding instead the more efficacious pardon implied by Cain's ensuing proclamation of the "peasse."¹⁹

The clever servant (and audience) in this reading, manage to be concerned about the finer particularities of the law even while aware of the larger, more obvious theological point that of course Cain could not possibly proclaim God's pardon for himself and Pikeharnes. Brockman further suggests that the audience might have perceived this episode of attempted pardoning as both amusing and as a "theoretical attack on a secular society which has forgotten or chosen to ignore its spiritual foundation. . . [T]he king through his 'special grace' can pardon the man who refuses the grace of God."²⁰

Brockman also notes that Cain connects his curse from God to being declared an outlaw. Cain invokes, however, a form of outlawry that was no longer in force when the Wakefield master was writing. Famously, this archaic law declared that "the outlaw...

¹⁸ Bennett A. Brockman, "The Law of Man and the Peace of God: Judicial Process as Satiric Theme in the Wakefield *Mactacio Abel*," *Speculum* 49:4 (1974): 702, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2852035>.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 707.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

bear wolves' head, which may be cut off by any man with impunity.” (Unsurprisingly, Agamben cites this same law as a paradigmatic instance of *homo sacer*.)²¹ By the fifteenth century, outlaws were not to be killed but, rather, executed by the king and were, in fact, frequently pardoned by the king. Brockman suggests that Cain's anachronism bespeaks his despair. Robert S. Sturges, by contrast, asserts that it is part of the habit of the Cain character, who frequently cites older, more folk-based laws in order to “situate himself in a world older than the Wakefield master's fifteenth century.”²² The advantage the Cain character sees in this older juridical order, according to Sturges, is an understanding of more mutual obligation between lords/kings and the commoners. Thus, this Cain attempts to hold God responsible and to assert his freedom: “He attempts to assert agency and authority—even power—in his dealings with God and with his brother, hence the potential for sympathy from the medieval audience and modern readers.”²³ Building upon Sturges' reading, I suggest that declaring *himself* an outlaw liable to be slain only to then pardon himself shortly after becomes Cain's prideful attempt to wrest sovereign power from God by extemporaneously temporalizing at his *own* convenience. Put another way, he satirically imitates fifteenth century kings who dispense pardons and cut short banishment because they need money or troops. We also see, however, how the Wakefield Cain's procedure also counteracts sentences of indefinite reduction to “bare life” *a la* James I (or, arguably, God in some traditions of the Cain myth). He seeks to

²¹ See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 104-111.

²² Robert S. Sturges, *The Circulation of Power in Medieval Biblical Drama* (New York: Pgrave Macmillan, 2015), 214.

²³ *Ibid.*, 113.

circumscribe the time he is condemned to “bare life,” to reclaim the duration of his life as his.

Similarly, Flamineo and Vittoria (and Zanche, Vittoria’s maid/ Flamineo’s sometimes lover) vie with one another for the privilege of executing this kind of sovereign decision over the duration of the life of the condemned. They make a pact that each shall kill the others at the same time, thus—like the Wakefield Cain—condemning themselves to die. Everyone claims they are prepared to be slain. Each breaks this pact, however. Zanche and Vittoria have actually conspired together, and seek to use the agreement as a pretext for killing Flamineo. Flamineo, however, has emptied the pistols. He briefly fakes his death, before spectacularly “rising up” again.

Flamineo’s License to Beg and English Poor Laws

Webster’s Cain-like Flamineo does not, however, connect the mark of Cain to a pardon (this despite the large role that pardons play in *The White Devil*) but to the legal documents (variously termed licenses, passports, patents, letters of protection) that authorize certain persons to beg. Officially, however, the poor laws had in 1601 eliminated licenses to beg.²⁴ From this perspective, the document Vittoria gives Flamineo, his “patent to beg,” also begins to look, as with the Wakefield Cain’s “releasse,” like a “doubly worthless.”

In fact, Elizabethan legislation had been progressively trying to eliminate licensed begging for at least the last decade and a half of the sixteenth century. Licensed begging was usually conceived of as a kind of temporary stop gap for those who were for some

²⁴ See Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England, 1350-1600* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 274ff.

reason not identified among the deserving poor of a particular parish. Parishes were supposed to ensure that they collected and distributed money in an official manner to their members who were verified as unable to work. A major reason for the push to eliminate licensed begging was the rampant counterfeiting of documents and the counterfeiting of identities..

The plans for maimed ex-soldiers provides an instructive example of the kinds of challenges involved in late Elizabethan attempts to eliminate begging. The 1590s had seen legislation stipulating that there were to be specific levies for their support at the county level and pensions distributed. It was declared that soldiers who received (or were supposed to receive) the pension but were nevertheless caught begging forfeited their pensions and were to be punished as rogues. As the historian of the sixteenth and seventeenth century poor laws, Marjorie McIntosh drily notes, “The new plan did not serve its desired purpose of eliminating begging by individual ex-soldiers.” Evidently, the pensions proved in various ways to be insufficient.²⁵

Flamieno conceives of the practice of begging as the work particularly of the ex-soldier who has been abandoned by the sovereign whose battles he fought. To his brother Marcello, a soldier in the employ of the Duke of Florence, he recommends: “Let others live by begging. Be thou one of them. Practice the art of Wolner in England to swallow all’s given thee; and yet let one purgation make thee as hungry again as fellows that work in a sawpit” (45-48). Wolner, apparently, attained fame for his willingness to eat anything

²⁵ McIntosh, 167.

but met his match when fed a live eel that he could not keep down.²⁶ Flamineo inventively creates an image of begging as an indiscriminate acceptance of fake nourishment that only results in greater emptiness.

Flamineo also has an instructive exchange with Francisco, the Duke of Florence, while the latter is disguised as a Moorish soldier. Flamineo notes, “If this soldier had a patent to beg in churches, then he would tell them stories” (5.1.110-111). He also has some “politic” advice for Francisco with regard to Bracciano:

The Duke says he will give you pension: that’s but a bare promise; get it under his hand. For I have known men that have come from serving against the Turk; for three or four months they have had pension to buy them new wooden legs and fresh plasters; but after twas not to be had. And this miserable courtesy shows, as if a tormenter should give hot cordial drinks to one three-quarters dead o’th’ rack, only to fetch the miserable soul again to endure more dog days. (5.1.129-137)

Like the Wakefield master’s medieval Cain, Webster’s early modern Cain critiques sovereign authority, pointing out the abuses of the law undertaken by the crown. Both begging and pensions, in Flamineo’s view, amount to a form of abandonment to bare life and, disturbingly, share a very similar structure to the elaborate pardoning performances of the sovereign: they involve a seemingly indefinite *temporalization* of life qua bare life.

I wish to underline this similarity by one more example of official pardon granted by James I. In 1607, he extends a royal pardon to a group of enclosure rioters from Northhamptonshire:

In calling to our Princely remembrance, that in the late Rebellion upon pretence of Depopulation and unlawfull Inclosures, the greatest number of the offenders have not beene proceeded with according to Justice and their traitorous deservings, no nor so much as apprehended or touched for the same, although they bee in no better case or degree, then those few which have suffered or beene

²⁶ *The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays*, ed. Weis, 377, n. 46.

called in question: There want not some reasons and circumstances which (if wee would consult onely with policie or passion) mought induce us to further severitie, and a more generall execution of the Law upon the same offenders. For wee are not ignorant, that of all other seditions and rebellions, none doth bring such infinite waste and desolation upon a Kingdome or State, as these popular Insurrections, which though they doe seldome shake or indanger a Crowne, yet they doe bring a heape of calamities upon multitudes of innocent Subjects, and chiefly upon the Authors and Actors themselves.²⁷

The king asserts first that the “rebellion” has been undertaken only upon a “pretence”—this despite having instructed a local official to prosecute several landowners involved in the conflict for illegal enclosure. His reminder that those who have thus far escaped prosecution (there was apparently a quite large number) have done so only by chance oddly both points out the weakness of the law and employs it as a threat. He is sure to emphasize that this rebellion has been at no point any real threat to his sovereignty and that, in the words of Steve Hindle “rebellion is a self-canceling act” because this means of protesting “want” only results in more want.²⁸

In the second half of the document, James once again and more explicitly claims that the degree of material want caused by the enclosures in the region was far from severe enough to provoke rebellion anyway:

And againe, Wee doe observe, that there was not so much as any necessitie of famine or dearth of corne, or any other extraordinary accident, that might stirre or provoke them in that maner to offend; but that it may be thought to proceede of a kinde of insolencie and contempt of our milde and gracious Government, which mought (in some Prince) turne the same into more heavy wrath and displeasure. But We neverthelesse having at the very entrance of our Raigne, in the highest treasons against our owne Persons, intermingled Mercie with justice, are much

²⁷ James I, *By the King in calling to our princely remembrance* (Robert Barker: London, 1607, STC (2nd ed.) / 8402, Early English Books Online.

²⁸ Steve Hindle, “Imagining Insurrection in Seventeenth-Century England: Representations of the Midland Uprising,” *History Workshop Journal* 66, no. 1 (2008): 32, <https://doi-org/10.1093/hwj/dbn029>.

more inclined in this case, which concerneth a number of poore & simple people, to extend our naturall clemencie towards them. Whereupon we have resolved to set wide open the gate of our Mercie unto them, and to bestowe upon them our free Grace and Pardon, without further Suite or Supplication.

Referencing that touchstone pardon in the “Main” and “Bye” case at the beginning of his reign, James has even more reason for condescension in this case of “poore & simple” people who, presumably, lack understanding of how great a fault it is to challenge his authority. Hence, the argument of the sovereign in both the cases of the ex-soldiers and the rioters proceeds on the grounds that these persons should not seek alms or level the enclosures in attempts to feed themselves *because they have no reason to*; their bodies are firmly in the care of the state. The ex-soldiers and the “levellers” beg to differ.

Hindle notes that, “the view from Whitehall” notwithstanding, the Midland regions were in dire circumstances:

burials soar[ed] across the forest of Arden in the harvest year 1606-7. Within twelve months, moreover, the anxieties of the Warwickshire diggers were vindicated. By 1 June 1608, with corn prices having risen by thirty per cent over the preceding twelve months, The Crown was forced to issue the ‘dearth orders’ under whose terms the royal prerogative was used to regulate the grain markets.²⁹

As Flamineo’s brief lament at the loss of Bracciano suggested, the sovereign’s double-edged power to decide the exception ensures he can dispense banishment and pardon, death and favors. For Agamben, it is critical to recognize that all these categories ultimately fail to hold up as distinctions:

What has been banned is delivered over to its own separateness and, at the same time, consigned to the mercy of the one who abandons it—at once excluded and included, removed and at the same time captured. The age-old discussion in juridical historiography between those who conceive exile to be a punishment and

²⁹ Hindle, 32.

those who understand it to be a right and a refuge ... has its root in this ambiguity of the sovereign ban . . . The originary political relation is marked by this zone of [indifferentiation] in which the life of the exile . . . borders on the life of *homo sacer*. . . This relation is more original than the Schmittian opposition between friend and enemy, fellow citizen and foreigner. The ‘estrarity’ of the person held in the sovereign ban is more intimate and primary than the extraneousness of the foreigner.³⁰

When the sovereign issues a ban on beggars, he or she excludes them from certain kinds of communal relationships such as the opportunity to spin a tale for a group of Churchgoers, but refuses to expel them completely from the community; instead they are compelled to partake in the sovereign’s mercy, whether in the form of a pension or punishment as a rogue. Agamben argues that “*In the city the banishment of sacred life is more internal than every interiority and more external than every extraneousness.*”³¹ These early modern beggars and protestors are exiles, nearly and in some cases destined to be *homines sacri*, who yet reside in the heart of the state.

Proliferating Earthly Cities and the Zone of Indifferentiation

Agamben in the section from which I just quoted notes the importance of the concept of the exile to ancient Greek and Roman political thought. One extremely influential heir to this tradition is Augustine, who discusses Cain and Abel at length in Book Fifteen of *City of God*:

Of these two first parents of the human race, then, Cain was the first-born, and he belonged to the city of men; after him was born Abel, who belonged to the city of God. . . . When these two cities began to run their course by a series of deaths and births, the citizen of this world was the first-born, and after him the stranger in this world, the citizen of the city of God, predestinated by grace, elected by grace,

³⁰ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 110

³¹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 111, italics in original.

by grace a stranger below, and by grace a citizen above. . . .Accordingly it is recorded of Cain that he built a city, but Abel, being a sojourner, built none. For the city of saints is above, although here below it begets citizens, in whom it sojourns till the time of its reign arrives . . . in which they shall reign with their Prince, the King of the ages, time without end.³²

Augustine casts Abel as the stranger, the one who wanders and sojourns, the one who does not care to be tied down and to build a city. He subscribes to a vision that there is a higher and better way that leads ultimately to reward, while Cain, as the builder of the city of men, depends on the values of that city for his “sense of place and of identity” and so commits fully to maintaining his place in it, at whatever cost.³³ Webster gives voice at points during the play to more Abel-like characters, who focus their vision on the heavenly city: Isabella, Cornelia, and Marcello (for a time).

More strongly stressed in *The White Devil*, however, is the inability of every character to escape from the violence of the earthly city and reject their citizenship in it. Part of the difficulty comes from the fact that there are so many corrupt cities: just as Webster multiplies his Cain figures, he also allows earthly cities to proliferate, refusing to let any one stand apart from the others, ensuring that citizenship in one of them ultimately amounts to citizenship in all of them. For example, he drives home the point that Bracciano’s removal of his household to Padua does absolutely nothing to remove it from the kind of corruption that in Rome allowed Monticelso to preside over a patently unfair trial of patently sinful Vittoria and, shortly thereafter, to be elected Pope.

³² Augustine, *City of God in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers First Series*, vol 2 ed. Philip Shaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), 285, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102>.

³³ Quinones, 37.

The power of the *illusion* of an escape—of the delusions involved in failing to see the zone of indifferention at the heart of political communities—is frequently stressed by this play. Bracciano and Vittoria, for instance, make their escape during the conclave that will elect Monticelso. The newly elected Pope issues a proclamation regarding the pair: “We do denounce excommunication / Against them both. All that are theirs in Rome / We likewise banish” (4.3.69-71). This speech which, let us not forget, is a response to news that they have *already* fled the city, thus, sounds a bit hollow. They have preempted the Pope in his banishment of the family and their escape highlights the yet again the tension between whether an event should be viewed as one of unfortunate banishment or of opportunity, if one chooses to see it as such, to build a new life. Bracciano appears little bothered that he has been excommunicated, for he is happy enough that his social standing among princes and dukes appears unharmed:

It hath pleased
The great ambassadors of several princes,
In their return from Rome to their own countries,
To grace our marriage, and to honour me. (5.1.55-59)

He does not need Rome, for the society of that city and, indeed, of the greater Catholic world, assembled for the papal election, has seen fit to come to him.

And yet all the while the audience knows that Bracciano’s success in freeing and marrying Vittoria has been carefully orchestrated by the Duke of Florence, his former brother-in-law who, although publically claiming to have little interest in Isabella’s death, delights to see that he has “directed [Bracciano] the way to marry a whore” (4.3.57). The Duke of Florence has also tricked Ludovico into thinking that the Pope has commissioned him to do away with the Duke of Bracciano. In fact, after having

accomplished the task of killing Bracciano (along with Flamineo, Vittoria and Zanche) Ludovico's proudest accomplishment seems to be what he has made of his banishment. In response to hearing the new, young Duke of Bracciano's proclamation that he should be tortured, Ludovico crows "I do glory yet, / That I can call this act mine own. . . . / I limned this night-piece, and it was my best" (5.6.294-95; 297). He glories in the accomplishments in the city of man. Ludovico—like the Wakefield Cain, like Flamineo, like Vittoria—thinks that he has resisted and still resists the power of the sovereign ban that would abandon him without abandoning him, extending his life only *qua* bare life. *The White Devil*, while deeply critical of the ways in which sovereign power manifests itself also remains alert to the blindness, evilness, pride in those Cain-figures who energetically but futilely resist it.

The kinds of hollow victories they win—the clever ironies, the mock resurrection, even the sharpest moments of satire—might call to mind again the figure of Bale's Seditio. That figure Bale handled uneasily, because Seditio so effectively suggested the dangers of purely performative self-transcendence that might not stop at destroying only explicitly targeted communities.

Flamineo, Vittoria, Ludovico, Francisco are all, like Seditio, energetic partitioners, breakers, *interrupters*. And yet, perhaps paradoxically, given that it is one another they keep interrupting, none seem to experience any particularly arresting moments of being really *interrupted*, in the way that Bosola will be in *The Duchess of*

Malfi after he has killed the titular character (4.2.346ff).³⁴ Such interruption yields for Bosola a sense of community conceived of as a kind of claim on emptiness: “We are only like dead walls or vaulted graves / that, ruined, yields no echo” (5.5.96-97).

Roberto Esposito, whom I mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, writes in *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community* that, in community, people discover themselves to be “*Not* subjects.” He continues,

Or subjects of their own proper lack, of the lack of the proper. Subjects of the radical impropriety that coincides with an absolute contingency or just simply “coincides,” that falls together. Finite subjects, cut by a limit that cannot be interiorized because it constitutes precisely their “outside”; the exteriority that they overlook and that enters into them in their common non-belonging. Therefore the community cannot be thought of as a body, as a corporation [*corporazione*] in which individuals are founded in a larger individual. Neither is community to be interpreted as a mutual, intersubjective “recognition” in which individuals are reflected in each other so as to confirm their initial identity; as a collective bond that comes at a certain point to connect individuals that before were separate. The community isn’t a mode of being, much less a “making” of the individual subject. It isn’t the subject’s expansion or multiplication but its exposure to what interrupts the closing and turns it inside out: a dizziness, a syncope, a spasm in the continuity of the subject.³⁵

This study has reckoned with many dramatic representations of subjectivities interrupted by certain kinds of limits: the horizons, as it were, that surround them and challenge efforts to interiorize or assimilate them. More exactly, it has tried to grapple with the processes by which individuals and communities are mutually constituted, or, mutually constituted by each other’s deficiencies. It has also emphasized a recurrent mark of our

³⁴ John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi* in *The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays*, ed. René Weiss, (New York: Oxford UP, 2009).

³⁵ Esposito, Roberto, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 7.

creaturely limits, one to which Bale, Woodes, Heywood, Shakespeare, and Webster abundantly testify: namely, our proneness, as Aristotle, not only to imitate one another but to acquire our distinctive sociality by means of that very imitation. Of particular interest have been moments in which, whether wittingly or willfully or not, characters are presented with sources of, in Esposito's phrasing, "dizziness," of syncopation, of "spasms" that interrupt, and thereby reveal as ephemeral the seeming continuity of this or that community.

We echo and re-echo each other—in prayer, in parody, in our typologies, in scriptural allusions, in doctrinal disputes, in our tears, in our mutual forgiveness, in our chatter, and in our chant. Sometimes even our chant may strike the unsympathetic ear as mere chatter. And yet this study has sought to pay due respect to the truth that we are also, on some fundamental level, unable really and authentically to echo one another. In such singular moments of incapacity, of self-constituting exposure to interruption, we may prove ourselves, after all, most intimately in communion.

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