Power Plays: Forgiveness in Shakespeare

ELIZABETH MAY HOYT

ABSTRACT

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Elizabeth M. Hoyt

Over the course of his plays, Shakespeare explores the fluid and contested nature of forgiveness. Is it possible for a leader to forgive his opponents without undermining his own hold on political power? Should secular law allow scope for Christian mercy, in keeping with the principle known as equity? Do the imperatives of honour require revenge, rather than forgiveness? Is it possible to forgive oneself? Through a variety of hypothetical plot-lines, Shakespeare evokes the ideas of influential classical and early modern philosophers such as Aristotle, Seneca, and Machiavelli, as well as theologians such as Calvin, evaluating the merits of their claims about power, mercy, and the value of forgiveness in light of his own compelling, persuasive, and particular sense of human nature.

In the Greco-Roman tradition forgiveness was passive, more akin to the forgoing of revenge than to the active rituals found in the New Testament. David Konstan, for example, goes so far as to argue that forgiveness, as we understand it today, did not exist in the ancient world. The advent of Christianity, as well as the later Reformation, reshaped assumptions about the nature of forgiveness, giving rise to incongruities and tensions, not only between Christianity and pagan thought, but also within Christian theology itself.

Throughout Shakespeare's lifetime, foreign ideas flooded into England. The most influential such import was Continental Calvinism, as the previously Catholic nation transformed into a stronghold of the Reformation. Calvinist soteriology changed how Shakespeare's contemporaries understood their relationship with God, which in turn affected their relationships with each other. The abolition of sacramental confession left English Protestants without a recognised common expression of forgiveness; no longer could they simply go to a priest for ritual absolution. Forgiveness thus became a more varied, uncertain, and public transaction.

Faculty of English

POWER PLAYS:
FORGIVENESS IN SHAKESPEARE

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, August 2020

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DECLARATION

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as anything that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Durham or any other University or similar institution except as declared and specified in the text.

At 80,448 words, this dissertation does not exceed the regulation length, including footnotes, but excluding bibliography, as prescribed by the Core Regulations for Research Degrees of the University of Durham.

This dissertation conforms here to the style-sheet of the Modern Humanities Research Association.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Patrick Gray, for his support and encouragement throughout this process. His understanding and empathy were as valuable as his academic insights, and I am forever grateful for his guidance.

To those friends who supported me and checked up on me throughout my PhD, I am particularly indebted. Lewis Wright, Samantha Bainbridge, Samuel Mellish, I would not have made it without you. PhD candidate mental health is something we should all take more seriously.

I am also grateful to Eric, Heather, and Nora Tippin, whose support and friendship made moving to a new country so much easier. Thank you for being my home away from home.

Moreover, I would like to express my gratitude to the mentors and life coaches who helped me stay on track, especially Fr. Daniel Themann. They provided much needed structure and encouragement.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents. Throughout my childhood they never ceased to remind me of the importance of education, and they sacrificed a great deal to ensure that I would receive the best education possible. I would never have made it this far without them.

INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness in the Western Literary Tradition

In *Before Forgiveness*, David Konstan argues that forgiveness, as many of us today understand it, 'is of relatively recent coinage, and that the ancient societies to which we often look as models…seem to have done perfectly well without it'.[1] According to Konstan forgiveness is necessarily an interpersonal affair, one which requires both parties to be actively engaged in order for forgiveness to take place. His definition of forgiveness is precise and systematic:

> it is a bilateral process involving a confession of wrongdoing, evidence of sincere repentance, and a change of heart or moral perspective – one might almost say moral identity – on the part of the offender, together with a comparable alteration in the forgiver, by which she or he consents to forego vengeance on the basis precisely of the change in the offender.[2]

In other words, both the forgiver and the forgiven must undergo a moral transformation in order for forgiveness to occur. Konstan goes on to argue, convincingly, that this kind of reciprocal forgiveness did not exist in the ancient world.[3] He then attempts the same argument with regards to the Jewish and Christian traditions, but with less success.

Within many ancient Greek texts there seem to be three main types of situations in which characters are forced to choose between revenge and forgiveness.[4] The first occurs when a character receives what might be called a slight to his honour: for example, he or his family is insulted in some way. The second revolves around murder: when a friend or family

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[1] David Konstan, *Before Forgiveness: The Origins of a Moral Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), p. 17.

[2] Ibid., p. 21.

[3] I would like to note here that, although Konstan's argument concerning the absence of forgiveness in the ancient world is convincing, his definition of forgiveness is, in my opinion, unnecessarily rigid. On account of this rigidity, Konstan is later forced to maintain that forgiveness did not properly exist in the New Testament. It is at this point that I diverge from Konstan's understanding of forgiveness and explore both the term and practice in a much more open way. This exploration occurs about half way through the present chapter.

[4] My choice of Greek texts was based on a desire to give a brief overview of some of the more well known characters and texts. I acknowledge that there are many more that could have been included, but I wanted to focus on a few that dealt specifically with Troy (for the Roman connections).

member of a character is killed, the hero must choose whether or not to take the life of the killer. The third happens when a character is forced to decide how to handle his own crime or fault—often something that he did unknowingly.

The paradigmatic example of both the temptation and the danger of revenge in Greco-Roman society was Homer's *Iliad*, which opens with the lines,

> Rage–Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus' son Achilles…
> Begin, Muse, when the two first broke and clashed,
> Agamemnon lord of men and brilliant Achilles.[5]

Homer's epic explains how Achilles is angry because Agamemnon has stolen his war-prize, the girl Briseis. Upon surrendering her to Agamemnon's envoys, Achilles cries out to the goddess Thetis, his mother, and his prayer makes clear that he feels dishonoured and disgraced by Agamemnon's theft:

> …Mother!
> You gave me life, short as that life will be,
> so at least Olympian Zeus, thundering on high,
> should give me honour—but now he gives me nothing.
> Atreus' son Agamemnon, for all his far-flung kingdoms—
> the man disgraces me, seizes and keeps my prize,
> tears her away himself![6]

As a result of this offence, Achilles refuses to fight for Agamemnon. The rest of the *Iliad* tells the story of this refusal. Even when the mighty Trojan prince, Hector, is slaughtering his countrymen, Achilles cannot be moved to return to the battle. He sends Agamemnon's envoys back to the king with a message that still rings of outraged honour:

> But now that he's torn my honour from my hands,
> robbed me, lied to me—do not let him try me now.
> I know *him* too well—he'll never win me over![7]

Despite the pleading of Odysseus, Ajax, and Phoenix, Achilles refuses to save the Argive armies from the onslaught of Hector. He is offered mountains of treasure, as well as Agamemnon's own daughter; nonetheless, he cannot bring himself to forgive the injury that

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[5] Homer, *Iliad*, trans. by Robert Fagles, ed. by Bernard Knox (New York: Viking, 1990), I.1, 7-8.

[6] Ibid., I.16-22.

[7] Ibid., IX.417-19.

Agamemnon has done him. In his own words, his honour has been torn from his hands; he has been robbed of Briseis, and he has been lied to. Donna F. Wilson argues that Homer portrays Achilles' refusal as 'without pity or restraint'.[8] Forgiveness is impossible, as he sees it, so he avenges himself by watching those who depended upon his strength die. They were, after all, complicit in Agamemnon's crime; they could have stopped him from dishonouring Achilles, but they did not.

Another example in Homeric epic of a character given the choice between forgiveness and revenge can be found in the *Odyssey*, and it involves Odysseus, one of the very men who tried to convince Achilles to give up his anger over his outraged honour. When put in a similar situation, Odysseus also refuses to put aside his anger at the many offences to his honour perpetrated by his wife's suitors, as well as her unfaithful maids. Instead, as Fiona McHardy argues, what is 'prominent' in 'Odysseus' decision-making process before he attacks' is a 'careful consideration of the costs and benefits of actions'.[9] His chief concern is not moral but instead how best to punish those who, in the words of Gilbert P. Rose, 'pose a direct threat to the household and family'.[10] When the arrows start to fly and Eurymachus tries to shift the blame to Antinous, promising Odysseus full and public reparation, Odysseus remains set on revenge:

> …would ye contribute each
> His whole inheritance, and other sums
> Still add beside, ye should not, even so,
> These hands of mine bribe to abstain from blood,
> Till ev'ry suitor suffer for his wrong.[11]

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[8] Donna F. Wilson, *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity in the Iliad* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), p. 109.

[9] Fiona McHardy, *Revenge in Athenian Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 52.

[10] Gilbert P. Rose, 'Odysseus' Barking Heart', *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 109 (1979), 228.

[11] Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. by William Cowper, ed. by Peter Levi and Richard Stoneman (London: Everyman, 1996), XXII.69-73.

Like Achilles, Odysseus is consumed with rage over the repeated offences to his honour and that of his son and wife. And, in truth, the offence of the suitors is more far reaching than that of Agamemnon. Nevertheless, it remains the case that the repairing of damaged honour leads to revenge, rather than forgiveness. In both scenarios the hero refuses offerings of peace, and in each case he thinks his revenge is justified.

The second type of situation in which ancient Greek characters are forced to decide between revenge and forgiveness is in the aftermath of a homicide. In the *Iliad*, for example, once he hears that Patroclus is dead, Achilles, bent on vengeance, takes up arms again. He knows that killing Hector will mean his own death, yet, as he says,

> …I've lost the will to live,
> to take my stand in the world of men—unless,
> before all else, Hector's battered down by my spear
> and gasps away his life, the blood-price for Patroclus,
> Menoetius' gallant son he's killed and stripped![12]

The term 'blood-price' is especially interesting. Hector has spilled the blood of Patroclus; the only way to balance the scales of justice is for Hector himself to die. Later, bent with grief over his friend's body, Achilles promises further bloodshed: to 'cut the throats, / of a dozen sons of Troy in all their shining glory'.[13] The death of one man is not enough to atone for Patroclus' death.

Another example of a character who believes that murder can only be atoned for with the blood of the perpetrator can be found in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Although the consequences will span generations, the immediate trouble begins when the Greeks first decide to set sail for Troy. They wait for months with no wind, until finally a priest tells Agamemnon that in order to obtain favourable winds he must sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia, to appease the goddess Artemis. Urged on by the injury to his brother's honour, Agamemnon lies to his wife, Clytemnestra, and tells her that she must send Iphigenia to him

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[12] Homer, *Iliad*, XVIII.105-109.

[13] Ibid., XVIII.392-93.

so that he can marry her to Achilles. According to Eric Dodson-Robinson, then, the *Oresteia* 'dramatises a collapse of law through the failure of the patriarch, Agamemnon, to protect the basic distinction between human and animal'.[14] Throughout the ten long years of the Trojan War, Clytemnestra nurses her rage at Iphigenia's murder, until finally she determines to kill her husband when he returns home from the war. In *Agamemnon* she succeeds in accomplishing her design; as Dodson-Robinson observes, Agamemnon himself 'becomes Clytemnestra's sacrificial offering'.[15] In the aftermath of her husband's murder, Clytemnestra defiantly proclaims to the Chorus: 'this man, Agamemnon, my husband, is dead, the work of this right hand, a work of justice'.[16] The Chorus is appalled, but she insists that his death was just and that she will continue to rule: 'hear this too, the force behind my oath. By that Justice I exacted for my child, by Ate, goddess of destruction, by the Fury to whom I offered up this man, I will never walk these halls in fear'.[17] Clytemnestra justifies her murder of Agamemnon to the Chorus by bringing up the murder of Iphigenia again and again. As in Homer's epics, murder is the price of 'justice'.

Agamemnon's murder is not left unavenged, however. In Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers,* Clytemnestra's son by Agamemnon, Orestes, spurred on by Apollo, returns from exile to avenge his father's death. As Dodson-Robinson explains, Orestes aims to '[reclaim] his identity through violence',[18] and, like his mother, he uses deceit to gain an advantage over his victim. Ironically, Clytemnestra tells the disguised Orestes that in her house all 'live under the eyes of Justice'.[19] When she later begs for her life, he tells her, 'my father's

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[14] Eric Dodson-Robinson, 'Violence, Revenge, and Metaphor in Aeschylus's Oresteia', in *Revenge, Agency, and Identity from European Drama to Asian Film* (Boston: Brill, 2019), 15.

[15] Ibid., p. 26.

[16] Aeschylus, 'Agamemnon', in *The Oresteia*, trans. by Ian Johnston, (Vancouver BC: Ian Jonhston, 2002), p. 19.

[17] Ibid., p. 19.

[18] Dodson-Robinson, *Oresteia*, p. 31.

[19] Aeschylus, 'Libation Bearers', in *The Oresteia*, trans. by Ian Johnston, (Vancouver BC: Ian Jonhston, 2002), p. 12.

destiny has chosen you. It decrees that you must die'.[20] And after he kills her, he protests to the Chorus, 'I killed my mother justly. She was guilty of my father's murder, a woman gods despised'.[21] Once again, 'justice' serves as explanation and justification for revenge.

The final type of situation in classical literature in which a character might be forced to choose between revenge and forgiveness is when he is forced to come to grips with some fault or crime that he himself has perpetrated. This situation is often made more complicated by dramatic irony: the character does not realise what he has done until after the fact, either because he is not privy to the knowledge that he needs in order to make an informed choice, or because he has a temporary lapse of sanity. In these cases, the character still feels a need for justice, but he is forced to direct that justice inward.

The most famous example of this kind of self-vengeance is Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. As question follows question, it slowly dawns on Oedipus not only that he killed his father, but also that he has married and had children by his own mother. The justice he swore to the dead Laius falls upon his own head. Everything he did he did unawares, and yet by his own oath he is banished, and by his own hand he loses his eyes, crying,

> you'll see no more the pain I suffered, all the pain I caused!
> Too long you looked on the ones you never should have seen,
> blind to the ones you longed to see, to know! Blind
> from this hour on! Blind in the darkness—blind![22]

Oedipus' innocent intentions do not cancel out the fact that his deeds are a scandal to his fellow countrymen, his family, and himself; nor is his lack of knowledge excuse enough to absolve him from responsibility for the plague that ravages Thebes.[23] Even involuntary misdeeds, though perhaps an occasion for pity, cannot be forgiven.

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[20] Ibid., p. 20.

[21] Ibid., p. 23.

[22] Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays,* trans. by Robert Fagles, ed. by Bernard Knox (New York: Penguin, 1984), ln. 1405-1409.

[23] Just as Oedipus polluted the marriage bed, so to his city suffers.

Roman literature reveals a similar fascination with vengeance. Like Virgil's *Aeneid*, Seneca's tragedies are preoccupied with personal revenge: slights to individual honour and honour killings are pervasive throughout. Whereas in Aeschylus' and Sophocles' tragedies, as well as Homer's epics, the gods are relatively active in human affairs, in Seneca's tragedies, like Euripides', the gods seem more distant; the focus instead seems to be on the ability of humans to choose their own courses of action and forge their own destinies.

Virgil's *Aeneid* offers an interesting middle ground and point of transition. Beginning where Homer left off, the *Aeneid* follows the journey of Aeneas, displaced from Troy on account of Menelaus' revenge, and ends with an entirely new act of vengeance that creates space for the founding of Rome. Thomas van Nortwick argues that the death of Pallas 'plays the same role in motivating the revenge of Aeneas as does the killing of Patroclus for Achilles'.[24] Nevertheless, although Aeneas seems to act in accordance with his own desires, throughout the *Aeneid* divine powers are also at play. Agatha H. F. Thornton maintains, for instance, that the death of Pallas was a 'divinely determined necessity'.[25] Aeneas chooses to kill Turnus in order to avenge the death of Pallas, yet this act of vengeance also seems necessary, even determined; as Elizabeth Kennedy argues 'the motivation of revenge…is part of an epic hero's role'.[26] Aeneas seems to choose to give in to the fury that propels him to kill Turnus, nonetheless, John Esposito would have readers pause, as Aeneas does, to more carefully consider Turnus' 'Priam-like request' that Aeneas think on his own father, Anchises, and pity the old age of Daunas.[27] Until Aeneas' eyes fall upon Pallas' sword belt hanging from Turnus' shoulder, it seems as though the young man might escape death on

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[24] Thomas Van Nortwick, 'Aeneas, Turnus, and Achilles', *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 110 (1980), 304.

[25] Agatha H. F. Thornton, 'The Last Scene of the *Aeneid*', *Greece and Rome*, 22.65 (1953), 82.

[26] Elizabeth Kennedy, 'Reading Aeneas through Hannibal: The Poetics of Revenge and the Repetitions of History', in *Roman Literary Cultures: Domestic Politics, Revolutionary Poetics, Civic Spectacle,* ed. by Alison Keith and Jonathon Edmondson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), p. 187.

[27] John Esposito, 'Who Kills Turnus? "Pallas" and What Aeneas Sees, Says and Does in Aeneid 12.939-52', *The Classical Journal*, 111.4 (2016), 466.

account of the pity Aeneas has for his father. However, as Esposito notes, 'when the baldric shines, a living "Pallas" becomes Turnus' killer' and, according to Aeneas he does not destroy Turnus, Pallas does'.[28] One could argue that fate caused Aeneas' eyes to alight on Pallas' belt, regardless, as Thornton says, 'it was Turnus' destiny to die, because it was Aeneas' destiny to be victorious in order to found Rome'.[29]

Whereas the gods do still play a significant role in Virgil's epic, Seneca's tragedies emphasise the role of individual determination, showing both men and women equally capable of horrific, self-inspired acts of vengeance. Speaking of Seneca's female avengers, M. L. Stapleton observes that 'to those who read carelessly, Medea and her cohorts seem irredeemably evil and full of rant'.[30] In other words, their rhetorical mastery is dismissed on account of their gender. Seneca's *femina furens* are not only as capable of taking vengeance as his male characters, but they are also more creative. Wondering what form her revenge might take, Medea asks herself: 'What can you do, a woman alone? Your strength / is nothing to theirs. You can only hurt yourself!'[31] Medea recognises that her gender puts her at a disadvantage, and, as a result, decides to focus her revenge plot on the one prize she has access to: her children. Some scholars view Seneca's women as acting under the influence of a bout of mental delusion or drunkenness, as in the case of Hercules' insanity in *Hercules Furens*. Berthe Marti, for instance, speaking of Phaedra and Medea, argues that

> both act as if possessed by a fit of temporary madness, both are equally devoid of self-control and decency, both are eager for revenge and give no thought to their own safety provided they can hurt and drag down in the ruin that overwhelms them the man against whom their resentment is so violent.[32]

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[28] Ibid., 476.

[29] Thornton, 83.

[30] M. L. Stapleton, *Fated Sky: The Femina Furens in Shakespeare* (London: Associated University Presses, 2000), p. 15.

[31] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, 'Medea', in *Seneca's Tragedies: In Two Volumes*, trans. by Frank Justus Miller (London: Heinemann, 1927), ln. 57-58.

[32] Berthe Marti, 'Seneca's Tragedies. A New Interpretation', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 76 (1945), 230.

Marti's reading of these characters echoes Seneca's *De Ira,* in which he describes the consuming nature of anger: 'raving with a desire that is utterly inhuman for instruments of pain and reparations in blood, careless of itself so long as it harms the other, it rushes onto the very spear-points, greedy for vengeance that draws down the avenger with it'.[33] Medea's wild abandon certainly seems of a piece with this description. Although characters such as Phaedra and Medea are consumed with rage, they are not passionate without reason. Medea, for example, feels that Jason has betrayed her; she perpetrated horrible crimes in order to help him, she gave up everything she had ever known in order to become his wife, and she now, not unreasonably, expects her devotion to be reciprocated. When Jason is instead unfaithful, she thus resorts to a cruelty that is as extreme as her pain, and her passion focuses her mind. For Gianni Guastella, 'the logic of Medea's revenge demands that a parallel injury be inflicted on her family by marriage as compensation for the injury this marriage inflicted on her family of origin'.[34] Medea is so incapable of forgiving, so bent on revenge, that she is willing to murder her own children in order to achieve it. And by this step, according to Harold Loomis Cleasby, she exceeds 'the measure of her revenge'.[35]

In the Old Testament, another source Konstan uses in his argument for the absence of forgiveness in the ancient world, Samson closely resembles the avengers of the Greco-Roman tradition. Moreover, as Michael J. Smith observes, his life 'is dominated by his interactions with women'; whether active or passive, the role they play in his acts of revenge are unmistakable. [36] In the book of *Judges* there are several instances in which Samson unleashes vengeance on the Philistines, and in each case it is because they have damaged his honour by stealing something from him. In the first instance, Samson declares himself

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[33] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, 'On Anger', in *Moral and Political Essays.* ed. by John Cooper and J.F. Procope. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995, p. 17.

[34] Gianni Guastella, 'Virgo, Coniunx, Mater: The Wrath of Seneca's Medea', *Classical Antiquity*, 20.2 (2001), 215.

[35] Harold Loomis Cleasby, 'The Medea of Seneca', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 18 (1907), 68.

[36] Michael J. Smith, 'The Failure of the Family in Judges, Part 2: Samson', *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 162 (2005), 426.

'blameless' in what he does against the Philistines because they have taken his wife and given her to another man.[37] In retaliation he catches three hundred foxes, sets them on fire, and lets them run through the fields of the Philistines destroying their corn and vineyards. When they retaliate by burning the woman and her father, he specifically says, 'yet I will be revenged of you',[38] and kills many of them before retiring to a cavern. They have taken something from him, and in retaliation he takes something from them: their lives.

The second, more famous example of Samson's revenge occurs after he has been betrayed by Delilah and blinded by the Philistines. At the feast of his enemies in Gaza, as he rests between two pillars, he cries out to the Lord, 'O Lord God, remember me, and restore to me now my former strength, O my God, that I may revenge myself on my enemies, and for the loss of my two eyes I may take one revenge'.[39] The Lord hears his prayer, Samson regains his strength and pulls down the pillars, collapsing the roof and killing both himself and his captors. In this case, the offence and the desire for revenge are both named explicitly: Samson says outright that he wants revenge. For Susan Niditch, his vengeance is just: the occasion for revenge is, once again, a personal assault against the person of the avenger, and no forgiveness is possible; the offended hero can only be appeased through the death of those who have injured him.[40] Pnina Galpaz-Feller argues, by contrast, that despite the violent nature of his revenge, 'Samson's deed is conceived as an act of heroism, sacrifice, and redemption'.[41] I would argue Niditch and Galpaz's arguments are complementary: Samson accomplishes his desired revenge by bringing about the death of

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[37] Judges, 15.3. All biblical quotations are taken from: *Douai-Rheims Catholic Bible* (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1899).

[38] Judges, 15.7.

[39] Ibid., 16.28.

[40] Susan Niditch, 'Samson as Culture Hero, Trickster, and Bandit: The Empowerment of the Weak', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 52.4 (1990), 624.

[41] Pnina Galpaz-Feller, "'Let my Soul Die with the Philistines' (Judges 16.30)", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 30.3 (2006), 325.

his enemies, while at the same time destroying the enemies of his people. Thus, in his death he is both avenger and hero.

Looking at these examples alone from both the classical and Jewish traditions, it might seem that within such a culture of revenge no degree of forgiveness is possible. Nevertheless, circumstances do arise in classical literature and the Old Testament where a forgiveness of sorts does seem to take place. And again, the paradigmatic example can be found in the *Iliad*, in Priam's embassy to Achilles. As Sarah Tompkins remarks, 'it is hard to imagine how Priam felt, watching the body of his beloved son trail the chariot of his rival'.[42] Covered in dirt and blood, Priam could not bear to see the body of Hector thus exposed. After a perilous journey to Achilles' camp, he kneels before the murderer of his sons and begs him to take pity on him as a father:

> …pity me in my own right,
> remember your own father! I deserve more pity…
> I have endured what no one on earth has ever done before—
> I put to my lips the hands of the man who killed my son.[43]

Wilson rightly argues that Priam here 'deploys the figure of the father not as a stratagem for domination but as the basis of an appeal for pity and restraint'.[44] At this supplication, Achilles is so overcome with grief for his own father, Peleus, and his friend, Patroclus, that he weeps with Priam and agrees to give him the body of his son. It is tempting to imagine that in releasing Hector's body Achilles somehow forgives Hector for the murder of Patroclus. Such a reading, however, would be difficult to reconcile with Achilles' warning to Priam:

> Do not stir my raging heart still more.
> Or under my roof I may not spare your life, old man—
> suppliant that you are—may break the laws of Zeus![45]

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[42] Sarah Tomkins, 'Priam's Lament: The Intersection of Law and Morality in the Right to Burial and Its Need for Recognition in Post-Katrina New Orleans', *University of the District of Columbia Law Review*, 12.1 (2009), 93.

[43] Homer, *Iliad*, XXIV.588-91.

[44] Wilson, p. 130.

[45] Homer, XXIV.667-69.

Clearly, Achilles is still angry—with Hector, yes, but also with Patroclus for getting killed, and with himself for allowing it to happen. However, despite the anger he harbours toward Hector for the murder of his friend, in the end Achilles does not refuse to return the body of the fallen warrior to his father. No forgiveness takes place; rather, Hector is released to Priam on account of the pity the king himself implores and the manifest will of the gods. Even if Achilles' concession falls short, however, of post-classical standards of forgiveness, it is a step in their direction. Wilson argues that Priam's successful appeal reawakens Achilles, brings him back from the dead, and 'reactivate[s] him as a social, living, human being', which in turn 'represents his reintegration into the human community'.[46] In many ways Wilson is right, Achilles' interaction with Priam does force him to reintegrate into the human community. Sadly, however, as Achilles himself is aware, he is about to die and leave said community behind.

The Old Testament Book of Genesis offers two parallel examples of forgiveness rituals: the story of Joseph and his brothers and the story of Jacob and Esau. Sold into slavery by his brothers, Joseph eventually becomes the governor of Egypt. When his brothers come in search of food during a famine, he initially hides his identity from them, although later he does reveal who he is and relocates them to Egypt. His brothers blame their hardships on themselves and interpret them as punishment for betraying Joseph. Joseph himself, however, interprets the same events as the will of God working for the preservation of his family. 'God sent me before', he tells his brothers, 'that you may be preserved upon the earth, and may have food to live. Not by your counsel was I brought hither, but by the will of God'.[47] According to Joseph, there is nothing to forgive: their betrayal was the

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[46] Wilson, pp. 132-33.

[47] Genesis, 45.7-8.

instrument of God's will. The kind of interpersonal forgiveness that Konstan wants to see, therefore, is arguably absent.

According to Konstan's definition, forgiveness must be secular, between two human beings, rather than between man and God, and include both parties' clear-cut recognition of the offender's former deliberate injury to the victim. Perhaps the most challenging case, then, for his argument that this kind of forgiveness does not appear in the Old Testament is the story of Jacob and Esau. After Esau has been cheated out of his birthright by trickery, Rebecca tells Jacob to flee to Haran as Esau 'threateneth to kill' him.[48] After many years in the house of Laban, Jacob decides to return home, but he is afraid of his brother's anger. He sends Esau many gifts and embassies, much as the Greeks do to Achilles in the *Iliad*. When he finally goes in person, he prostrates himself seven times before his brother. Esau then, for his part, runs to meet him, embraces him, kisses him, and weeps.[49] It is difficult not to read this episode as an example of interpersonal forgiveness, fulfilling even the most stringent of Konstan's conditions.

This meeting also bears a striking resemblance, however, to the ancient Greco-Roman ceremony of supplication, by which two parties could be formally reconciled. Konstan describes these rites as including four distinct steps: the supplicant's approach to the supplicand; the performance of certain gestures or verbal appeals, like Jacob's prostrations, for example; the making of the petition; and the evaluation and judgment of the plea by the supplicand.[50] Konstan insists, moreover, that the essence of such supplication 'resided in sparing the defeated, not in forgiving'.[51] Seneca helps to elucidate the difference in *De Clementia*, where he defines clemency as a 'restraint of the mind when it is able to

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[48] Genesis, 27.42.

[49] Genesis, 33.4.

[50] Konstan, p. 13.

[51] Ibid., p. 14.

take revenge'.[52] While conceding that 'it is harder to show restraint when retribution is motivated by a sense of injury', Seneca nonetheless maintains that showing clemency is the surest way for a ruler to ensure his own safety and security.[53] Generally speaking, Seneca believes demonstrating clemency increases the glory of one in a position of power, because he could exact revenge, yet refrains from doing so. Supplication, by this light, although it does in effect reconcile two parties, is an act of generosity, and, Konstan argues, self-preservation, rather than forgiveness.[54] The meeting of Jacob and Esau, with its series of prostrations and Esau's generosity from a position of power, thus becomes more ambiguous. The lack of any further details in the original text regarding motivation make a definitive reading unattainable.

Scattered throughout Greco-Roman literature, as well as the Old Testament, interactions which at least resemble interpersonal forgiveness, such as Esau's greeting of Jacob and Achilles' return of Hector's body to his father, Priam, anticipate a moral revolution, the rise of Christianity. In this new paradigm, forgiveness is embraced as a form of *imitatio Christi*: emulation of the divine. Konstan tries to argue that, in the New Testament, 'there is nothing like a systematic philosophical interrogation of the concept [of forgiveness] and seeking one is likely to be a frustrating exercise'.[55] 'Systematic philosophical interrogation of the concept', however, is not the only or even necessarily the most effective way to teach a new perspective on forgiveness. Konstan's objection suggests that he misunderstands the literary form of the Gospels, in particular. They are not written as philosophical treatises, but instead as biographical accounts. Forgiveness is explained through practical demonstration and particular example, rather than theoretical, abstract

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[52] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *De Clementia*, ed. by Susanna Braund (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 2.1.

[53] Ibid., 1.20, 1.10.

[54] Konstan, p. 14.

[55] Ibid., pp. 122-23.

word-splitting, in the style of analytic philosophy. In keeping with this basic oversight, Konstan also fails to register that God's interaction with man is presented as a model for our interaction with each other. Jesus repeatedly urges his disciples to follow his example: 'be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect';[56] or again, 'learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart'.[57]

This doctrine of forgiveness is reaffirmed by the Church Fathers, as well, in the early centuries of Christianity. St. Paul admonishes the Ephesians, 'be ye kind to one another; merciful, forgiving one another, even as God hath forgiven you in Christ'.[58] Soon after he continues, 'be ye therefore followers of God, as most dear children; / and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us'.[59] The action encouraged here is one of imitation: be forgiving, as God is. Later Church Fathers echo St. Paul. St. John Chrysostom, speaking of this passage from Ephesians, notes, 'forgive another, and thou art *imitating* God, thou art made like unto God. It is more our duty to forgive trespasses than debts; for if thou shalt forgive debts, thou wilt not therefore be *imitating* God; whereas if thou shalt forgive trespasses, thou art *imitating* God'.[60] Once again, the emphasis is on imitation of the divine, and it is this imitation that St. John encourages the faithful to perform. God forgives us our sins; therefore, we are to forgive the sins of others.

In his sermons on the New Testament, St. Augustine of Hippo says, 'brethren, if we have sins let us forgive them that ask us. Let us not retain enmities in our heart against another. For the retaining of enmities more than anything corrupts this heart of ours'.[61] Here

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[56] Matt., 5.48.

[57] Matt., 11.29.

[58] Ephesians, 4.32.

[59] Ephesians, 5.1-2.

[60] John Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians and Homilies on the Epistle to the Ephesians of St. John Chrysostom,* trans. by John Henry Parker (London: F. and J. Rivington, 1845), Homily 17, p. 281. [Emphasis in the original].

[61] Augustine, 'Sermon 114 on the New Testament', in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Vol. 6,* trans R.G. MacMullen, ed. Philip Schaff and Kevin Knight (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1888), Sermon 114.

St. Augustine makes clear that forgiveness is as much for the sake of the forgiver as it is for the forgiven. If we do not forgive, he says, it 'corrupts' our hearts. A millennia later, St. Thomas Aquinas concurs with Augustine and expands upon this sentiment. In his commentaries on the New Testament, Aquinas insists on our emulating the divine: 'He must be imitated insofar as it is possible for us to do so—a son must imitate his father'.[62] When we couple Aquinas' certainty that Christians are obliged to imitate their heavenly Father with the admonitions of the other Fathers that we forgive, it becomes clear that a forgiveness based, not on abstract prescriptions, but on concrete imitation of divine perfection, as illustrated by the example of Jesus's earthly life, is intrinsic to Christianity.

In *The Human Condition,* Hannah Arendt describes Jesus as the 'discoverer of the role of forgiveness in human affairs', a claim Konstan explicitly rejects.[63] Even if the New Testament and the Church Fathers do not provide the philosophical analysis of forgiveness that Konstan desires, it seems wilfully obtuse to deny that the ethical perspective they present, in their own more literary fashion, radically differs from the norms of previous pagan Greek and Roman literature, as well as the Old Testament. Even Nietzsche, an outspoken enemy of Christianity, acknowledges that 'from the trunk of the tree of revenge and hatred…grew something just as incomparable, a *new love*, the deepest and most sublime kind of love'.[64] As Nietzsche sees it, with the crucifixion man's moral horizon changed. Christ's Passion is the exemplary foundation of a new moral order, one grounded in forgiveness, and one that he, Nietzsche, refuses to accept. As St. Paul explains, 'we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles'.[65]

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[62] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians,* trans. by Matthew Lamb, ed. by Joseph Kenny (Albany: Magi, 1966), 5.1.

[63] Hannah Arendt, p. 238, quoted in Konstan, p. 112.

[64] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality,* trans. by Carol Diethe, ed. by Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), I.viii.

[65] 1 Corinthians 1.23.

Konstan's complex, exigent definition of forgiveness, adopted from the work of his friend, Charles Griswold, seems all but designed to preclude this model, and by extension a more plausible, straightforward sense, like Nietzsche's, of Christianity as the *fons et origo* of our modern tendency to admire interpersonal forgiveness. Why, for instance, is forgiveness only forgiveness if it is between two human beings? What, then, of the Christian belief that God himself is a fellow human being? Why is forgiveness conditional, as Konstan insists, upon 'evidence of sincere repentance'?[66] It seems a step too far to argue that it is impossible to forgive someone who does not themselves repent. In the interests of a striking, counterintuitive argument, Konstan inflicts Procrustean violence on the definition of the concept in question.

Shakespeare and Forgiveness

Sarah Beckwith argues that 'the Reformation was an argument about the very nature of forgiveness'.[67] The changes that swept through the English church had a profound influence on interpersonal relationships: John Calvin's theology restructured Shakespeare's contemporaries' understanding of their relationship to God and, by extension, their approach to their relations with other people. For Calvin, salvation had been accomplished once and for all, through the passion of Christ; God had already decided whom He wished to save. Forgiveness was not an ongoing action on the part of God, but something granted once. The Catholic sacrament of auricular confession, therefore, was not necessary, or so he maintained, and the practice rapidly disappeared within the English church. Without this concrete cultural convention, the act of forgiveness came to seem amorphous; malleable;

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[66] Konstan, p. 21.

[67] Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2011), p. 37.

even optional. What, then, did 'forgiveness' mean to Shakespeare and his contemporaries? Without its former foundation in common ritual, as well as earlier Christian theology, forgiveness could begin to seem no more than a tool of emotional consolation that one could take or leave at will.

In *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness,* Sarah Beckwith discusses how the 'pathways and possibilities of forgiveness' underwent a transformation 'in the absence of auricular confession and priestly absolution'.[68] For centuries the Catholic Church had claimed the power to forgive sins, and the Catholic faithful believed in the power of absolution to do just that. Sacramental confession and priestly absolution brought with them the assurance that all sins were forgiven; that one could have a new beginning. With the dissolution of sacramental confession English Christians, by contrast, no longer enjoyed the comfort of unburdening themselves through verbal admission of guilt to God's priest. Beckwith looks closely at the consequences of this loss, arguing that

> Shakespeare's theatre…charts from first to last, with extraordinary clarity and remorselessness, the transformed work of language in human relating…when authority is no longer assumed in speech acts of sacramental priesthood, it must be found, and refound, in the claims, calls, judgements of every person who must single themselves and others out in these calls, grant them the authority in each particular instance. So Shakespeare's theatre is a search for community, a community neither given nor possessed but in constant formation and deformation.[69]

For Beckwith, forgiveness must 'involve faith and hope in the future', because it is 'an exchange of love, and coterminous with the growth and possibility of love': 'both an acknowledgement of separateness and a relinquishment of autonomy'.[70]

In light of the etymology of the term, which derives from the Old English *gieven*, meaning give, and *for*, meaning away, Bernardine Bishop sees forgiveness as a giving away 'that carries a notion of nothing in return, and outrages the sense we have so deeply of fair's

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[68] Ibid., p. 2.

[69] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

[70] Ibid., p. 10.

fair and just deserts'.[71] Equally important for her is knowledge, that is, that the forgiver see and know the deed for what it is, examining his own part in it.[72] Forgiveness for Bishop can never be effortless; rather, 'it has to be the outcome of a struggle, anguish, fluctuation, conflict: a profound engagement with good and evil within and without the self, which leaves all changed'.[73] She believes strongly in Konstan's idea of moral transformation, but she does not hold, as he does, that this internal change must occur in both parties in order for true forgiveness to be present. Precisely to the contrary, she acknowledges, rather, that 'people forgive those who do not repent, though it may be more difficult'.[74] Bishop's idea of forgiveness is much closer to the ideal expressed in the New Testament and championed by the early Church Fathers. It is a deeply personal process, one that does not rely on the goodwill of the other party. Beckwith, too, focuses on the search for forgiveness, as opposed to the struggle in learning to forgive. For her, as for Bishop, honest acknowledgement of what has taken place is instrumental. She would agree with Konstan, however, that forgiveness is not an isolated, individual act, but rather something that depends on relationship to another person.

Of the three—Beckwith, Bishop, and Konstan—Beckwith's concept of forgiveness most closely resembles that found in the New Testament. In describing forgiveness as 'an exchange of love', she captures the great mystery of the Christian life, a bond between God and the soul that consists in 'a relation, not a possession'.[75] I agree with Beckwith that forgiveness requires an acknowledgement, and with Bishop that it is an incredibly difficult, deeply personal process. However, I would, and do, resist the urge to define it as a step-by-

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[71] Bernardine Bishop, '"The Visage of Offence': A Psychoanalytical View of Forgiveness and Repentance in Shakespeare's Plays', *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 23.1 (2006), 27.

[72] Ibid., 29.

[73] Ibid., 30.

[74] Ibid., 31.

[75] Beckwith, *Forgiveness*, p. 12.

step process in the way Konstan does. Throughout this treatise the idea of evolution is particularly important; forgiveness, and what it means to forgive, is not as a static notion because it is a human act, and humans are in a constant state of evolution. Moreover, because such things as circumstance and intention influence action, they also have a part to play in the forgiveness ritual. Consequently, no two instance of forgiveness will be exactly the same. Forgiveness, then, is as varied as the individuals who engage with it.

A further complication arises in Shakespeare's plays, insofar as forgiveness seems to be bound up in his understanding of gender. Commenting on feminist criticism of Shakespeare, Michael Friedman notes his 'particular concern with the formation of gender roles, both male and female, and their repercussions for the behaviour of men and women', especially in such areas as courtship and marriage.[76] Shakespeare often represents forgiveness as the natural response of female characters, who are supposed to be 'more fair, virtuous, wise, chaste, constant, qualified, and less attemptable'.[77] Male characters, by contrast, treat forgiveness as a weakness, seldom engaging in anything like forgiveness either of those who have wronged them or of themselves.

In Shakespeare's plays, a recurrent context for consideration of the pros and cons of forgiveness is apparent infidelity. In Renaissance England, as Juliet Dusinberre points out, there was a double standard when it came to chastity, and Shakespeare largely conforms to this cultural norm.[78] His heroines often forgive men for sexual promiscuity, whereas a woman's alleged impurity tends to be met with unalloyed disdain. Examples include Claudio's treatment of Hero, as well as Othello's berating, striking, and finally murdering Desdemona. For a woman in Shakespeare's world, Posthumus is the exception that proves

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[76] Michael Friedman, *'The World Must Be Peopled': Shakespeare's Comedies of Forgiveness* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2002), p. 22.

[77] *Cymbeline* 1.5.59-61. N.B.—All quotations from Shakespeare are taken from: *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, eds. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015).

[78] Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

the rule that sexual infidelity is the unforgivable sin. Robert Miola offers some insight into this mindset:

> In all cases chastity defines female identity, and, in some important sense, constitutes female essence and existence. Female chastity, moreover, defines male identity: the men are husbands not cuckolds, sole possessors (in physical and legal senses) of their wives. The discovery of female chastity restores order and enables the worlds of the plays to cohere and continue.[79]

Dusinberre, like others, believes this double standard results, at least in part, from the propensity to view female chastity as a 'property asset'.[80] Men had a vested interest in having faithful wives so that they could be sure that their sons were indeed their own, thereby ensuring their property and possessions would be passed on to legitimate heirs. Given this systemic anxiety, Dusinberre proposes, sexual infidelity, even on the part of one single woman, 'jeopardis[ed] the chastity of women in general'.[81] Such a high value was set on chastity, moreover, that if a woman lost it, she lost everything; all other virtues were seen to revolve around this one.

Forgiveness, then, jostles uneasily with assumptions about honour in the sometimes overconfident, sometimes anguished, minds of Shakespeare's male heroes. Consequently, in the end, they seldom choose to forgive those whom they see as having wronged them, especially when it is they themselves whom they see as the authors of their own destruction. Nonetheless, in his later plays, particularly *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare does not shy away from leading his male characters to engage in serious introspection. They recoil from the prospect of forgiveness, yet it seems nonetheless a worthwhile exercise. As Friedman suggests, 'he seeks to explore a common and imperfect love whose course is fraught with detours, roadblocks, and potential dead ends represented by male tendencies

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[79] Robert Miola, '"Wrying but a Little?": Marriage, Punishment, and Forgiveness in Cymbeline', in *Shakespeare and Renaissance Ethics*, ed. by John D. Cox and Patrick Gray (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014), p. 188.

[80] Dusinberre, p. 52.

[81] Ibid., p. 52.

toward fickleness, suspicion, lust, and sexual irresponsibility'.[82] When a male character longs to be forgiven, guilt troubles his mind, and he knows, even admits to himself, that he has done wrong, as Leontes and Posthumus do. His request for forgiveness, however, if he can bring himself to such a point, tends to be implicit, whereas the forgiveness bestowed by Shakespeare's women tends to be both explicit and complete.

Given the moral turmoil introduced by the Reformation, as well as the new sense of the distinctiveness of pagan antiquity that emerged over the course of the Renaissance, one might be led to ask: what was forgiveness for Shakespeare? His earlier works, such as *Titus Andronicus,* are more sympathetic to the Old Testament principle of 'an eye for an eye', a formulation which would have been readily intelligible to ancient Greeks and Romans and which, as Robert Grams Hunter notes, 'was not notable for any admixture of benignity'.[83] As Shakespeare matures, however, he interrogates the validity of vengeance, until finally, in the late romances, his sense of the appeal of revenge gives way all but entirely to a more Christian view of forgiveness, in keeping with the moral revolution proposed in the New Testament. Even here, however, as Patrick Gray argues, what Shakespeare wants is not so much to instruct his audience as to 'find some relief from his own private cognitive dissonance', the lack of harmony between forgiveness in the abstract and forgiveness in practice. [84] For Gray, when we watch Shakespeare's plays, 'we as audience are passengers along for the ride. We are observers, bystanders, looking in on someone else's thought-experiments'.[85] Current literature on forgiveness in Shakespeare focuses on the problem plays and the late romances; this dissertation considers forgiveness across a wider range of

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[82] Friedman, p. 27.

[83] Robert Grams Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness* (New York: Columbia UP, 1966), p. 12.

[84] Patrick Gray, 'Seduced by Romanticism: Re-imagining Shakespearean Catharsis', in *Routledge Companion to Shakespeare and Philosophy*, eds. Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne, (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 517.

[85] Ibid., p. 517.

Shakespeare's works, and each chapter takes as its starting point a different philosopher or theologian.

Philosophy and Forgiveness

In the first chapter, 'Machiavelli, War, and the Challenge of Forgiveness in Shakespeare's English History Plays', I consider the influence of Machiavelli's *The Prince* on the Elizabethan understanding of political power in general, as well as Shakespeare's more particular treatment of forgiveness in his English history plays. Although printing of Machiavelli's works was, as Margaret Scott notes, 'banned in England throughout the sixteenth century',[86] and in spite of L. Arnold Weissberger's argument that 'all the evidence that can be adduced leads to the conclusion that Machiavelli had no appreciable influence on the thought or policy of Tudor England',[87] I argue in this chapter that Shakespeare engages with and interrogates Machiavellian principles throughout both tetralogies. Given their focus on rebellions, wars, and political upheaval, these plays offer Shakespeare an ideal background for a sustained evaluation of Machiavelli's sometimes scandalous conclusions.

Henry J. Abraham, J. W. White, Gaetano Mosca, and Raymond Belliotti all argue that our modern propensity to confuse Machiavelli with 'Machiavellianism' arises as a result of insufficient attention to the political setting of his time. Beliotti, for instance, argues that in *The Prince* there is a 'separation of politics and private morality' disregarded by those hostile to Machiavelli himself.[88] Those who undermine Machiavelli's philosophy, he maintains, overlook his fundamental and distinctive concession that 'necessity often compels the ruler, who wishes to maintain the state, to commit deeds which are properly

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[86] Margaret Scott, 'Machiavelli and the Machiavel', *Renaissance Drama*, 15 (1984), 149.

[87] L. Arnold Weissberger, 'Machiavelli and Tudor England', *Political Science Quarterly,* 42.4 (1927), 605.

[88] Raymond A. Belliotti, 'Machiavelli and Machiavellianism', *Journal of Thought*, 13.4 (1978), 296.

judged as immoral when performed outside the political arena'.[89] For Joseph L. Hebert , when 'Machiavelli appears to offer us the choice of one set of goods over another', what he is actually doing is placing us 'in the position of having to create the good for ourselves'.[90] Without a sense of the historical context of *The Prince*, it is easy to characterise Machiavelli himself as the sort of villain that he sought to avoid. More precisely understood, Machiavelli's ideal ruler is one who carefully combines the Aristotelian ideal of equity and the Senecan concept of clemency with a Christian understanding of responsibility and virtue. For, as Beliotti explains, 'the Machiavellian ruler is always concerned with the common good of his nation, not with his own aggrandisement'.[91] Both of Shakespeare's tetralogies are full of uprisings and wars, and, as Theodor Meron observes, like Machiavelli's Prince, 'Shakespeare's kings understood that foreign wars could serve to divert attention from internal troubles'.[92] When they act according to this principle, they are able, as Henry IV encourages his son to do in *2 Henry IV*, to 'busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels'.[93]

W. A. Armstrong argues that 'the essential character of the prince's dealings with mankind is epitomised by Machiavelli's doctrine of the Lion and the Fox. Like the lion, the prince must be strong and ruthless; like the fox, he must be cautious and cunning'.[94] Nowhere is this maxim truer than in a time of war. Like Machiavelli, just war theory seeks to define the parameters of the 'just' within the extraordinary circumstances that war inevitably entails. A 'just war' seeks to rebalance the scales of justice between countries.

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[89] Ibid., 294.

[90] L. Joseph Hebert, 'The Reward of a King: Machiavelli, Aquinas, and Shakespeare's Richard III', *Perspectives on Political Science*, 44:4 (2015), 241.

[91] Belliotti, 294.

[92] Theodor Meron, *Henry's Wars and Shakespeare's Laws: Perspectives on the Law of War in the* Later Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), p. 32.

[93] *2 Henry IV*, 4.5.213-14.

[94] W. A. Armstrong, 'The Influence of Seneca and Machiavelli on the English Tyrant', *The Review of English Studies,* 24.93 (1948), 26.

Generally speaking, a nation either protects itself from a foreign invasion, or it invades, preemptively, in order to ensure its own safety (*jus ad bellum*). In all its dealings with another country, however, just war theory holds that both parties are to remain conscious that war is, in and of itself, a special circumstance. For Shakespeare, as well, anything that happens under wartime conditions is to be considered not only by the usual standards of morality, but also in light of the principle of equity. In short, as Patrick Gray explains, 'the ethics of war as Shakespeare sees it is an ethics of equity'.[95] Machiavelli himself incorporates elements of 'just war' theory into *The Prince,* when he says, for instance, that leaders should not punish the people of a country for the bad choices of their leaders.

Within the context of rebellion and war conversations about forgiveness are especially complicated, not least because a show of mercy has the potential to exacerbate tension within already tenuous relationships. A king is not a private citizen. Every word he speaks, like every other action that he takes, has consequences not only for himself, but also for his people. He has a duty, as Shakespeare sees it, to remain constantly aware of this burdensome responsibility. Given this obligation, moreover, for a king, even more so than for a private citizen, what is 'just' or 'equitable' during a time of peace might be untenable, even dangerous, during a time of war. In peacetime, for example, Henry V could not be forgiven for ordering the execution of unarmed prisoners. Since his order to do so comes, however, in the middle of a battle in which the English forces are massively outnumbered, evaluating its moral standing, right or wrong, becomes much more complicated. Given the danger posed by the number of enemy soldiers, Henry's choice, although shocking, is grounded in a desire to protect his own men. As king, his first duty of care is to his own people. Had he not given the order, and had the tide of the battle turned, he would rightly be

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[95] Patrick Gray, 'Shakespeare and War: Honour at the Stake.' *Critical Survey*, 30.1 (2018), 21.

considered negligent, foolhardy even, for not giving the command, as will be discussed further in chapter 1.

In Shakespeare's tetralogies this calculus of strength through power, corroborated by less rational, deeply engrained assumptions about masculinity and martial honour, comes into conflict with Christian doctrines of forgiveness and mercy. In the second tetralogy, for example, Shakespeare uses Falstaff to question the intrinsic value of honour, while at the same time using honour as Prince John's excuse for executing the rebels at Gaultree. While both of these events will be discussed in the course of this treatise, this particular chapter focuses specifically on the person of the king himself. Should kings ever put aside their personal desire to forgive their enemies in light of the obligations of their office? Does the delicate nature of royal political power and the complicated connection between honour and authority blur the line between mercy and weakness? In his English history plays, Shakespeare explores the the tension that arises between various, sometimes competing impulses towards Christian forgiveness, male pride, martial 'honour', and political effectiveness.

The second chapter, 'Seneca, Honour, and the Dilemma of Revenge in Shakespeare', builds on the discussion of war and rebellion in the first. Rather than kings and leaders, however, this chapter focuses on the individual. Individual revenge was a complicated subject in Elizabethan England, not least because, as Lily B. Campbell observes, 'it was perceived that God sometimes uses as his instrument of vengeance a private avenger'.[96] This chapter, then, seeks to understand how the desire to maintain honour influences cases in which a character, usually male, seeks to repair his honour through private vengeance. Honour hinders Shakespeare's characters' capacity to forgive real or imagined personal slights. Early modern concepts of honour seemed to be inseparable, moreover, from what

[96] Lily B. Campbell, 'Theories of Revenge in Renaissance England', *Modern Philology*, 28.3 (1931), 292.

Curtis Brown Watson identifies as 'an unquestioned faith in the reality of good and evil—be it Christian, or pagan-humanist, or most frequently a mixture of the two'.[97] Honour is a muddled idea born of both pagan and Protestant influence, at one and the same time a catalyst toward Christian virtue and a dubious justification for sin.

In the Greco-Roman world honour was a man's most prized possession, and he was willing to do whatever was necessary in order to defend it. This desire to maintain personal dignity at all costs is a hallmark, especially, of Senecan tragedy. In his treatises on moral philosophy, Seneca argues that a disciplined mind can resist the emotions that, like Sirens, seek to dislodge reason from her throne. Of particular concern is anger, because, as he says, 'there is no emotion which anger cannot master';[98] it is the quintessential 'enemy of reason'.[99] It is

> oblivious of decency, heedless of personal bonds, obstinate and intent on anything once started, closed to reasoning or advice, agitated on pretexts without foundation, incapable of discerning fairness or truth, it most resembles those ruins which crash in pieces over what they have crushed.[100]

According to Seneca, anger is not only dangerous to the individual, but also a destructive force within society as a whole. In his tragedies, he demonstrates how anger can lead to a vicious cycle of revenge, illustrating by vivid example the destructive nature of anger and the disastrous effects of unrelenting efforts at vengeance. For Maurice Charney, revenge in Shakespeare's plays 'springs from a psychological context, especially the idea of victimisation, and from the effort to restore some sort of integrity and personal wholeness to one's life'.[101] Seneca emphasises, by contrast, the superiority of inaction, born of the

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[97] Curtis Brown Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1960), p. 93.

[98] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, 'On Anger', in *Moral and Political Essays*, eds. John Cooper and J.F. Procope, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), p. 75.

[99] Ibid., p. 21.

[100] Ibid., p. 17.

[101] Maurice Charney, review of *The Shapes of Revenge: Victimization, Vengeance, and Vindictiveness in Shakespeare* by Harry Keyishian, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 49.4 (1998), 456.

supreme self-control made possible by subordinating individual desires to reason. For Reuben Arthur Brower, 'Seneca's example is worth insisting on, because Seneca had given the Elizabethans an approved classical model too potent to be resisted except by a disciplined and mature mind'.[102] Reading Seneca, by this light, is an exercise in understanding the performance of suffering; it forces the reader to consider the lengths to which a broken man might go to redeem his honour, all while questioning the legitimacy of his pursuit.

Roman stoicism had a singular influence on Elizabethan notions of revenge, and, as Colin Burrow observes, Seneca was 'principally known in the later sixteenth century as the most notable Roman expositor of Stoic thought'.[103] As Gordon Braden explains, 'Stoic tenets are present very close to the origins of Renaissance literary culture, and they arrive linked to a renewed feeling for the honorific ambition of Roman civilisation as well'.[104] For Braden, 'stoicism enters Renaissance literature as part of the metaphorics of nobility'.[105] Like the Romans, Elizabethans were obsessed with honour; so much so that Curtis Brown Watson argues that 'for the Renaissance aristocracy, honour, good name, credit, reputation, and glory come close to the very centre of their ethical values and receive expression almost whenever we look in the records of the nobility of that age'.[106] A man's honour was inseparable from his place within society: what we might call today 'social status'. Undermining the honour of an individual, therefore, could have seismic repercussions for a much larger community. On account of these far-reaching implications, David E. Phillips maintains that 'if the social order could somehow benefit from the revenger's action, then

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[102] Reuben Arthur Brower, *Hero & Saint: Shakespeare and the Graeco-Roman Heroic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), p. 201.

[103] Colin Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), p. 167.

[104] Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger's Privilege* (Yale UP: New Haven, 1985), pp. 73-74.

[105] Ibid., p. 77.

[106] Watson, *Honor*, p. 64.

that revenge would be, if not openly approved, at least silently tolerated'.[107] Theatre offered Shakespeare a forum to test this idea that revenge might be acceptable in certain circumstances.

Like Seneca's vacillating protagonists, Shakespeare's characters, in the words of Brower, 'address their "great souls" in the ebb and flow of moral and emotional debate'; 'like the wise men of the Stoics, they wage a war within'.[108] Although, as Burrow notes, scholars have repeatedly 'sought out precise verbal parallels between Seneca and Shakespeare',[109] the compatibility of their ideas is in this case more important than such borrowing of language. For, Robert Miola observes, 'Seneca provides an important paradigm of tragic style, character, and action'; 'his influence surpasses the narrow limitations of genre'.[110] Shakespeare, like Seneca, uses his 'revenge' tragedies not to validate vengeance, but instead to question its efficacy as a means of achieving self-fulfilment. Paul Hughes explains, 'to forgive another is to engage in an internal drama: one struggles with oneself to overcome one's resentment'.[111] Shakespeare uses his plays as thought-experiments to explore the relationship between action and consequence, between religious fervour and philosophy. Revenge tragedy, inspired as it was by Senecan tragedy, competed with Christian ideals of mercy and forgiveness in what could easily seem like efforts to legitimise private citizens pursuing violent revenge. Contemporary Calvinist representations of God as, in human terms, vengeful, or at least unforgiving, exacerbated this tension. Shakespeare, however, as Patrick Gray argues, sees Christianity as essentially a religion of forgiveness, including self-acceptance:

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[107] David E. Phillips, review of *The Shapes of Revenge: Victimization, Vengeance, and Vindictiveness in Shakespeare* by Harry Keyishian, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 27.4 (1996), 1153.

[108] Brower, p. 68.

[109] Burrow, p. 162.

[110] Miola, *Seneca*, p. 10.

[111] Paul Hughes, 'What Is Involved in Forgiving?', *Philosophia*, 25.1 (1997), 36.

> in keeping with the precepts of Christianity, Shakespeare sees dignity in accepting the limits of individual agency, as long as it is in the interests of compassion…The most important expression of this acceptance of intrinsic human weakness is forgiveness, which includes not only pardoning others, but also acknowledging and making peace with one's own particular sins and failures.[112]

This chapter, then, considers both Christianity and classical antiquity as influences on Shakespeare's representation of revenge. For, as Watson notes, 'Shakespeare's heroes, like the great lords of Elizabeth's court, feel an allegiance to Christian as well as to Greek and Roman ideals'.[113] This divide leads to confusion, until finally the protagonist finds himself obliged to take one side or the other in a moral conundrum.

The third chapter, 'Aristotle, Equity, and Forgiveness in Shakespeare', begins by noting the relationship between the Aristotelian concept of equity (Greek, *epieikeia*; Latin, *aequitas*) and the evolution of competing concepts of the law in Elizabethan England. The Reformation caused a shift in the influence of the ecclesiastical courts, while at the same time enabling the rise of English common law, which, in turn, was manipulated by the Crown in order to more firmly establish the legitimacy of Queen Elizabeth I and confirm Protestantism as the national religion. John Guy, for instance, argues that 'the mutual co-operation of the Crown and lawyers was essential both to the English Reformation's success and to the survival of common lawyers as a profession'.[114] The English Reformation, therefore, 'was declared and enforced by parliamentary statutes and by common-law procedures: the theory was that of the unitary sovereign state. Treason, not heresy, was the penalty for denying royal supremacy'.[115] Thus, it might be said that the evolution of English law was guided by a present need to ensure a predetermined future. For, according to G. L. Harris, 'the maintenance of law was the very basis and essence of ordered society and the

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[112] Patrick Gray, 'Shakespeare vs. Seneca: Competing Visions of Human Dignity', in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Senecan Tragedy: Scholarly, Theatrical and Literary Receptions*, ed. by Eric Dodson-Robinson (Boston: Brill, 2016), p. 225.

[113] Watson, *Honor*, p. 73.

[114] John Guy, 'Law, Lawyers and the English Reformation', *History Today* (1985), 16.

[115] Ibid., 20.

exercise of royal authority'.[116] Nonetheless, as Eric Heinze is quick to point out, 'as early as 1516, Erasmus' "Education of a Christian Prince"…advocates law as a curb on monarchical power and aristocratic excess'.[117] In setting out their vision of the future, legal theorists in Elizabethan England drew extensively upon what was for them a familiar concept: 'equity'.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle argues against a formalist interpretation of law in favour of a more nuanced approach. In order to ensure a just outcome, he proposes, one must consider not only the frame of mind of the person who committed a certain act, but also the circumstances in which he committed it. From this perspective, someone who planned a murder ahead of time, for example, would be guiltier than someone who accidentally killed his neighbour in self-defence. For the just, according to Aristotle, consists in 'the proportional', just as 'the unjust is what violates the proportion'.[118] The nature of the equitable, then, is 'a correction of law where it is defective owing to its universality'.[119] Aristotle sees, in other words, that positive law by its very nature as a collection of general statements is unable to account for any and every conceivable circumstance of human action.

Shakespeare himself had personal experience with the Elizabethan courts. He was, for instance, reported for failing to pay his taxes in 1597, 1598, and 1600; and in 1612 he was called as a witness in a trial in the Court of Requests, where he gave testimony regarding the non-payment of a dowery.[120] More generally, as Daniel Kornstein explains,

> the pervasiveness of law in Shakespeare is perhaps to be expected in light of the role law played in English life in his time. Centuries of experience with the common law had

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[116] G. L. Harris, ed., *Henry V: The Practice of Kingship* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), p. 11.

[117] Eric Heinze, 'Power Politics and the Rule of Law: Shakespeare's First Historical Tetralogy and Law's "Foundations"', *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 29.1 (2009), 153.

[118] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* trans. by W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), V.iii.

[119] Ibid., V.x.

[120] Quentin Skinner, 'Shakespeare and the Legal World', *Counsel Magazine* (June 2016).

> moulded English attitudes. Legal proceedings were popular both as a form of entertainment and as a way for the litigious English to assert their rights.[121]

Shakespeare's plays, I argue, illustrate an interesting continuum of concepts of the law, ranging from autocracy to equity to formalism. Should personal intention and the vagaries of circumstance affect the rulings of a court of law?

The autocratic assumption that 'might makes right', in keeping with the Machiavellian perspective I consider in more detail in the first chapter, pervades Shakespeare's early English histories and Roman plays. In such a world law is arbitrary; judgments are whatever the leader wants them to be, not least because he has the means to enforce his personal interpretations of each case. In these plays, Shakespeare interrogates the place of precedent within a system of law, while at the same time illustrating the consequences of acting above or outside it. I then turn to the distinctive formalism which permeates the problem plays. As Erwin Chemerinsky explains, 'formalism promises objective law' and 'offers the hope that law truly can be separated from politics'.[122] As Ernest J. Weinrib observes, however, this common distinction between law and politics 'makes formalism seem at best a pathetic escape from the functionalism of law, and at worst a vicious camouflage of the realities of power'. Although, as David Crawford says, the purpose of the courts is 'to legitimate or to denounce certain types of behaviour',[123] Daniel A. Faber is correct when he points out that 'at the level of judicial practice, practical reason rejects legal formalism, the view that the proper decision in a case can be deduced from a pre-existing set of rules'.[124] Shakespeare's problem plays ultimately suggest that justice cannot be arrived at solely through a strict, literal, or 'legalistic' interpretation of the law,

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[121] Daniel Kornstein, *Kill All the Lawyers?: Shakespeare's Legal Appeal* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), p. 13.

[122] Erwin Chemerinsky, 'Getting beyond Formalism in Constitutional Law: Constitutional Theory Matters', *Oklahoma Law Review*, 54.1 (2001), 1.

[123] David Crawford, 'The Rule of Law?: The Laity, English Archdeacons' Courts and the Reformation to 1558', *Parergon*, 4.1 (1986), 160.

[124] Daniel A. Farber, 'The Inevitability of Practical Reason: Statutes, Formalism, and the Rule of Law', *Vanderbilt Law Review*, 45.3 (1992), 539.

without any consideration of mitigating circumstances. Finally, then, I consider Shakespeare's representation of equity. At times in Shakespeare's plays, crimes are weighed alongside their circumstances: questions such as how, when, why, and with what degree of knowledge aforehand complicated any more straightforward assignation of culpability. In the end, Shakespeare suggests, any legal system that strives to be both just and practicable must have equity at its heart.

The fourth chapter, 'Calvin's Reformation and Self-forgiveness in Shakespeare's Plays', examines how Shakespeare's protagonists react when they come to believe that they themselves have fallen into grievous moral error. Whereas previous chapters consider interpersonal relationships and the forgiveness that might be achieved within them, this chapter looks instead at the complex nature of internal forgiveness of the self, in light of the ongoing influence of the Reformation. Calvinist soteriology, which suggested the ultimate futility of man's efforts in his own salvation, haunted the lived experience of Shakespeare's contemporaries. In his exegesis of their disparate treatments of St. Paul's *Letter to the Romans*, Charles Raith observes that the main difference between Calvinist and Thomist theology is that 'Aquinas depicts Christ's work as occurring *in* and *through* the sinner, while Calvin depicts Christ's work as occurring *for* and *to* the sinner'.[125] The difference, in other words, is between God acting *with* the individual or *in spite of* the sinner in order to bring about salvation. Calvin's theology changed the way in which Englishmen viewed salvation: individuals no longer saw themselves as participating in the work of their own salvation. Confession, for example, was, in theory at least, no longer seen as necessary: a radical and disconcerting change. Debora Shuger observes that 'penance, bound up as it was with purgatory, indulgences, intercessory prayer, private masses, and pardoners, became the site

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[125] Charles Raith II, *Aquinas and Calvin on Romans: God's Justification and Our Participation* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), p. 54.

of early Protestantism's most violent attacks and the Reformation's most drastic changes'.[126] When sacramental confession disappeared, so too did the consolation and moral certainly of salvation that it had provided. Without a ritual to unburden themselves, people were left to their own private prayers, giving rise to no small degree of new anxiety.

Previous chapters illustrate just how difficult forgiveness of others can be. In this chapter, we see that self-forgiveness can be equally difficult. Suddenly the outrage and anger that are more typically directed at another are forced inward; guilt and shame lodge themselves in the soul. Jeffrie Murphy labels the resulting emotion 'moral hatred of self':

> a kind of *shame* placed on top of guilt: guilt over what one has done but, in cases where being a moral person is part of what Freud would call one's ego ideal, shame that one has fallen so far below one's ideal of selfhood that life—at least life with full self-consciousness—is now less bearable.[127]

Once this guilt and shame take root in the soul, despair is quick to follow. Ewan Fernie, for example, draws attention to Shakespeare's 'painfully clear and commanding images' of 'shame as death, as self-dissolving deformity, as an explosion of being, as the shattering of the self'.[128]

When one of Shakespeare's protagonists commits some heinous sin, he finds that he feels a need to act out some approximation of confession with his victim. Claudio, for instance, looks to Hero for forgiveness; Leontes to Hermione; Posthumus to Imogen.[129] In order to forgive themselves each of these protagonists feels compelled first to seek forgiveness from the woman whom he wronged. The performance of such forgiveness in Shakespeare closely follows the form of sacramental confession: first contrition, then confession, then penance. As Beckwith notes, however, 'forgiveness must involve faith and

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[126] Debora Shuger, 'The Reformation of Penance', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 71.4 (2008), 558. It should be noted that Penance was directly tied to the relationship between the individual and God—and, thus, to the Church as mediator.

[127] Jeffrie Murphy, *Getting Even: Forgiveness and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), p. 60.

[128] Ewan Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 82.

[129] It should be noted that *The Tempest* does not conform to the above mentioned model of forgiveness that is found in other of Shakespeare's late romances. The uniqueness of *The Tempest* is discussed in chapter 2.

hope in the future'; hence, for the couples in Shakespeare's comedies, and especially late romances, forgiveness proves to be 'an exchange of love, and coterminous with the growth and possibility of love'.[130]

Where faith, hope, and love are lacking, however, forgiveness, too, in the sense here of self-forgiveness or repentance, seems out of reach, as we discover through examples such as Macbeth, Othello, and Lear. As Patrick Gray observes, citing David Bromwich, 'when tragic heroes do repent, their repentance often seems to be somehow incomplete'.[131] When these tragic protagonists' misdeeds have caused irreparable harm, including, in particular, the death of the woman who might otherwise have forgiven them, they find themselves in a state of despair, which, if they cannot evade through the delusions of madness, they then seek to escape through suicide or a close analogue thereof, self-destructive recklessness. This chapter explores just how necessary the prior forgiveness of the injured party is to the self-forgiveness of Shakespeare's heroes. What is the nature of their inner struggle, as they interrogate their actions, their motives, and their own moral character? In this trio of tragedies, *King Lear* acts as a sort of bridging play: he does seek and find forgiveness in the arms of Cordelia, only to despair once again when she is taken from him.

In general terms, then, this dissertation seeks to explore and understand what 'forgiveness' meant to Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Taking into account the importance of circumstantial and cultural influences, I have chosen to take both a philosophical and contextual approach this topic. By considering leadership and war, personal honour, the law, and the self through the lens of recognised philosophical influences and Shakespeare's plays, I hope to elucidate both contemporary views of forgiveness and Shakespeare's own evolution of thought.

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[130] Beckwith, *Forgiveness*, p. 10.

[131] Gray, *Aristotle*, 5; David Bromwich, 'What Shakespeare's Heroes Learn', *Raritan: A Quarterly Review*, 29.4 (2010), 132-148.

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MACHIAVELLI, WAR, AND THE CHALLENGE OF FORGIVENESS IN SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLISH HISTORY PLAYS

> It is desirable to be both loved and feared; but it is difficult to achieve both and, if one of them has to be lacking, it is much safer to be feared than loved.[1]

In the late sixteenth century English minds were coming to grips with Machiavelli's controversial concept of an ideal prince. Although Machiavelli's works had been placed on the Index, censorship did not stop his ideas from penetrating deep into European consciousness. The longstanding notion of a divinely anointed king who held his authority directly from God was beginning to give way to the more practical notion of 'might makes right'. Tension developed, therefore, between the traditional ideal of the 'Christian king' on the one hand, and Machiavelli's insights into Realpolitik on the other, as both subjects and rulers sought to reconcile their desire for stable government with their moral discomfort at the unscrupulous means Machiavelli argues are sometimes necessary in order to secure it.

As early as the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, men as Barnes, Ockham, Wycliffe, Tyndale, and Erasmus maintained that kings were ministers appointed by God to rule and that, by extension, their subjects were obliged to obey them. Following the schism triggered by Henry VIII, as England came to adopt Reformed theology and ecclesiology, the English found themselves in a precarious situation. To ensure the security of Elizabeth's throne in the face of pressure from the Pope, it was deemed expedient that the divine prerogative of kings become, and remain, an entrenched belief in the hearts and minds of the common people. Scriptural warrant could be found in, for example, St. Paul's epistle to the Romans:

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[1] Nicola Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. by Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), p. 59.

> Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. / Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation…/ Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake…/ Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.[2]

With such an exhortation by the Apostle to obey authority as they would the divine law, it would not have been difficult to convince Christian subjects that, in principle at least, they should 'act in accordance with the will of God'. From this perspective, as E. M. W. Tillyard notes, 'to obey was a privilege and to question not to be thought on'.[3]

In 1922 John Neville Figgis published a treatise entitled *The Divine Right of Kings*, in it he examines how the political situation in England led to the development and acceptance of 'divine right' kingship. This attitude toward kings is as prevalent in Shakespeare's plays as it was in the minds of the common people: both kings and subjects, at least those portrayed in a positive light, subscribe to it. In Shakespeare's *Richard II*, we have perhaps the strongest arguments for divine right kingship. As early as Act 1, scene 2, John of Gaunt rebukes his vengeful sister-in-law for questioning it:

> God's is the quarrel; for God's substitute,
> His deputy anointed in His sight,
> Hath caused his death; the which if wrongfully,
> Let heaven revenge; for I may never lift
> An angry arm against His minister.[4]

Gaunt argues here that the reason he cannot avenge the death of Woodstock is because Richard, who is 'God's substitute', is responsible. Given his position as 'deputy anointed', God alone may judge Richard; a mere subject cannot 'lift an angry arm against His minister'. As convinced as Gaunt is of Richard's divine right, Richard himself is even more certain. Speaking of Bolingbroke's treason, he boldly declares,

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[2] Romans, 13.1-2, 5, 7.

[3] E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 73.

[4] *Richard II*, 1.2.37-41. in *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015). All subsequent quotations from Shakespeare's plays are taken from this same edition.

> Not all the water in the rough rude sea
> Can wash the balm off from an anointed king;
> The breath of worldly men cannot depose
> The deputy elected by the Lord.[5]

Richard firmly believes that God will protect him and defend his lawful right to the throne. Even after Bolingbroke's grip on the realm tightens, belief in Richard's right to the throne is so strong that the Bishop of Carlisle upbraids the usurper to his face:

> What subject can give sentence on his king?
> And who sits here that is not Richard's subject?
> Thieves are not judged but they are by to hear,
> Although apparent guilt be seen in them;
> And shall the figure of God's majesty,
> His captain, steward, deputy-elect,
> Anointed, crowned, planted many years,
> Be judged by subject and inferior breath,
> And he himself not present? O, forfend it, God,
> That in a Christian climate souls refined
> Should show so heinous, black, obscene a deed!
> I speak to subjects, and a subject speaks,
> Stirr'd up by God, thus boldly for his king.[6]

Here Carlisle reiterates the principle that the office of the monarch is sacred: no one has the power to judge the king save God Himself. While the theme of 'divine right' kingship recurs throughout the tetralogies, it is nowhere dwelt upon so thoroughly as in *Richard II.* Nevertheless, it is also in this play that we come to recognise the devious workings of the Machiavel.

Niccolò Machiavelli is, perhaps, one of the most misunderstood and misused political theorists of the post-Renaissance era. His oft-cited treatise, *The Prince*, has suffered both praise and condemnation as a manual for attaining political dominance. To appreciate *The Prince*, however, it is important to understand the context in which the piece was written. Machiavelli had just been tortured and banished from his native Florence following the retaking of the city by the Medici. If we take Romeo's response to being banished from Verona as any indication, banishment was sometimes felt to be a fate worse than death. *The Prince*, then, was written in the heat of passion. It was Machiavelli's attempt to regain his

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[5] Ibid., 3.2.54-57.

[6] Ibid., 4.1.121-133.

footing in the political sphere and to prove both his worth and loyalty to the Medici family. Moreover, as Henry Abraham suggests, 'Machiavelli was primarily and chiefly concerned with the practical goal of the national unification of Italy'.[7] Given the real and constant threat of foreign invasion, Machiavelli believed that the Italian states were more likely to survive if they united against a common enemy, rather than warring between themselves. *The Prince* represents his attempt to demonstrate how this unification might be brought about.

In Renaissance England the reception of Machiavelli was somewhat vexed, for, as Margaret Scott notes, the printing of Machiavelli's works was forbidden in England throughout the sixteenth century.[8] Nonetheless, N. W. Bawcutt argues, this prohibition did not stop Elizabethans from accessing his writings in Italian, French, or Latin translations.[9] Of particular note and influence was a book of Machiavellian maxims compiled by the Frenchman Innocent Gentillet in 1576. According to Bawcutt, Gentillet's commentary on Machiavelli's ideas amounted to a systematic renunciation of his maxims, which Gentillet deemed 'misconceived and pernicious in their influence'.[10] Despite the ban on Machiavelli's works, however, George Watson maintains that Machiavelli's chief political writings were known in English intellectual circles as early as the 1570s.[11] Playwrights, as well, must have had access to Machiavelli's ideas, as the link between Christopher Marlowe, who died in 1593, and Machiavelli is widely acknowledged by scholars.[12] Shakespeare, too, was referring to Machiavelli and the 'Machiavel' in the 1590s. Notwithstanding Machiavelli's

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[7] Henry J. Abraham, 'Was Machiavelli a "Machiavellian"?', *Social Science*, 28.1 (1953), p. 27.

[8] Margaret Scott, 'Machiavelli and the Machiavel', *Renaissance Drama*, 15 (1984), 149.

[9] N. W. Bawcutt, 'The "Myth of Gentillet" Reconsidered: An Aspect of Elizabethan Machiavellianism', *Modern Language Review*, 99.4 (2004), 863.

[10] Ibid., 864.

[11] George Watson, 'Machiavel and Machiavelli', *Sewanee Review*, 84.4 (1976), 637.

[12] See, for instance, Irving Ribner, 'Marlowe and Machiavelli', *Comparative Literature*, 6.4 (1954), 348-356. He begins this article with the declaration: 'In the last fifty years of Renaissance scholarship, few names have been coupled more often and with less agreement than those of Christopher Marlowe and Niccolò Machiavelli'.

popularity, however, Watson argues that Elizabethans, like many scholars today, were 'largely indifferent as Englishmen to the historical circumstances' in which Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*.[13] Irving Ribner notes that Machiavelli's ideas were consistently taken out of context and distorted in Elizabethan England, and he argues that it was this popular misunderstanding of Machiavelli that led to the emergence of the stereotype of 'the Machiavel'.[14] This caricature of Machiavellian leadership fused with the existing archetypes of the Senecan tyrant and the Vice character of the morality plays to create a supervillain, one which, Watson argues, exploited the horror that Elizabethans had for Machiavelli and his methods.[15]

Given this historical context, both Henry Abraham and Raymond Belliotti argue for a clear distinction between Machiavelli and 'Machiavellianism'. Whether we take Machiavelli to more closely resemble Abraham's clever republican or Belliotti's passionate lover, the result is the same: both men believe *The Prince* is misrepresented, and both agree that Machiavelli's ultimate motive in writing the piece was to help bring about the unification of Italy. Belliotti goes so far as to conclude that Machiavelli's treatises 'are not the labours of a dispassionate scientist, but rather the poems, aspirations, and implorations of a lover'.[16] Machiavelli recognised the danger in which Italy found herself as a loose assortment of warring city-states in constant fear of foreign invasion, and he wanted to preserve, protect, and save her from this threat. Belliotti's most significant conclusion, however, is that in *The Prince* 'the Machiavellian ruler is always concerned with the common good of his nation, not with his own aggrandisement'.[17] He argues, therefore, for a 'separation of politics and

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[13] Ibid., 632.

[14] Irving Ribner, 'Marlowe and Machiavelli', *Comparative Literature*, 6.4 (1954), 349.

[15] Watson, *Machiavel*, p. 644.

[16] Raymond A. Belliotti, 'Machiavelli and Machiavellianism', *Journal of Thought*, 13.4 (1978), 300.

[17] Ibid., 294.

private morality' that is often disregarded by interpreters more hostile to Machiavelli.[18] This conception of a Machiavellian leader as one who acts for the common good is entirely opposed to the popular understanding of the Machiavel as someone who relentlessly pursues his own ends. The distinction between private and public morality, in this case between the moral obligations of a private citizen and those of a king, is also crucial. In Shakespeare's England, a king was seen as set apart. When acting in his role as divinely appointed ruler, occasions could arise when he would be obliged to take morally questionable actions for the common good: actions that would rightly be condemned if taken by a private individual. *The Prince* might be considered a ruler's guide for how to approach these impossible situations.

The Influence of 'The Prince'

The increasing influence of *The Prince* reflects the movement of Christian princes away from Christian principles of kingship. Michael Manheim notes that during this period 'political leaders were victims of a kind of double-think whereby they sincerely believed themselves true and devout Christians, yet at the same time they felt increasingly justified in ignoring Christian precepts in political dealings'.[19] The idea took root that successful governance—the ability to rule and retain one's throne—was dependent on the use and acceptance of Machiavellian tactics. In the context of Shakespeare's English history plays, three Machiavellian admonitions are of particular interest: the necessity of war, the inevitability of acting immorally, and the importance of appearances.

According to Machiavelli, a ruler 'should have no other objective and no other concern, nor occupy himself with anything else expect war and its methods and practices',

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[18] Ibid., 296.

[19] Michael Manheim, *The Weak King Dilemma in the Shakespearean History Play* (NY: Syracuse UP, 1973), p. 80.

because, he argues, war 'is of such efficacy that it not only maintains hereditary rulers in power but very often enables men of private status to become rulers'.[20] For Machiavelli, war is not only a means of expanding one's kingdom but also an invaluable means by which the minds and hands of potential rivals can be kept occupied. Shakespeare's Henry IV gives voice to this view: on his death bed he exhorts Prince Hal to take on wars of conquest. 'Therefore, my Harry,' he explains, 'be it thy course to busy giddy minds / with foreign quarrels'.[21] Distracting the nobility, he believes, is necessary in order to consolidate power, not least because, as Machiavelli says, 'anyone who enables another to become powerful, brings about his own ruin'.[22] This observation proves true in *2 Henry VI,* where Richard Plantagenet, waiting patiently for a chance to claim the throne, is first made the Duke of York, then later handed the army with which he will subsequently overthrow his cousin. York elucidates the problem with leaving intelligent men idle:

> My brain, more busy than the labouring spider,
> Weaves tedious snares to trap mine enemies.
> Well, nobles, well; 'tis political done,
> To send me packing with an host of men;
> I fear me you but warm the starved snake
> Who, cherished in your breasts, will sting your hearts.
> 'Twas men I lacked, and you will give them me;
> I take it kindly, yet be well assured
> You put sharp weapons in a madman's hands.[23]

Left without the occupation of war, York is allowed to formulate his plan to overthrow the king, until finally, when war does come, it assists rather than inhibits his rise to power by supplying him with the men necessary to enact his plan.

Even though he recommends wars abroad, Machiavelli is exceedingly careful to explain that there is a right way and a wrong way to go about expanding one's domain. One cannot, for example, simply march into a country and massacre its inhabitants: 'for even if

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[20] Machiavelli, pp. 51-52.

[21] *2 Henry IV*, 4.5.212-214.

[22] Machiavelli, p. 14.

[23] *2 Henry VI*, 3.1.338-346.

one possesses very strong armies, the goodwill of the inhabitants is always necessary in the early stages of annexing a country'.[24] Machiavelli recognises that it is much easier to control a newly conquered country if the goodwill of the inhabitants is obtained. Therefore, control of one's army, including in particular not allowing soldiers to plunder towns or rape local women, should be of primary concern to a prince who wishes to preserve his power in conquered territories. Shakespeare's Henry V understands this principle well. For reasons of political prudence, as well as morality, he not only allows the hanging of Bardolph for robbing a church but further declares

> We would have all such offenders so cut off; and
> we give express charge that in our marches through
> the country there be nothing compelled from the
> villages, nothing taken but paid for, none of the
> French upraised or abused in disdainful language;
> for when lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the
> gentler gamester is the soonest winner.[25]

Henry, Machiavelli's Machiavel, is a master of situational context. He knows when to use the proverbial stick and when the carrot might be more effective. He understands that those who treat the people kindly and well are more likely to be embraced by the people because they will expect to fare well under their conqueror and so will welcome rather than oppose his rule.

Perhaps one of the most delicate decisions, however, comes after a new territory has been brought to its knees, for it is then that a ruler must decide how to deal with his enemies. Machiavelli declares that

> a conqueror, after seizing power, must decide about all the injuries he needs to commit, and do all of them at once, so as not to have to inflict punishments every day. Thus he will be able, by his restraint, to reassure men and win them over by benefitting them…For injuries should be done all together so that, because they are tasted less, they will cause less resentment.[26]

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[24] Machiavelli, p. 7.

[25] *Henry V*, 3.6.107-113.

[26] Machiavelli, p. 34.

Machiavelli is adamant that every thought, word, and deed, must be carefully considered, because no action is without consequences. Nevertheless, negative outcomes can be predicted, even controlled, if a prince acts with patience and determination.

Acquiring power is one thing; keeping it, however, is an entirely different matter. Machiavelli insists that success rests on the willingness of a prince to commit himself to morally questionable, but unavoidable, acts. He argues that

> how men live is so different from how they should live that a ruler who does not do what is generally done, but persists in doing what ought to be done, will undermine his power rather than maintain it. If a ruler who wants always to act honourably is surrounded by unscrupulous men his downfall is inevitable. Therefore, a ruler who wishes to maintain his power must be prepared to act immorally when this becomes necessary.[27]

A prince must take into account human fallenness where the political sphere is concerned; otherwise he risks deposition. The immoral acts that he envisages might be necessary include such things as crushing one's enemies so that retaliation is impossible and breaking one's word. When done to preserve power, Machiavelli views such actions in a positive light. He asserts

> a prudent ruler cannot keep his word, nor should he, when such fidelity would damage him, and when the reasons that made him promise are no longer relevant. This advice would not be sound if all men were upright; but because they are treacherous and would not keep their promises to you, you should not consider yourself bound to keep your promises to them.[28]

In addition to neglecting to fulfil promises, Machiavelli suggests that princes must take pains to deceive their subjects with regards to their own personal virtue. Although he might act in a ruthless manner or break his word, the monarch must always preserve an appearance of goodness: 'to those who see him and hear him, he should seem to be exceptionally merciful, trustworthy, upright, humane and devout'.[29] Reputation is paramount. As Machiavelli explains,

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[27] Ibid., pp. 54-55.

[28] Ibid., pp. 61-62.

[29] Ibid., p. 62.

> what will make him despised is being considered inconsistent, frivolous, effeminate, pusillanimous and irresolute: a ruler must avoid contempt as if it were a reef. He should contrive that his actions should display grandeur, courage, seriousness and strength, and his decisions about the private disputes of his subjects should be irrevocable. He should maintain this reputation, so that no one should think of lying to him or scheming to trick him.[30]

In short, the Machiavel must appear to be the epitome of clean-handed virtue, even as he is in fact willing to do whatever is necessary, not only to secure his own safety and power, but also to ensure the common good, understood in this case as the stability of his country, free from civil war. In Shakespeare there are many examples of the Machiavel. They do not always take the same form, however: some represent the clever, intelligent, unscrupulous man most commonly associated with Machiavelli's prince, whereas others act on motives that are much less devious.

In Shakespeare's two tetralogies we can see the playwright grappling with the incongruity between Christian ethics and this vision of leadership. It should come as no surprise, however, seeing how, as Manheim explains,

> the success of the Tudors was a triumph in the application of a Machiavellian view of leadership, whether they would acknowledge it under that name or not—and there is ample evidence of the approving familiarity men in Tudor English public life had with Machiavelli, despite their official opposition to his name and ideas.[31]

Given the numerous wars waged over who had the right to wear the English crown, it is understandable that the English public might doubt the ability of a truly Christian king to maintain his position and claim to the throne in an increasingly Machiavellian environment. John Roe argues that no other contemporary dramatist explored English monarchical history to the extent that Shakespeare did.[32] Shakespeare's tetralogies cover an extensive period of history, and he wrote them over the space of a decade. 'Between the writing of *Henry VI* at the beginning of the decade and *Henry V* at the end', Manheim contends that an obvious

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[30] Ibid., p. 64.

[31] Manheim, p. 2.

[32] John Roe, *Shakespeare and Machiavelli* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), p. 17.

change came over Shakespeare, as well as his audience.[33] An uncomfortable compromise emerges: both playwright and audience come to an uneasy truce with Machiavelli. There is an acknowledgement that sometimes a leader must do things that appear to be, or even are, questionable in order to ensure both the common good and a peaceful state. When surrounded by Machiavels, a king must also play the game in order to govern well and maintain control of his kingdom.

Just Wars and Equity

In *The Prince* Machiavelli obsesses over the intricacies and practicalities of war. Having established war as the primary means of obtaining national unity and princely prowess, he proceeds to expound a system of warfare that is particularly concerned with justice and equity. Just as laws seek to rebalance the scales of justice when they become unbalanced due to individual actions, even so a just war seeks to maintain the balance between nations, while at the same time ensuring that enemy soldiers and non-combatants are treated in a just way. Equity, which Aristotle deems a necessity, is that part of justice that takes into account the circumstances within which and intentions with which an action is carried out. Aquinas, following on from Aristotle, argues that 'when we are treating of laws, since human actions, with which laws are concerned, are composed of contingent singulars and are innumerable in their diversity, it [is] not possible to lay down rules that would apply in every single case'.[34] Given that human experience is as diverse as the individuals who populate the state, laws cannot possibly provide for every eventuality. On account of this complexity, Aquinas maintains that there are times when following the law would actually be bad, and he

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[33] Manheim, p. 4.

[34] Aquinas, II.ii.120. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* trans Fathers of the English Dominican Provence, gen. ed. Kevin Knight, last accessed 1 June 2020 <www.newadvent.com>.

encourages those whose job it is to pass judgment to 'set aside the letter of the law and to follow the dictates of justice and the common good'.[35] This focus on the common good is where Machiavelli's political theory intersects with Aristotle and Aquinas' philosophy.

Aquinas' three conditions for a just war are well known, even today. He insists that a war must 1) be declared by a proper authority, 2) for a just cause, 3) and with the right intention, and that if it fails to meet any one of these conditions, then it cannot be considered just. In *Just and Unjust Wars in Shakespeare*, Franziska Quabeck points out that 'due to the change in concerns of the state and the individual,' by the sixteenth century 'war [was] no longer considered to be inevitable'; rather, 'its origins and its necessity [were] questioned'.[36] Machiavelli, as we have seen, saw war as a means of strengthening the bond between the people of a single nation; war was the focal point he recommended using to capture the attention of the populace and focus their energy on a common enemy. If they were all occupied hating an external threat, then there would be no time for internal quarrels, rebellion, or civil war. Thus, in a very real sense, any war that was declared by the ruler with the intention of strengthening patriotism might be considered just within the context of *The Prince*.

In *Shakespeare and the Just War Tradition* Paola Pugliatti delves into the ethics of warfare, arguing that 'war is ubiquitous in Shakespeare'.[37] Given the pervasiveness, even inevitability, of war in Shakespeare's history plays, every act of Shakespeare's kings becomes a political declaration that is not without consequences.[38] Goodwill, good intentions, and good example all take second place to good leadership, because only a strong

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[35] Ibid., II.ii.120

[36] Franziska Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars in Shakespeare* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co, 2013), p. 19.

[37] Paola Pugliatti, *Shakespeare and the Just War Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 1.

[38] On war as inevitable in Shakespeare's history plays, in keeping with St. Augustine's concept of 'the City of Man', see Paul A. Jorgensen, 'Shakespeare's Use of War and Peace', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 16.4 (1953), 319–352; and Patrick Gray, 'Shakespeare and War: Honour at the Stake.' *Critical Survey*, 30.1 (2018), 1–25.

leader can ensure the common good, i.e. unity of purpose. In such a state, then, every decision must be carefully weighed and measured, and its consequences carefully considered. Even the act of Christian forgiveness takes on political implications. The authority of a king is so fragile in the evolving Machiavellian politics of the era that forgiveness can prove an act of inadvertent self-sabotage. Kings who forgive find that they encounter more problems than they solve, whereas rule of law, by contrast, and unbending will cement political power. In a world where nobles are Machiavels, the king must be, as well, if he is to protect his people and his secure his throne.

Even as Shakespeare acknowledges that Machiavellian tactics are necessary in order for a king to be effective, his tetralogies offer an engaging analysis of how Machiavellian principles and politics complicate kingship. Taken chronologically, his first and second tetralogies of English history plays reveal his struggle as he grapples with the same insights into human nature that Machiavelli sets out in *The Prince*. This chapter, then, considers Shakespeare's kings, beginning with Henry VI, and how not employing Machiavelli's advice can end up causing frustration and eventually lead to outright civil war. This analysis is followed by a short examination of *Richard III*, an extreme instance of 'selfish' Machiavellianism or the so-called 'stage Machiavel'. Shakespeare casts aside both of these 'extremes': *Richard II* and *Henry IV* provide an apology of sorts for Machiavelli's principles, showing that they can be pressed into the service of the common good. The chapter then closes with a careful consideration of *Henry V* as the play in which Shakespeare 'makes up his mind', so to speak, that power and responsibility bring with it an obligation to consider actions with which one might not be personally comfortable, so long as such actions are for the common good. If a marriage were arranged, so to speak, between Machiavelli and Christianity, Shakespeare's *Henry V* would represent the offspring of such a union.

HENRY VI and RICHARD III

Two Ends of the Spectrum

Shakespeare's kings illustrate two types of forgiveness: the Christian and the Machiavellian. Christian forgiveness is motivated by Jesus' teaching to forgive one's enemies, to do good to one's persecutors, and to love one's neighbour as oneself. It is deeply personal, without regard for public policy. Machiavellian forgiveness, by contrast, is politically motivated and wrought with some specific secular end in mind. In separating public from private morality, such forgiveness takes into account the obligation of a ruler not to act solely as his private conscience whispers, but instead, if need be, as his public duty dictates. Throughout his English history plays, Shakespeare demonstrates the effects of these two types of forgiveness on both the person and the power of a king, as well as the people he rules.

Henry VI is usually regarded as a weak king, and at first glance he may indeed appear so. He is only weak, however, when viewed through a Machiavellian lens. If he is ineffective as a ruler, it is only because he takes his cues from an entirely different frame of reference than those around him. As Manheim points out:

> Those who wish Henry VI to be more effective are wishing for a different character and one impossible in human terms. Henry is quite effective in his love, understanding, and trust…He is the only character who sees the full horror of civil disorder, and he sacrifices his family honour to prevent its continuance. He alone believes in justice and the triumph of truth. In his actions and responses, he alone believes in the natural dignity of man. If man has betrayed that dignity, it is insufficient to say that the terms of the betrayal must therefore be the terms by which men are led and governed.[39]

In other words, according to Manheim, Henry VI is the closest we get in Shakespeare to a king who is truly Christian in both his actions and his motivations. His desire to spare his subjects the horrors of war proves, however, his undoing. As Peter Saccio observes, Henry's

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[39] Manheim, pp. 88-89.

'incompetence permitted, indeed encouraged, the growth of faction'.[40] Henry refuses to acknowledge that he lives in a Machiavellian world. England, like Machiavelli's Italy, lacks unity. Henry's position obliges him to provide stability for his kingdom; his insistence on acting, nonetheless, and despite all evidence, as if the world were still unfallen gives rise to chaos. As king, Henry tries to elevate his people to the spiritual realm he occupies, and he fails to adjust his tactics when they prove unsuccessful. Unfortunately, as Saccio explains, 'without a reliable guardian of national stability, men had to establish and protect their interests by their own efforts'.[41]

Immediately preceding the first major scene of reconciliation in the play, we find Richard Plantagenet beside the deathbed of his uncle Mortimer, where he seeks to understand why his father, the Earl of Cambridge, was executed. Mortimer proceeds to explain that Cambridge lost his head for trying to restore the throne to its proper master.[42] With his parting words he admonishes Richard:

> With silence, nephew, be thou politic.
> Strong fixed is the house of Lancaster,
> And, like a mountain, not to be removed.[43]

Like Machiavelli, Mortimer counsels patience and caution; Richard for his part locks his uncle's counsel in his breast and lets rest for the time being his desire to overthrow the king.[44] It is on the heels of this scene, with its talk of rebellion and deposition, that we arrive at the court and witness the first of Henry VI's great worldly mistakes, namely, his choice to restore Richard to his blood and bestow on him all the honours of the House of York.

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[40] Peter Saccio, *Shakespeare's English Kings: History, Chronicle, and Drama* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), p. 116.

[41] Ibid., pp. 116-117.

[42] In this case, Mortimer, who descended from Lionel, Duke of Clarence, the 3rd son of Edward III, had claim before Henry Bolingbroke, Henry V, or Henry VI, who were descended from Edward III's 4th son, John of Gaunt (II.v.74-92).

[43] *1 Henry VI*, 2.5.101-103.

[44] Ibid., 2.5.118-119.

Act 3 begins with a literal battle between the Duke of Gloucester and the Bishop of Winchester. Henry begs his uncles to join their hearts in love and amity because 'civil dissension is a viperous worm, / that gnaws the bowels of the commonwealth'.[45] After such a declaration, and after insisting that his uncles reconcile, professing that such discord afflicts his soul,[46] Henry can hardly refuse to restore Richard Plantagenet to his rights when the matter is brought to him—nor does he refuse. With a wild abandon that Machiavelli would never have condoned, Henry not only restores Richard to the rights of his blood, but further declares,

> If Richard will be true, not that alone
> But all the whole inheritance I give
> That doth belong unto the house of York,
> From whence you spring by lineal decent.[47]

So it is that in less than thirty lines Henry creates the man who will eventually destroy him and his family. Henry VI is not like his father, conqueror of France, nor yet is he like his grandfather, who seized the throne from Richard II. Henry VI has no desire to 'busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels';[48] we cannot mistake his stance after the conversation he just had with his quarrelling uncles. Indeed, he goes so far as to proclaim that he holds infighting between his nobles to be a scandal to his crown,[49] and he commands their followers, on their allegiance, to keep the peace.[50] His agenda, if it can be called that, is one of peace. His main concern is the good of his kingdom. Henry fails to see, however, that his exhortations to reconciliation and peace will prove unsuccessful precisely because his own weakness undermines the dignity of his office. John Watts maintains that 'the royal dignity and majesty were primarily maintained not by the king's private resources, but by the communal

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[45] Ibid., 3.1.71-72.

[46] Ibid., 3.1.107.

[47] Ibid., 3.1.165-68.

[48] *2 Henry IV,* 4.5.13-14.

[49] *1 Henry VI*, 3.1.69.

[50] Ibid., 3.1.86-87.

power of his satisfied subjects…Rule was less a force imposed by the king upon the realm than a reaction which his proper functioning elicited from it'.[51] Given that Henry is, as Hazlitt says, 'naturally averse to the turmoils of ambition and the cares of greatness', he, perhaps unknowingly, but strongly, nonetheless, resists acting with the strong will and determination that would constitute 'proper functioning'.[52] Manheim is quick to point out, however, that 'in terms of moral standards…a traditional Christian view of good government underlies the Henry VI plays'.[53] In so far as this 'Christian view of good government' establishes unity and stability, Machiavelli himself would laud Henry's efforts. Henry's inability to adjust, however, to the fallen world in which he lives in effect opens up its degeneration into civil war.

Henry VI is one of the most consistent characters in the Shakespearean canon. From the beginning he abhors the idea of civil war and sets himself against infighting and discord; he seeks to protect his people from the ravages of such a conflict at all costs. Henry believes, as Manheim says, in the natural dignity of man, and he refuses to condone the betrayal of this dignity through the use of Machiavellian tactics. Instead, he regards his elevated position as a platform from which he might do right. As Hazlitt explains, he is 'less desirous of the advantages to be derived from possessing it than afraid of exercising it wrong'.[54] In practice, however, as Patrick Gray observes, 'Henry VI's efforts at diplomacy seem quixotic, and his abstemious aversion to any kind of violence comes across as short-sighted, inadequate to the task of maintaining a viable peace'.[55] Henry VI sees the infighting and

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[51] John Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), p. 29.

[52] William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays,* ed. J. H. Lobban (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), p. 166.

[53] Manheim, p. 88. This idea of Christian good government can be seen in this same scene. When Winchester refuses to give his hand to Gloucester, Henry upbraids him using a paraphrase of Romans, 2.21: 'Fie, uncle Beaufort, I have heard you preach / that malice was a great and previous sin: / and will not you maintain the thing you teach, / but prove a chief offender in the same?' (3.1.128-31). This will not be the last time that Henry bases his admonitions and decisions on biblical or religious, rather than worldly, precedent.

[54] Hazlitt, p. 166.

[55] Patrick Gray, 'Shakespeare and War: Honour at the Stake', *Critical Survey*, 30.1 (2018), 17.

factionalism among his nobles and the dissatisfaction of his people, yet he neglects to proceed in a manner that might effectually confront this crisis. His refusal to live in the world as it actually is, as opposed to the world that he wants it to be or believes that it should be, gives rise to the very outcome he so desperately seeks to avoid.

Henry's response to Jack Cade's rebellion represents the first real example of his staying true to the principles that he espoused in *1 Henry VI*, while at the same time successfully reestablishing the rule of law. After Cade and his followers kill the king's emissaries, they send a missive to the king, which Henry receives with calm.[56] When Buckingham asks Henry how he will answer them the king replies,

> I'll send some holy bishop to entreat,
> For God forbid so many simple souls
> Should perish by the sword.[57]

As king, Henry is the only person who has the power to end the bloodshed, and he chooses to try to end it, not by killing those who have rebelled, but by entreating them. The word 'entreat' is significant here because it carries a connotation of humility and deference. A king does not need to entreat when it is in his power to command, and yet entreaty is precisely what he chooses to do. In addition to sending a bishop to entreat the common people, Henry says that he will personally parley with Jack Cade. As was the case with his uncles in the preceding play, Henry wants to avoid bloodshed at all costs. His choice to personally speak with the commoner who aspires to usurp him is a humbling step that we can hardly imagine his father or grandfather being willing to endure. It shows once again that Henry's motives are pure, if at times incredibly naive. He wants peace, and he is not above humbling himself

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[56] Holinshed's description of the message sounds like an echo of Henry Bolingbroke: 'Cade sent vnto the king an humble supplication, affirming that his comming was not against his grace, but against his councellours, as were louers of themselues, and oppressors of the poore commonaltie; flatterers of the king, and enimies to his honor; suckers of his purse, and robbers of his subiects; parciall to their freends, and extreame to their enimies; thorough bribes corrupted, and for indifferencie dooing nothing' (Holinshed, Raphael, *Holinshed's Chronicle as Used in Shakespeare's Plays,* ed. by Allardyce Nicoll and Josephine Nicoll (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1951), p. 117.).

[57] *2 Henry VI*, 4.4.8-10.

in order to achieve it. His actions are not some Machiavellian plot to trick the rebels into surrender, as we see with Prince John at Gaultree.[58] Henry is not trying to appear virtuous; he actually is virtuous. Given, moreover, that he is dealing here with 'simple souls', he can afford to be merciful; showing mercy to the common people will not threaten his power in the way that his forgiveness of the House of York completely undermined his throne.

Henry is unable to follow through on his plan, however, for almost immediately a messenger enters and declares that Cade 'proclaims himself Lord Mortimer…and calls your grace usurper, openly, and vows to crown himself at Westminster'.[59] Furthermore, we learn that Cade threatens the lives of all who hold any power or influence. Many would expect this insult to prompt a bloody reprisal. Henry's response, however, is an echo of Christ's words from the cross: 'O, graceless men! They know not what they do'.[60] Some might laugh at such apparent simplicity on the part of the king. In large part, however, his supposition is correct; the common people have been riled up and spurred on by Cade. When Buckingham arrives with Henry's message he acknowledges as much and purposefully leaves Cade cut off from the proffered pardon:

> Know, Cade, we come ambassadors from the King
> Unto the commons, whom thou hast misled,
> And here pronounce free pardon to them all
> That will forsake thee and go home in peace.[61]

In leaving Cade out Henry accomplishes two things: firstly, he makes it clear that culpability is dependent upon knowledge; secondly, he acknowledges that those who lead astray innocents are deserving of punishment. In this scene, Henry demonstrates an understanding both of the law of equity and of the Machiavellian principle of restraint. He recognises, as Machiavelli writes, that 'the people are fickle'; everyone taking part in the rebellion cannot

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[58] In *3 Henry IV*.

[59] *2 Henry VI*, 4.4.27, 29-30.

[60] Ibid., 4.4.37; Luke, 23.34: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'.

[61] *2 Henry VI*, 4.8.7-10.

be treated, therefore, as equally culpable.[62] When the offence is solely against himself Henry forgives; when it includes an element of scandal or contamination of the simple-minded, however, it cannot be left unpunished. As Jesus says in the Gospels: 'it is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him through whom they come! / It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones'.[63] Henry recognises the distinction between direct malice, as represented by Cade, and the simple-mindedness of the common people who were lead into rebellion with false promises of an easier life. He knows that he has done nothing to deserve their hatred, and so it is that Clifford asks them 'who loves the King and will embrace his pardon'.[64] The masses accept the king's offer of pardon and go with Clifford, halters around their necks, to plead for mercy, which Henry grants willingly, even eagerly:

> Soldiers, this day you have redeemed your lives
> And showed how well you love your prince and country.
> Continue still in this so good a mind,
> And Henry, though he be unfortunate,
> Assure yourselves will never be unkind.
> And so, with thanks and pardon to you all,
> I do dismiss you to your several countries.[65]

Henry shows mercy to the rebels because his wish is not to punish them but to have them reform. Though they are weak, he believes in their innate goodness. In his forgiveness Henry is consistent. As with his uncles and York in the previous play, his desire here is to end civil unrest and prevent bloodshed. He does not dwell on the offence to his own dignity and honour that such a rebellion represents, but rather chooses to focus on the safety of his people and the peace of his realm. The result of his clemency in this scene is strikingly different from that which we saw before. The common people accept his pardon and hail his mercy. Their turnaround, however, is genuine in a way that Gloucester and Winchester's

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[62] Machiavelli, p. 21.

[63] Luke, 17.1-2.

[64] *2 Henry VI*, 4.8.14.

[65] Ibid., 4.9.15-21.

reconciliation was not. The peasants are not Machiavels, so forgiving them does not introduce another threat to Henry's throne. When it comes to the nobles, however, Henry needs to be an altogether different king; he needs to be an unyielding king; a king who demands blood; a king who recognises that deep down not all men are good.

The first scene of *3 Henry VI,* more so, perhaps, than any other scene, shows the incompetence and weakness of Henry VI. Although it is in line with his overall objective to preserve his kingdom and his people, what he actually achieves is the opposite. When Henry first enters the court, he does attempt to deflect York's claim, asking the would-be usurper: 'think'st thou that I will leave my kingly throne, / wherein my grandsire and my father sat'?[66] This show of resistance is what we would initially expect from the son of Henry V. When questioned as to his right, however, Henry is forced to admit to himself: 'I know not what to say. My title's weak'.[67] With such an admission, it is not surprising that, as Manheim notes, Henry's 'instinctive loyalty to his crown and his house is thus powerfully challenged by the fact of his tainted title'.[68] Henry does not want to give up his throne, yet his recognition of the truth and aversion to war will not allow him to defend it at the cost of bloodshed. Thus, it is, presumably, for the sake of peace in his kingdom that he compromises, naming York his heir. Henry makes the cessation of the civil war a condition of his compromise:

> …I here entail
> The crown to thee and to thine heirs forever,
> Conditionally that here thou take thine oath
> To cease this civil war and, whilst I live,
> To honour me as thy king and sovereign;
> And neither by treason nor hostility
> To seek to put me down and reign thyself.[69]

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[66] *3 Henry VI*, 1.1.128-29.

[67] Ibid., 1.1.138.

[68] Manheim, p. 103.

[69] *3 Henry VI*, 1.1.200-206.

The problem with this effort at conciliation, as we soon discover, is that human beings are not in fact as charitable, peaceable, and trustworthy as Henry imagines. Even Margret, formidable as she is, will not be able to save Henry's crown when civil war inevitably breaks out.

Eventually the House of York is triumphant, and Henry is imprisoned. Once in jail, Henry is the model of forgiveness. It is here that the parallels to Christ are most readily apparent, both in his conversation with the keeper and in his response to Richard's designs upon his life. Meek in life, he maintains his virtue to the last, and it is in these final scenes that the deeply personal nature of his virtue truly becomes apparent: Henry's virtue is the *caritas* of the saints, not the *virtù* of kings. Despite all that has befallen him, Henry protests to those who take him captive:

> My crown is in my heart, not on my head;
> Not deck'd with diamonds and Indian stones,
> Nor to be seen: my crown is call'd content;
> A crown it is that seldom kings enjoy.[70]

Henry was born to be a king, but his personal identity is that of a Christian man. Like Jesus in the Gospels, he protests that his kingdom is 'not of this world'.[71] When confronted by his murderer, Manheim observes, 'Henry does not speak bitterly and his words betray no irony. They are a mark of benevolence beyond anything else we see in these plays'.[72] To the very end, Henry stays true to his first principles. He prophecies more slaughter to come; yet with his dying breath he begs, 'O God, forgive my sins and pardon thee!'[73]

In a practical sense, Shakespeare demonstrates the consequences of Henry's inability to separate his personal desires and ideals from his duty as a king. The saintly monarch learns the hard way the consequences of his idealism. Throughout the tetralogy there are

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[70] Ibid., 3.1.62-65.

[71] John, 18.36.

[72] Manheim, p.112.

[73] *3 Henry VI*, 5.6.60.

always two competing possibilities: what Henry wants to do, in keeping with the precepts of Christianity, and what Henry needs to do, in keeping with the precepts of Machiavelli, in order to provide stability for his kingdom. In his treatise on the politics of kingship, John Watts argues that 'only a single independent will, rooted deep in the king's own person, could guarantee a single common interest and the unity of the realm with which it was so closely associated'.[74] Henry's decisions, by this light, especially his forgiveness of his political enemies, have disastrous political consequences. Each of the three plays shows how incompatible Henry's personal code of virtue was with new philosophies of leadership that required *virtù,* a strong, virile, militaristic monarch. In the epic battle for the English throne, King Henry VI falls short of what is needed and is eventually murdered. With his dying breath he forgives Richard, arguably Shakespeare's vilest villain, while at the same moment he leaves his kingdom in the hands of a tyrant who embodies an extreme caricature of Machiavellian leadership. Had Henry gone to war to preserve his kingdom and won a decisive victory, he might have spared his people the terror of Richard III, which, as Gray points out, is a direct result of 'the chaos which Henry VI allows to consume the nation'.[75] Clifford makes a similar point when he upbraids Henry earlier in the play:

> Henry, hadst thou swayed as kings should do,
> Or as thy father and his father did,
> Giving no ground unto the house of York,
> They never had then sprung like summer flies!
> I and ten thousand in this luckless realm
> Had left no mourning widows for our death.[76]

Clifford reminds Henry that the current situation is a direct result of the decisions he made, and in doing so he forces Henry to consider what Amir Khan terms a 'counterfactual alternative': as a free individual, Henry could have chosen differently.[77] Manheim disagrees,

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[74] Watts, p. 31

[75] Gray, *War*, 18.

[76] *3 Henry VI*, 2.6.14-19.

[77] Amir Khan, *Shakespeare in Hindsight: Counterfactual Thinking and Shakespearean Tragedy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 13.

however, arguing that hoping for this sort of action would be wishing for a different character altogether.[78] Manheim, it seems to me, is correct: while it is true, strictly speaking, that Henry could have made different decisions, the king's will and desires are so tied up with his idealism as to make any form of Machiavellian political awareness impossible. Because Henry does not separate his role as king from his role as private citizen, all the decisions he makes and actions he takes are in line with his deeply religious nature. In this sense, then, one cannot expect him to act differently without, as Manheim suggests, wishing for an altogether different character.

If Henry VI is a saint, Richard III embodies the stage Machiavel. He is ruthless, cruel, merciless, without principles, devoid of morality, and motivated purely by self-interest; as a Machiavel he is, as Scott says, 'not only godless but totally egocentric'.[79] His desire is to be king, and he will do anything to achieve his end. At the end of *3 Henry VI*, Richard gives a soliloquy that spans over seventy lines; in it he makes clear that he will do whatever is necessary to gain the throne. The peroration of his monstrous speech is a series of comparisons:

> I'll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall;
> I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk;
> I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,
> Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could,
> And, like a Sinon, take another Troy.
> I can add colors to the chameleon,
> Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
> And set the murderous Machiavel to school.
> Can I do this and cannot get a crown?
> Tut, were it farther off, I'll pluck it down.[80]

In these lines Richard not only associates himself with characters from mythology who are known for their ability to deceive the unsuspecting, but also brags of his ability to outdo their conniving. In declaring that he will 'set the murderous Machiavel to school' Richard

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[78] Manheim, p. 88.

[79] Scott, 161.

[80] *3 Henry VI*, 3.2.186-195.

implies that Machiavelli's advice does not go far enough. Consequently, he will have to teach those who follow Machiavelli's teachings how to truly carry out grand designs. Richard's primary lesson is that self-interest, not the common good, is the ultimate motivator. Acting on this principle, he stoops to new depths of depravity. As Tillyard maintains, 'whereas the sins of other men had merely bred more sins, Richard's are so vast that they are absorptive, not contagious. He is the great ulcer of the body politic into which all its impurity is drained and against which all the members of the body politic are united'.[81] Although many of his subjects initially believe Richard to be genuine in his support of his brothers and his hesitance to rule, by the end of *Richard III* they realise that he is entirely self-serving and willing to do anything to achieve his ends. Consequently, the kingdom unites to unseat a tyrant.

After murdering Henry VI at the end of *3 Henry VI*, Richard must find a way to get rid of his brothers and his nephews, if he wishes to claim the crown. His methods are so subtle and precise that even though members of his family are dying at an alarming rate, the guardians of the state do not suspect Richard's wickedness until it is too late. Richard, like Scott's Machiavel, 'is indifferent to human feeling and is ultimately concerned to manipulate action…he reduces those about him to types, ascribes them roles, and sets them going in a scenario of his own devising'.[82] After demonstrating throughout *Henry VI* what happens when a leader refuses to act according to Machiavellian principles, separating his own private morality from the necessity foisted on him by political circumstance, Shakespeare illustrates here the consequences of resorting to the opposite extreme. Whereas Henry VI hesitated, indeed refused, to go to war, Richard all but invites the fury of his enemies to descend upon him with his continued acts of brutality. In doing so, Richard's name, like that

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[81] Tillyard, p. 215.

[82] Scott, 170.

of the Machiavellian prince upon whom he is modelled, becomes, as Weissberger says, 'a metaphor for evil'.[83] Robert Miola draws attention to Richard's lack of both repentance and godly despair.[84] Consequently, Richmond's war against Richard represents one of the few 'just wars' in Shakespeare. It is, in the opinion of Quabeck, just in every respect:[85] Richmond's claim to the throne sets him apart as a proper authority, while Richard's vileness and Richmond's desire to free the kingdom from fear and tyranny provide just cause and right intention. Quabeck goes so far as to contend that in *Richard III*, 'there is a clear distinction between *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bellum*, of legitimate authority versus illegitimate authority, just versus unjust cause and right versus wrong intention'.[86] Meanwhile, Pugliatti argues that Richmond's relatively swift defeat of Richard is intended as proof that God is acting on Richmond's side.[87] On account of Richard's many atrocities, Richmond's war is not only portrayed as just within the play, it is also just when considered alongside the accepted just war principles in the Renaissance.

RICHARD II and HENRY IV

Private Justice vs the Common Good

In *Richard II* the king mostly acts as though he is a private individual: he does not base his decisions on the common good, but instead focuses on his own comfort and pleasure, levying crushing taxes and neglecting the needs of his people. The entry on Richard II in *The Mirror for Magistrates* is tellingly labeled 'How kyng Richarde the seconde was for his

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[83] L. Arnold Weissberger, 'Machiavelli and Tudor England', *Political Science Quarterly*, 42.4 (1927), 591.

[84] Robert S. Miloa, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 90.

[85] Quabeck, p. 84.

[86] Ibid., p. 93.

[87] Pugliatti, p. 144.

euyll gouernaunce deposed from his seat, and miserably murdred in prison'.[88] Whereas Henry VI's weaknesses as a king were born of his idealism and his belief in the innate goodness of his subjects, Richard's weakness stems from a selfish focus on the self:

> I am a Kyng that ruled all by lust,
> That forced not of vertue, ryght, or lawe,
> But alway put false Flatterers most in trust,
> Ensuing such as could my vices clawe:
> By faythful counsayle passing not a straw…
> For mayntenaunce wherof, my realme I polde
> Through Subsidies, sore fines, loanes, many a prest,
> Blanke charters, othes, & shiftes not knowen of olde,
> For whych my Subiectes did me sore detest.[89]

In other words, Richard not only neglects his kingly duties, he even goes so far as to abuse his position at the expense of his subjects, taxing them to fund his wanton lifestyle. Peter G. Phialas argues that

> Richard's failure, his loss of crown and life, is due to his inability to balance the claims of the royal and the individual life… In all these matters the personal life is given precedence over the claims of Richard's public responsibility: in everything he does Richard is first and last concerned with himself. And this is precisely the cause of his failure.[90]

Ultimately Richard's egocentrism and desire for self-preservation lead him to banish his cousin, Bolingbroke, and seize his patrimony. Richard is acutely aware that the common people love Bolingbroke, and yet he mocks their love:

> Ourself and Bushy, [Bagot here and Green,]
> Observed his courtship to the common people,
> How he did seem to dive into their hearts
> With humble and familiar courtesy,
> What reverence he did throw away on slaves,
> Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles
> And patient underbearing of his fortune,
> As 'twere to banish their affects with him.[91]

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[88] *The Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. by Lily B. Campbell, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1938), p. 113. It should be noted that this particular work does have a Tudor bias. To some extent Shakespeare's play would have held this same bias due to the censorship of plays and literature prevalent during Elizabeth I's rule. For an in-depth analysis of Shakespeare's political reality, see Neema Parvini's *Shakespeare's History Plays: Rethinking Historicism*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2012). Chapter 6, 'Shakespeare's Historical and Political Thought in Context', is particularly helpful, as it provides an overview of scholarly opinions on the matter of Shakespeare's Histories.

[89] Ibid., p. 113-114, ln. 31-35, 41-44.

[90] Peter G. Phialas, 'Shakespeare's Henry V and the Second Tetralogy', *Studies in Philology*, 62.2 (1965), 159-60.

[91] *Richard II*, 1.4.23-30.

In this passage, Richard demonstrates his ignorance of the power of reputation, as discussed by Machiavelli, when it comes to leadership. Nevertheless, despite this show of flippant disdain, it was his fear of Bolingbroke's rising star that propelled him to issue a sentence of banishment in the first place.

While this tendency towards self-interest is undoubtedly Machiavellian, Machiavelli would most definitely not recognise his prince in Richard. Indeed, with his seizure of Bolingbroke's inheritance, Richard effectively provokes a rebellion that might not otherwise have materialised. York tries to warn him, protesting

> If you do wrongfully seize Herford's rights,
> Call in the letters patents that he hath
> By his attorneys-general to sue
> His livery, and deny his offered homage,
> You pluck a thousand dangers on you head,
> You lose a thousand well-disposed hearts,
> And prick my tender patience to those thoughts
> Which honour and allegiance cannot think.[92]

Despite such a clear warning concerning the potential consequences of his actions—stirring danger, losing the love of the people, causing even loyal men like York to question their allegiance—Richard chooses to continue with his seizure of Bolingbroke's inheritance. With this decision he not only violates one of Machiavelli's principal tenets, that, above all, a ruler 'must not touch the property of others, because men forget sooner the killing of a father than the loss of their patrimony',[93] but he also succeeds, as Phialas explains, in 'placing himself outside the principle of inheritance to which he owes the crown',[94] thereby undermining the very law to which he will later appeal.

Bolingbroke, by contrast, is, as William Hazlitt suggests,

> drawn with a masterly hand:—patient for occasion, and then steadily availing himself of it, seeing his advantage afar off, but only seizing on it when he has it within his reach, humble,

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[92] Ibid., 2.1.201-208.

[93] Machiavelli, p. 59.

[94] Peter G. Phialas, 'Richard II and Shakespeare's Tragic Mode', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 5.3 (1963), p. 351.

> crafty, bold, and aspiring, encroaching by regular but slow degrees, building power on opinion, and cementing opinion by power'.[95]

The young duke is careful to say and do only what is acceptable to those who aid his cause. While he might have grander designs, he pursues them patiently. Given this restraint, his protestations of loyalty to King Richard are believable. Consequently, when he returns to England after his father's death to reclaim the lands the king has stolen from him, numerous lords come to his aid. When his uncle, York, accuses him of treason, Northumberland quickly jumps to his defence, explaining that

> The noble duke hath sworn his coming is
> But for his own, and for the right of that
> We all have strongly sworn to give him aid.[96]

In the end Bolingbroke's protestations of loyalty to Richard, his appeal to York as a father, and the pleading of his fellow lords are so convincing that York, too, joins his crusade.

Richard, however, does not believe Bolingbroke; he senses his coming fall from power, and almost from the moment the duke steps foot on English soil the king begins his swan song. William Hazlitt remarks that

> after the first act, in which the arbitrariness of his [Richard's] behaviour only proves his want of resolution, we see him staggering under the unlooked-for blows of fortune, bewailing his loss of kingly power; not preventing it, sinking under the aspiring genius of Bolingbroke, his authority trampled on, his hopes failing him, and his pride crushed and broken down under insults and injuries, which his own misconduct had provoked, but which he has not courage or manliness to resent.[97]

Although Richard seems to be the only one who truly understands the implications of Bolingbroke's popularity, he does very little to prevent his own deposition. When he arrives back in England after having survived a storm at sea, his speech has an air of fancy:

> Not all the water in the rough rude sea
> Can wash the balm off from an anointed king.
> The breath of worldly men cannot depose
> The deputy elected by the Lord.
> For every man that Bolingbroke hath pressed
> To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,
> God for His Richard hath in heavenly pay

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[95] Hazlitt, p. 275.

[96] *Richard II*, 2.3.147-49.

[97] Hazlitt, p. 272.

> A glorious angel. Then, if angels fight,
> Weak men must fall, for heaven still guards the right.[98]

Although he believes himself the beneficiary of divine protection. Richard fails to realise that with rights come responsibilities; his negligence in the performance of his kingly duties has left him exposed. Richard's pride and self-absorption cast Bolingbroke in an even more sympathetic light: he is a man of the people, a man who cares about upholding the laws of England and ensuring the welfare of her people. The people believe that they will fare better under Bolingbroke than they have under King Richard II; the self-same quality of deference toward the common people that Richard had previously mocked provides the springboard for Bolingbroke's ascension to the throne.[99]

Whereas Richard consistently focuses on himself and what is due to him, Bolingbroke views leadership in an entirely different light. Throughout the second tetralogy Shakespeare explores the connection between self-interest, the common good, and Machiavelli. Bolingbroke's return to England is obviously motivated by self-interest; at the same time, however, he recognises how much damage Richard has caused to England through his flippant attitude toward responsibility. For Manheim, Bolingbroke, like Richard III, 'does a superb job of obeying the Machiavellian axiom that the greatest skill a politician can have is the knowledge of how to wait'.[100] Up until the very moment when he plucks the crown from Richard's head, Bolingbroke protests, perhaps even honestly, that he is loyal to the king.

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[98] *Richard II*, 3.2.54-63.

[99] In *Richard II and Shakespeare's Tragic Mode*, Peter Phialas argues that Richard's growing awareness and understanding of his position, and especially the part his own actions play in his deposition, mark a 'gradual but sure movement towards awareness and acceptance by the tragic hero of his own moral involvement in his tragedy' (354). According to Phialas, then, *Richard II* 'becomes the pattern of action for the tragedies which follow', most significantly *King Lear*; it is the play in which Shakespeare 'first became himself' (354, 355).

[100] Manheim, p. 67.

From the very beginning of *Richard II*, Bolingbroke continually declares, protests, and insists upon his loyalty to Richard; and his love for the king is somewhat plausible. Before challenging Mowbray to a trial by combat, the young duke maintains that he comes before the king

> In the devotion of a subject's love,
> Tend'ring the precious safety of my prince
> And free from other misbegotten hate.[101]

Even when the king stops the trial and banishes Bolingbroke for his show of love, the duke still proclaims his loyalty to his cousin:

> Your will be done. This must my comfort be:
> That sun that warms you here shall shine on me,
> And those his golden beams to you here lent
> Shall point on me and gild my banishment.[102]

Throughout the play Bolingbroke is always careful to ensure appearances are on his side; he says and does all the right things, and it is a masterful performance. It is not until Richard seizes Bolingbroke's inheritance that the duke shows any sign of disloyalty. Even as he marches through England at the head of an army, however, Bolingbroke still manages to convince all those around him that he has no designs on the crown, only a desire for the restoration of his title and inheritance. Unfortunately for Richard, Bolingbroke makes a strong argument in his own defence:

> My father's goods are all distrained and sold,
> And these, and all, are all amiss employed.
> What would you have me do? I am a subject,
> And I challenge law. Attorneys are denied me,
> And therefore personally I lay my claim
> To my inheritance of free descent.[103]

Bolingbroke notes that he first tried to have his wrongs righted through legal means. As the rights of a subject were denied him, however, he had no choice but to return to England and

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[101] *Richard II*, 1.1.31-33.

[102] Ibid., 1.3.144-47.

[103] Ibid., 2.3.130-35.

personally fight for his inheritance.[104] Even when his army surrounds the king, and Richard is at his mercy, Bolingbroke still professes his loyalty and allegiance. He instructs Northumberland to tell the king that

> …Henry Bolingbroke
> On both his knees doth kiss King Richard's hand
> And sends allegiance and true faith of heart
> To his most royal person.[105]

Furthermore, he promises to disband his army and live as a true subject if Richard will but lift his banishment and restore his inheritance. Otherwise, he declares that he will fight, 'and lay the summer's dust with showers of blood / rained from the wounds of slaughtered Englishmen'.[106] Henry's willingness to drag his country into civil war if he is not restored to his patrimony, demonstrates both the seriousness with which Englishmen took the right of succession, and the lengths to which they were willing to go in order to ensure that their own honour and that of their family remained untarnished.[107]

While Richard has little choice but to capitulate to Henry's demands, he refuses to concede Bolingbroke's apparent loyalty, referring to him as both 'King Bolingbroke' and 'traitor'.[108] He recognises too late that his treatment of Henry was ill-advised, and he soon comes to regret mocking Bolingbroke's relationship with the common people, as their love for him not only provides the duke with safe passage through England, but also dashes any lingering hope that Richard might have had of retaining his crown. For as Holinshed writes, and Shakespeare depicts, 'there was not a man that willinglie would thrust out one arrow

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[104] In Holinshed's *Chronicles* Henry's desire to reclaim only what is his by right is clearly articulated: '[H. iii. 498] At [Bolingbroke's] comming [II. iii.] vnto Doncaster, the earle of Northumberland, and his sonne, Sir Henrie Persie, wardens of the marches against Scotland, with the earle of Westmerland, came vnto him; where he sware vnto those lords, that he would demand no more, but the lands that were to him descended by inheritance from his father, and in right of his wife' (34).

[105] *Richard II*, 3.3.35-38.

[106] Ibid., 3.3.43-44.

[107] The role of personal honour in Shakespeare, in particular its role as a catalyst for war and violence, will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter.

[108] Ibid., 3.3.173, 181.

against the duke of Lancaster, or his partakers, or in anie wise offend him or his freends'.[109] In the end, then, unable to offer any resistance to the armed forces brought against him, Richard has no choice but to concede to all of Bolingbroke's demands, and, in the end, he is forced to resign the crown and adopt Henry as his heir.

Up until the moment Henry is crowned king a sense of uncertainty pervades the play, because, until that moment, Richard never fully loses control. Nevertheless, at each decision-making juncture Richard brings himself closer to deposition. When his cousin stands up to fight for him, Richard banishes him; when his uncle dies, Richard seizes his cousin's inheritance; when Henry demands that his banishment be lifted and his goods and titled restored, Richard capitulates immediately. So long as he remains unchallenged, Richard acts with impunity. He recognises, however, that he has won few friends through the misuse of his office, and he is therefore forced to rely on his position as God's anointed. Harold Goddard argues that *Richard II* is the play in which 'Shakespeare interred the doctrine of the divine right of kings';[110] and Richard claims divine sanction frequently throughout the play.

On the one hand, Richard is a deeply narcissistic king who uses his position of privilege largely to ensure his own pleasure; on the other, however, he is the legitimate king, God's anointed. While the common people may be happy to welcome King Henry IV that does not mean that he therefore has a right to Richard's throne. Kingship is not a popularity contest. Henry does not take advantage of the situation, however, until Richard provides him with the opportunity. G. Noon notes that Bolingbroke 'is in general willing to conform to the order of society'; it is not until his place within that order is threatened that he acts contrary

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[109] Raphael Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicle as Used in Shakespeare's Plays,* ed. by Allardyce Nicoll and Josephine Nicoll (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1951), p. 35.

[110] Harold C. Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare Volume I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 161.

to the establishment.[111] For, as Noon goes on to argue, he is also perceptive, enterprising, and pragmatic:

> [Bolingbroke] is…perceptive enough to see an opportunity to elevate his social position when it presents itself, and enterprising enough to grasp that opportunity when he is in a position of material strength […he] is also pragmatic enough not to let a faith in the Divine ordering of society prevent him from striving for what he sees as his rightful position nor even from seizing a position to which he has (according to the Divine Order) no right.[112]

Bolingbroke, then, is a perfect example of Machiavelli's opportunist: 'prepared to vary his conduct as the winds of fortune and changing circumstances constrain him'.[113] He recognises his chance to seize power, and he takes it. Unlike Richard, however, who treated his office as an instrument of pleasure, Henry is keenly aware of the duties of kingship, as well as the fickleness of fortune.

HENRY V

Machiavelli's Prince

Although King Henry IV does feature prominently in Shakespeare's second tetralogy of English history plays, these plays are primarily concerned with Prince Hal's response to the increasingly urgent demands of his royal station. As becomes apparent, Henry V's focus is the unity of his kingdom. Whereas Henry VI, as discussed previously, appeals to the goodness and virtue he believes his subjects to possess—brotherly love, the desire to avoid bloodshed, attachment to the gospel message—Henry V, by contrast, maintains order by presenting a carefully crafted persona, one which inspires both fear and awe, an entirely necessary combination given that Hal was, as G. L. Harris notes, 'to an unusual degree the

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[111] G. Noon, 'Richard Versus Bullingbrook: Heaven Versus Machiavelli?', *English Studies in Africa,* 32.1 (1989), p. 50.

[112] Ibid., pp. 50-51.

[113] Machiavelli, p. 62.

focus of the hopes and apprehensions of his subjects'.[114] Henry VI portrays the true version of himself; Henry V is necessarily an actor who plays his part to perfection. From Prince Hal's first soliloquy, Shakespeare portrays a man who is entirely aware of his place, his surroundings, and his ultimate objective; a man who, as Joan Rees points out, 'inherited his father's flair for career management'.[115] Throughout both parts of *Henry IV,* Hal is presented as a man in control; even in the midst of his wanton life, the audience is aware of a higher motive, a purpose that is ultimately achieved when Hal becomes king. Manheim argues that '*Henry V* explores the means by which Machiavellianism could be seen as attractive and even desirable as a guide to political behaviour'.[116] Although audiences might be disconcerted by the machinations of Prince Hal, given scenes such as his ordering the execution of French prisoners, seeing his carefully laid plans achieve glory for England ultimately introduces some appreciation of Machiavelli's sense that ends can sometimes justify otherwise-unconscionable means. For, regardless of modern perceptions of Henry V, the fact remains, as Peter Saccio reminds us, that 'his contemporaries thought that he had ruled spectacularly well, and their admiration lasted as the common English attitude toward him for generations'.[117] Shakespeare's play lays out a more sophisticated version of Machiavellianism than the amoral antinomianism familiar from the figure of the 'stage Machiavel', a task made easier by the historical significance of Henry V, who was revered at

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[114] G. L. Harris, ed., *Henry V: The Practice of Kingship* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), p. 9.

[115] Joan Rees, 'Falstaff, St Paul, and the Hangman', *Review of English Studies*, 38.149 (1987), 14.

[116] Manheim, p. 161.

[117] Saccio, p. 88.

the time as one of England's greatest monarchs.[118] Shakespeare's Henry presents a picture of palatable Machiavellianism. What is the place of forgiveness, however, in this ethical paradigm?

Even before he becomes king, the young Prince Hal is presented as a Machiavel, watching and waiting for the proper time to reveal himself. As Tillyard points out, 'far from being a mere dissolute lout awaiting a miraculous transformation he [Prince Hal] is from the first a commanding character, deliberate in act and in judgment, versed in every phase of human nature'.[119] The fact that others see him as a disgrace—including his father, who proclaims at the end of *Richard II* that 'if any plague hang over us, 'tis he'[120]—is part of Hal's plan. Before the audience ever meets the prince they are predisposed to despise him, for he is a man whose own father considers him a dishonour.[121] Hal is much more like his father, however, than Henry IV discerns. Whether one agrees with Irving Ribner that Bolingbroke had planned to seize the crown from the beginning or with Brents Stirling that 'in a literal reading, Bolingbroke makes no decision prior to Act IV, and there he is scarcely more than at hand to take the throne', one could argue, as Stirling does, that opportunism is

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[118] Holinshed has much to say about the character of Henry V—nearly all of it praiseworthy. For example: 'this Henrie was a king, of life without spot; a prince whome all men loued, and of none disdained; a capteine against whome fortune neuer frowned, nor mischance once spurned; whose people him so seuere a iusticer both loued and obeied, (and so humane withall,) that he left no offense vnpunished, nor freendship vnrewarded; a terrour to rebels, and suppressour of sedition; his vertues notable, his qualities most praise-worthie' (88). Even Henry's earlier missteps are glossed over by the historian: 'wantonnesse of life and thirst in auarice had he quite quenched in him; vertues in deed in such an estate of souereignitie, youth, and power, as verie rare, so right commendable in the highest degree. So staied of mind and countenance beside, that neuer iolie or triumphant for victorie, nor sad or damped for losse or misfortune. For bountifulnesse and liberalitie, no man more free, gentle, and franke, in bestowing rewards to all persons, according to their deserts: for his saieng was, that he neuer desired monie to keepe, but to giue and spend' (89). When we add to this praise Holished's declaration that 'he had such knowledge in ordering and guiding an armie, with such a gift to encourage his people, that the Frenchmen had a constant opinion he could neuer be vanquished in battell' (89), we are left with a man of heroic proportions. It would be difficult to underestimate the significance of Henry's conquests to the powerful image he inspired in the popular imagination. Representations such as Holinshed's, coupled with the indisputable facts of Henry's military conquest of France, led to the creation of a national myth, a hero king.

[119] Tillyard, p. 282.

[120] *Richard II*, 5.3.3.

[121] *1 Henry IV*, 1.1.76-94.

essentially a 'tacit vice'.[122] Bolingbroke did not have to take definite action because he was in the right place at the right time, and he had the wherewithal to take advantage of the situation. Prince Hal, by contrast, carefully lays the groundwork for his own miraculous change of character. He does not simply take advantage of a situation; he creates one.

When the audience finally meets Hal, he gives a clear, even acceptable, reason for wanting to appear as he does:

> I know you all, and will awhile uphold
> The unyok'd humour of your idleness…
> So when this loose behaviour I throw off,
> And pay the debt I never promised,
> By how much better than my word am I,
> By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;
> And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
> My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
> Shall show more goodly, and attract more eyes
> Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
> I'll so offend, to make offence a skill,
> Redeeming time when men think least I will.[123]

The 'you all' here could just as easily refer to the audience, who sit idly by watching the play unfold, as to those who fail to see the prince's true intentions. Hal's idleness, he maintains, is a disguise. He wants to be underestimated; he wants people to misjudge him and think him to be what he is not precisely because this will make his reformation all the more awe-inspiring. 'The whole point of the Prince's character', Tillyard notes, is 'that his conversion was not sudden'.[124] This conscious assassination of his own character and reputation is a step further than even Machiavelli would go.

Machiavelli counsels, as was said before, that 'to those who see him and hear him, he [the ruler] should seem to be exceptionally merciful, trustworthy, upright, humane and devout'.[125] Hal, at the beginning of *1 Henry IV*, displays none of these characteristics, not because he fails to recognise their necessity, but precisely because he recognises it. Hal

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[122] Brents Stirling, 'Bolingbroke's "Decision"', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 2.1 (1951), 30.

[123] *1 Henry IV,* 1.2.190-91, 203-212.

[124] Tillyard, p. 311.

[125] Machiavelli, p. 62.

realises that if he first appears to lack all virtuous and kingly qualities, then when he suddenly demonstrates them they shall 'show more goodly', and, not only that, but the contrast with his former life will cause even those who before ignored the wanton youth to stop and take note of the new man he has become. As Beatrice Groves explains, 'Hal has constructed a pattern in which, after his Lenten period in the wilderness, he will return and overcome the opposing forces and rise as England's glorious new hope'.[126] From a reputation as a dissolute prince who is a disgrace to his father, Henry consciously contrives, as Machiavelli suggests, 'that his actions should display grandeur, courage, seriousness and strength'.[127] His splendour will appear brighter when contrasted with his former lifestyle.

Harold Goddard, for his part, is not impressed by Hal's plan:

> The Prince was doing precisely what his father had done, only in a wilier way [By being seldom seen, I could not stir / But like a comet I was wonder'd at]. The King had kept himself literally hidden and then suddenly appeared. The Prince was keeping himself figuratively hidden by his wild ways in order to emerge all at once as a self-disciplined king. As between the two, who can question which was the more dramatic and effective? But we like neither father nor son for his tricks, no matter how well contrived or brilliantly executed.[128]

Here, Goddard strikes upon two important points. First, that the prince is 'wilier' than his father, and in that sense more Machiavellian; he has thought through this entire charade, planned it down to the last detail, and his strategy proves incredibly effective. Groves romanticises Hal's deception, insisting that 'Hal attempts to infuse his Machiavellian dissimulation of his true nature with an aura of the Incarnation, a descent to the mortal world of the tavern, employed in order to hide his true royalty'.[129] Goddard, by contrast, claims that Prince Hal's deception does not sit well with the audience. This second point is, perhaps, more controversial than the first. In the context of Christian kingship, Hal's

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[126] Beatrice Groves, 'Hal as Self-Styled Redeemer: The Harrowing of Hell and Henry IV Part 1', in *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespeare Studies and Production*, ed. by Peter Holland, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), p. 248.

[127] Machiavelli, p. 64.

[128] Goddard, pp. 172-73.

[129] Groves, p. 240.

deception is difficult to justify, mainly because it is based upon a lie. He is, purposefully and with full knowledge, deceiving everyone around him. Given his conniving, moreover, we can only assume that he has already given thought to the need, sooner or later, to renounce Falstaff's company. The one person that might have an inkling of Hal's true nature is his father, Henry IV, who only recognises the prince's Machiavellianism on his deathbed.

Near the end of *2 Henry IV*, left alone in the room with his ailing father, Hal, eager for the crown, mistakes his father's sleep for death. In the conversation that follows the king bitterly accuses his son of wishing to hasten his death so that he can ascend the throne. Henry IV's first address to Hal is triggered by the prince's protest, 'I never thought to hear you speak again', to which the king replies, 'Thy wish was father, Harry, to that thought'.[130] Without realising it Henry has recognised his own Machiavellianism in his son, a truth that he will know with certainty by the end of the scene. Henry's pained cry of 'O foolish youth, / thou seek't the greatness that will overwhelm thee!',[131] will soon transform into admiration when he realises that his son is more like him than he had realised. Before Hal has a chance to speak, he must listen to how successful his ploy has been; he has so deceived his own father that Henry despairs of England's future under the rule of his son.

> Harry the Fifth is crowned! Up, vanity!
> Down, royal state! All you sage counsellors, hence,
> And to the English court assemble now
> From every region apes of idleness!…
> For the fifth Harry from curbed licence plucks
> The muzzle of restraint, and the wild dog
> Shall flesh his tooth on every innocent.
> O my poor kingdom, sick with civil blows!
> When that my care could not withhold thy riots,
> What wilt thou do when riot is they care?[132]

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[130] *2 Henry IV*, 4.5.91-92.

[131] Ibid., 4.5.96-97.

[132] Ibid., 4.5.119-22, 130-35.

Hal's disguise has been so complete, so perfect, that everyone—from Falstaff to his father—believes the costume to be the real prince. If Hal were not a Machiavel in hiding, they would have real cause to worry. But the prince, in answer to his father, and in the security of personal conversation, gives his father a glimpse of his future self. He protests himself innocent of wishing his father's death, and swears, not on his own honour or that of his family, but on his plan to make a future change:

> …If I do feign,
> O let me in my present wildness die
> And never live to show th'incredulous world
> The noble change that I have purposed.[133]

His protestations convince his father to such a degree that the conversation transitions from one of accusation to one of advice:

> And all my friends, which thou must make thy friends,
> Have but their stings and teeth newly ta'en out;
> By whose fell working I was first advanc'd,
> And by whose power I might well lodge a fear
> To be again displac'd…
> …Therefore, my Harry,
> Be it thy course to busy giddy minds
> With foreign quarrels, that action hence borne out
> May waste the memory of the former days.[134]

Henry IV's counsel to his son represents one of the few outright Machiavellian exchanges in Shakespeare. In it, Henry advises war as a means of occupying the nobility, in order both to help drive his own usurpation from living memory and distract the nobility from quarrels that could lead to future civil wars. 'Prince Hal is like Virgil's Aeneas', A. D. Nuttall observes, 'in that he is burdened with a sense of history and the crushing obligations implied by the likely succession of events'.[135] Henry IV could hardly imagine the extent to which Hal would heed his advice. England had made attempts to conquer France previously, but

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[133] Ibid., 4.5.151-54.

[134] Ibid., 4.5.204-208, 212-214.

[135] A. D. Nuttall, *A New Mimesis: Shakespeare and the Representation of Reality* (London: Methuen & Co, 1983), p. 160.

had not succeeded in holding onto her gains. This idle prince, however, the very thought of whom made his father despair of England, would turn out to be her most successful king. As Harris notes, historically speaking, by the time Henry V embarked for France in 1415, 'he already commanded greater respect than any English king since Edward III'.[136]

Prince Hal swiftly makes good on the 'purpose' he mentioned to his father. The king is barely cold before Harry starts his miraculous transformation, shocking first the Lord Chief Justice and then Falstaff. The new king is aware that sadness and fear are at the forefront of his subjects' minds, because they are uneasy about his ascension to the throne.[137] Even so, he cannot resist toying with the Lord Chief Justice, pretending to hold the past against him before revealing his true purpose.[138] Henry V starts his reign with a proclamation:

> Into the hands of justice you did commit me,
> For which I do commit into your hand
> Th'unstained sword that you have used to bear,
> With this remembrance: that you use the same
> With the like bold, just and impartial spirit
> As you have done 'gainst me.[139]

This first official act of the new king makes clear that he respects those who despise his former self. It also represents stage one of his public change. Henry V intends to reign with justice, personified by the Lord Chief Justice. C. T. Allmand rightly argues that he takes his duty as the 'personification of justice' seriously.[140] There can be no doubt in anyone's mind that he respects the rule of law and desires it to be upheld. Stage two of his public change is to convince the magnates of his late father's court that this change is genuine. King Henry

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[136] Harris, p. 1.

[137] *2 Henry IV*, 5.2.46.

[138] In *2 Henry IV*, 2.1, we learned that the Lord Chief Justice committed Prince Harry to prison for striking him in an argument concerning Bardolph, who, ironically, the king will let hang in *Henry V*.

[139] *2 Henry IV*, 5.2.112-17.

[140] C. T. Allmand, 'Henry V the Soldier, and the War in France', in *Henry V: The Practice of Kingship*, ed. G. L. Harris, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), p. 117-18.

claims that he survives 'to mock the expectation of the world, / to frustrate prophecies and to raze out / rotten opinion'.[141] He protests that 'no prince nor peer shall have just cause to say, / "God shorten Harry's happy life one day!"'[142] His first task as king, then, is to prove his reformation is genuine, and he does so with a startling change, a renunciation that Phialas describes as 'an aspect of the tragic conception of royalty'.[143]

2 Henry IV ends with one of the most critically divisive scenes in Shakespeare, a scene that confuses, angers, and saddens some, even as it provides others with a sense of relief that justice has been done. The plurality of reactions is both interesting and expected, for the reasons that Harold Goddard articulates:

> It is not Henry's rejection of tavern life with which we quarrel. That, naturally, had to go. It is not his new sense of responsibility. That we welcome. What we inevitably remember is the beam and the mote…The best we can say for Henry is that it is an outburst of that temper of which his father told us he was a victim ("being incensed, he's flint"), sudden anger at Falstaff's highly untactful appearance at such a time and place. The worst we can say is that the King had deliberately planned to rebuke Falstaff publicly at the first opportunity for the sake of the moral contrast with his own past and in fulfilment of the promise of his first soliloquy.[144]

Given what has been said about Hal's careful Machiavellianism, I would argue that the 'worst' option is actually the more likely. In order to be successful, in order to convince the people who matter that a real transformation has occurred, Henry must sever his connection with his former life. With his intimate knowledge of human nature, he would have expected Falstaff to seek him out as soon as he learned of Henry IV's death. A public rejection was the simplest way to convince people of his conversion to serious living. But it had to be unexpected; it had to be public; it had to be Falstaff, in order to succeed.

Scholars such as Tillyard argue that

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[141] *2 Henry IV*, 5.2.126-28.

[142] Ibid., 5.2.144-45.

[143] Phialas, *Henry V*, 166.

[144] Goddard, pp. 203-04.

> those who cannot stomach the rejection of Falstaff assume that in some ways the Prince acted dishonestly, that he made a friend of Falstaff, thus deceiving him, that he got all he could out of him and repudiated the debt. They are wrong. The Prince is aloof and Olympian from the start and never treats Falstaff any better than his dog, with whom he condescends once in a while to have a game. It is not the Prince who deceives, it is Falstaff who deceives himself by wishful thinking.[145]

Falstaff is not the only one shocked by Henry's transformation, however: both the Lord Chief Justice and the peers are stupefied. Given that Hal's father, the Lord Chief Justice, Henry Percy, and all the peers were convinced that the prince's life was genuinely wanton, it follows that Falstaff, too, would be confused. As shocking as Hal's treatment of Falstaff is, however, it is, as Ritchie Robertson explains, 'necessary that, as a responsible ruler, he should disassociate himself from his former companions'.[146] It is, in other words, pragmatically justified.[147]

The banishment of Falstaff marks the true beginning of the new Henry, the casting off of what St. Paul calls 'the old man' and the putting on of the new garb and manner of a king. As Nuttall observes, 'he commits himself, body and soul, to confirming, both morally and by force of arms, the power of the crown'.[148] Henry's rebuke to his stunned friend makes this clear:

> Presume not that I am the thing I was;
> For God doth know, so shall the world perceive,
> That I have turn'd away my former self;
> So will I those who kept me company.[149]

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[145] Tillyard, p. 277.

[146] Ritchie Robertson, 'Schiller, Kant, Machiavelli and the Ethics of Betrayal' in *Playing False: Representations of Betrayal*, ed. by Kristina Mendicino and Betiel Wasihun (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013), p. 131.

[147] Ibid., p. 131.

[148] Nuttall, p. 153.

[149] *2 Henry IV*, 5.5.56-59. Holinshed describes Henry's determination in his history: 'But this king euen at first appointing with himselfe, to shew that in his person princelie honors should change publike manners, he determined to put on him the shape of a new man. For whereas aforetime he had made himselfe a companion vnto misrulie mates of dissolute order and life, he now banished them all from his presence (but not vnrewarded or else vnpreferred); inhibiting them vpon a great paine, not once to approch, lodge, or soiourne within ten miles of his court or presence' (70).

As surprised as Falstaff is, however, he is the only one who truly understands the meaning of the rejection. He acknowledges that Hal 'must seem thus to the world'.[150] The key word here is 'seem'. Henry must give the impression that he has changed. Although he outwardly has changed, he remains the same within; he has successfully executed the plan that he outlined at the beginning of *1 Henry IV;* he has falsified men's hopes and then confused their expectations when they least expected it. As A. C. Bradley puts it, 'Henry's conduct in his rejection of Falstaff is in perfect keeping with his character on its unpleasant side as well as on its finer'.[151] 'So far as Henry is concerned', he maintains, 'we ought not to feel surprise at it'.[152] Henry V, more so even than Richard III, has schooled the Machiavel.

Having established the Machiavellian nature of Henry V, we are able to contrast his actions as king with those of his son Henry VI. Shakespeare's treatment of kingship and forgiveness changes significantly between his first and second tetralogies. Clifford Leech argues that 'the sequence of the histories depends on the cardinal assumption that order in a commonwealth is a prime good'.[153] In the *Henry VI* plays the younger playwright tries to work through the connection of kingship to divine providence and the right role of a Christian monarch in a state at war with itself. In the second tetralogy, Shakespeare's focus shifts toward the consequences of political infighting, the Machiavellian nature of the political system, and the lengths to which one must go to ensure a stable government. My treatment of *Henry V* will focus on instances where Christian precepts and political expediency intersect and a choice must be made, places where Henry V might show mercy or forgiveness, but where he chooses instead not to bestow it, not only to appear stronger

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[150] Ibid., 5.5.79.

[151] A. C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 6.

[152] Ibid., p. 6.

[153] Clifford Leech, 'The Unity of 2 Henry IV', in *Discussions of Shakespeare's Histories: Richard II to Henry V*, ed. by R. J. Dorius (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1964), p. 65.

and more formidable, but also out of a desire to ensure the security of his throne. In the Machiavellian state that Henry V rules, mercy can potentially destabilise the state, putting the king, and thereby his kingdom, at risk. Notable faults, crimes, or instances of treason must be punished quickly, severely, and publicly. Often Shakespeare ensures that these episodes cause us to feel morally uneasy. As we question whether or not an action was necessary or even just, it is worth remembering, as E. E. Stoll writes, that even though

> Henry V, at least in some measure, approaches Shakespeare's ideal of the practical man, which is not his highest ideal…It is more to the point to say that Henry is the ideal of England, not Shakespeare's but his country's notion of their hero-king. He is the king that audiences at the Globe would have him be.[154]

Henry V, the king who conquered France, was an English legend.[155]

Harris explains how, when Henry finally ascends the throne, he enters 'a world where political debate was more heightened and criticism of royal government more widely disseminated than at any previous point in English history'.[156] In order to unite such a kingdom and occupy idle hands, Henry is determined to conquer France. While Theodor Meron perceives this determination as an intelligent move, commenting that 'Shakespeare's kings understood that foreign wars could serve to divert attention from internal troubles',[157] Hazlitt scathingly remarks that Henry's desire to declare war on France is proof of his

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[154] E. E. Stoll, 'Henry V', in *Discussions of Shakespeare's Histories: Richard II to Henry V*, ed. by R. J. Dorius (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1964), p. 130.

[155] At this point it is good to recall what Arthur Sewell has said regarding the nature of presenting a character on the stage who already possess a legend in the popular mind: 'the histories raise the problem of character-presentation in a special form. The persons in these plays, whether taken from Plutarch or Holinshed, had had already, before Shakespeare dealt with them, their particular life in men's imaginations. They were known as treacherous or ambitious; their policies had brought them victory or had come to nothing; for kings and councillors they were famous predecessors and known examples. The audience had already formed some attitude to these characters, and, of course, this attitude was largely determined by the contemporary idea of political order. We may be sure that Shakespeare accepted these attitudes, even though he enriched and energised them' ('Character and Society in Shakespeare', in *Discussions of Shakespeare's Histories: Richard II to Henry V*, ed. by R. J. Dorius (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1964), pp. 147-48). In the case of Henry V, then, Shakespeare could not have presented him as anything less than a hero, for this is what the people of England believed him to be.

[156] Harris, pp. 1-2.

[157] Theodor Meron, *Henry's Wars and Shakespeare's Laws: Perspectives on the Law of War in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), p. 32.

inability to govern his own kingdom.[158] Both ideas contain an element of truth: it is true, for instance, that it would be extremely difficult for Henry to successfully govern a kingdom that was on the brink of civil war, yet it is equally true that engaging in a foreign war would provide a common enemy to distract his magnates and unify his people. In order to go to war with France, however, Henry must first establish a just cause, and for this *casus belli* he turns to the Bishop of Canterbury. Henry asks that the bishop weigh the justice of his cause:

> My learnèd lord, we pray you to proceed
> And justly and religiously unfold
> Why the law Salic that they have in France
> Or should or should not bar us in our claim.[159]

While the king does go to some length to give the proceedings an air of neutrality, the bishop necessarily gives Henry the justification he desires, which, due to his position as a prince of the Church, carries significant weight with the people. The validity of the Archbishop's assessment is hotly debated. Meron, for instance, argues that 'according to writers on *jus gentium* contemporaneous with Shakespeare, a war aimed at repossessing property captured by an enemy would be a defensive, not an aggressive, war', and that 'Henry's invasion of France in August 1415 did not start a new war but continued the war that legally was still extant'.[160] This argument relies on the premise, however, that a war can be 'paused' and resumed at will. Ritchie Robertson argues, by contrast, that 'Henry's claim to France is not clearly justified', and Paola Pugliatti maintains that 'he is falsifying the *causa belli* which, in the final analysis, is – both in the play and in the chronicles – nothing but the desire to expand one's dominion mentioned by Grotius among unjust causes'.[161] Henry's assault against France, even if it is technically just, is at the same time not obviously so. In some sense at least, Henry realises this truth, as he tries to pass on the responsibility for

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[158] Hazlitt, p. 53.

[159] *Henry V*, 1.2.9-12.

[160] Meron, p. 37, 53.

[161] Robertson, p. 130; Pugliatti, p. 209.

ensuring that his war is just to the bishop. He is, as Pugliatti notes, 'eager to dispose of this kind of downward responsibility'.[162] Unsurprisingly, then, the king directly asks, 'may I with right and conscience make this claim?'[163] To which the Bishop of Canterbury replies:

> The sin upon my head, dread sovereign,
> For in the Book of Numbers is it writ:
> "When the man dies, let the inheritance
> Descend unto the daughter." Gracious lord,
> Stand for your own, unwind your bloody flag,
> Look back into your mighty ancestors.[164]

Using both Salic and Old Testament law, the bishop encourages the king to go war, saying that he will take responsibility for the justness of the cause. As Saccio acknowledges, 'to a modern mind, claiming foreign territories on the basis of genealogical facts buried a century or more in the past appears to be not only a ridiculous move in itself but also a frivolous reason for starting a war'.[165] Nevertheless, he explains,

> The inheritance of property by the correct bloodlines was an extremely serious matter in the Middle Ages and long after. It was the elementary premise undergirding the whole social organisation. That is why Henry IV had gained the support of the English nobility in deposing Richard II after Richard had confiscated his huge inheritance from John of Gaunt. Richard had committed other undesirable and alarming acts, but sequestering a magnate's inheritance (except in cases of treason) was lawless tyranny.[166]

Henry's question to the Archbishop, and Canterbury's subsequent argument, would likely have been more convincing to an early modern audience than it is to audiences today.

Following swiftly upon Henry's decision to invade France, we learn of an assassination plot, supposedly engineered by France. Richard Earl of Cambridge, Henry Lord Scroop, and Sir Thomas Grey conspire to murder the king, but Henry is forewarned. His treatment of the traitors, as Manheim points out, is divisive: some believe it to be

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[162] Ibid., p. 217.

[163] *Henry V*, 1.2.96.

[164] Ibid., 1.2.97-102.

[165] Saccio, p. 77.

[166] Ibid., p. 78.

'devious and sudden, cat-and-mouse tactics at their worst', while others view it as 'a superbly effective example of justice appropriately rendered'.[167] Manheim argues that it is both:

> the three lords are guilty; no one doubts that. What Henry must prevent is the bifurcation of our feelings which accompanies so many previous conflicts between rebel and crown…Any potential division in our sympathies is overwhelmed by Henry's verbal onslaught. He so completely smothers issues here that whatever rationale might exist for the rebels' behaviour is overlooked.[168]

Henry accomplishes this feat of rhetoric by tricking the traitors into condemning themselves, preempting any possible case for mercy. The king knows from the beginning that they are false, but they are unaware of his knowledge. Thus, when Henry asks them what he should do with the drunk man that railed against him, they respond with 'let him be punished, sovereign, lest example / breed, by his sufferance, more of such a kind'.[169] They argue that the slightest offence be severely punished, without realising that in doing so they make mercy for themselves impossible. When they learn that they have been discovered and open their mouths to plead, Henry's response is swift:

> The mercy that was quick in us but late
> By your own counsel is suppressed and killed:
> You must not dare, for shame, to talk of mercy,
> For your own reasons turn into your bosoms
> As dogs upon their masters, worrying you.[170]

Henry has, in effect, tricked the conspirators into pronouncing their own sentence. But their fall from grace serves a double purpose. Firstly, it gives Henry the opportunity to equate the safety of England with his own personal safety, making it appear that he punishes them not out of revenge, but because he loves England:

> Touching our person seek we no revenge,
> But we our kingdom's safety must so tender,
> Whose ruin you have sought, that to her laws

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[167] Manheim, p. 174.

[168] Ibid., pp. 174-75.

[169] *Henry V*, 2.2.45-46.

[170] Ibid., 2.2.79-83.

We do deliver you.[171]

The ruin of Henry would most certainly have meant the ruin of the state, for, if they had succeeded in killing him, it would have destabilised the realm and England would have descended into civil war. It might be said, therefore, that Henry acted in the only way possible, for, as Harris notes, 'the maintenance of law was the very basis and essence of ordered society and the exercise of royal authority'.[172] Furthermore, as John Watts argues, 'if the single authority of the crown was not recognised, it could do nothing for the common good'.[173] Secondly, the plot gives Henry an excuse to publicly declare that now no one can be trusted: 'and thus thy fall hath left a kind of blot / to mark the full-fraught man and best endued / with some suspicion'.[174] In a rare moment of feeling, Henry laments the betrayal of Scroop, and almost reluctantly delivers him up to execution.[175] Henry has accomplished more in a single scene than other of Shakespeare's kings accomplished in entire plays: he has coupled himself and the state; he has convinced his subjects that he is merciful by

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[171] *Henry V*, 2.2.175-78. Shakespeare's portrayal of this scene matches closely with Holinshed's historical account: 'When king Henrie had heard all things opened, which he desired to know, he caused all his nobilitie to come before his presence; before whome he caused to be brought the offendors also, and to them said: "Hauing thus *conspired* the death and destruction of me, which an the head of the realme and gouernour of the people, it maie be (no doubt) but that you likewise haue sworne the confusion of all that are here with me, and also the *desolation* of your owne countrie. To what horror (O lord!) for any true English hart to consider, that such an execrable iniquitie should euer so bewarp you, as for pleasing of a forren enimie to imbrue your hands in your bloud, and to ruine your own natiue soile. *Reuenge* herein *touching* my *person*, though I *seeke* not; yet for the *safegard* of you my deere freends, & for due preseruation of all sorts, I am by office to cause example to be shrewd. *Get* ye *hence therefore,* ye *poore miserable wretches,* to the receiuing of *your* just reward; wherein *Gods* maiestie *giue you* grace *of his mercie, and repentance of your* heinous *offenses'* (74-75).

[172] Harris, p. 11.

[173] Watts, p. 44.

[174] *Henry V*, 2.2.138-40.

[175] Speaking of the conspirators in 'Shakespeare's Henry V and the Second Tetralogy', Peter Phialas argues that 'Henry's words of judgment to Scroop show that the king is not the ruthless Machiavellian that some critics take him to be. He has no choice in the rejection of Falstaff or the execution of the traitors, but it does not follow that Henry fails to experience real pain in passing judgment upon these two. Both actions on the king's part are made to underscore the tragic element in Shakespeare's—and King Henry's—conception of the royal dilemma. That element resides, as we have noted, in the conflict between the impersonal necessities of the king's public function and the multiple needs of Henry the man' (167-68). Throughout his piece, Phialas repeatedly mentions Henry's quest for balance; his desire to find that fulcrum between private and public life that will allow him to be successful as king. This idea is echoed in A. D. Nuttall's *New Mimesis: Shakespeare and the Representation of Reality*, where he argues that everything Henry does is 'directed to the good end of stable government', which, while confessedly Machiavellian in nature, is done with a good intention, thus making Henry a 'White Machiavel' (147).

freeing the drunkard, but reluctantly just in condemning the conspirators; he has shown that his authority is not to be trifled with, while at the same time making clear that no one is above suspicion.

The next instance in which Henry finds himself able to dispense forgiveness features his old friend Bardolph: the same Bardolph on whose behalf he had previously struck the Lord Chief Justice. Bardolph, we learn, has been condemned to death by Exeter for taking 'a pax of little price' from one of the French churches, a crime for which, as Pugliatti notes, 'the death penalty was indeed traditionally prescribed by war manuals'.[176] When given the opportunity to show leniency, Henry chooses to let the execution go ahead in order to deter others from stealing from the towns and churches. He further declares, 'we would have all such offenders cut off…for when lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the / gentler gamester is the soonest winner'.[177] Like Machiavelli, Henry recognises that the French people will more easily accept his rule later if his army treats them well.[178] In this scene Henry makes clear that no one, no matter how close they might have been to him, is too dear to sacrifice on the altar of his ambition. He cannot forgive, because forgiveness would be a chink in the armour of his power, and such a weakness, however small, is a risk too great to endure when the prize is France and the forfeit civil war.

Our final example of Henry V's inability to show mercy or forgiveness is his twice-given order for his men to slaughter their French prisoners during the Battle of Agincourt. Phialas argues that 'from a military point of view the decree is unavoidable', and Meron agrees, postulating that fear of another French onslaught drove Henry to order the

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[176] Pugliatti, p. 222.

[177] *Henry V*, 3.6.107, 112-13.

[178] '[Henry] caused proclamation to be made, that no person should be so hardie, on paine of death, either to take anie thing out of anie church that belonged to the same; or to hurt or doo anie violence either to priests, women, or anie such as should be found without weapon or armor, and not readie to make resistance' (Holinshed, 79).

slaughter.[179] In the first instance the motive is clearly stated. Henry orders the slaughter because he believes the French have reinforced their men: 'the French have reinforced their scattered men. / Then every soldier kill his prisoners!'[180] On the second occasion, however, Henry's order is motivated by anger. Enraged with the French attacking the English camp and killing the non-combatant boys, he exclaims:

> I was not angry since I came to France
> Until this instant…
> We'll cut the throats of those we have,
> And not a man of them that we shall take
> Shall taste our mercy.[181]

Robertson maintains that Henry's behaviour in this instance is proof that behind his carefully constructed exterior he 'conceals a ruthless Machiavellian'.[182] Even supposing that everything Henry believes to be true is actually true, it still remains, nonetheless, that he orders the death of numerous defenceless men. The prisoners are no longer combatants; they cannot defend themselves, and they surrendered under the assumption that the laws of war would protect them; namely, that those who laid down their weapons would be spared. In a battle governed by Christian principles and laws of war, Henry's order is impossible. And yet, he is obeyed. Of all Henry's Machiavellian decisions, these orders are the most difficult to interpret as acceptable.

Concluding Remarks

Goddard argues that 'not maliciously and in cold blood but against the grain of his own nature and by insensible degrees, the man who began as Hal and ended as Henry V made

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[179] Phialas, *Henry V*, 169; Meron, p. 155.

[180] *Henry V*, 4.6.36-37.

[181] Ibid., 4.7.54-55, 62-64.

[182] Robertson, p. 130.

himself into something that comes too close for comfort to Machiavelli's ideal prince'.[183] Likewise, Manheim declares that 'Machiavelli would have been far readier to accept Henry as his ideological offspring than Richard of Gloucester'.[184] Even Tillyard links the names of Hal and Richard when he inadvertently makes an argument for Henry's Machiavellian character: 'first and most important, Richard and Prince Hal are deliberately contrasted characters; Richard being the prince in appearance rather than in reality, Hal being the prince in reality whose appearance first obscures the truth'.[185] Henry, however, is not a caricature of a villain: not the so-called 'stage Machiavel' of Elizabethan theatre. Rather he is a true Machiavel. He is a man who purposely appears to possess no virtue so that he can more easily convince his subjects that he possesses them all. He understands men's motivations and uses them to his (and their) advantage. He does not allow anyone, regardless of the debt he might owe him, to come between him and power, because the power of the king maintains the peace and stability of his kingdom. He uses war both as a means to 'busy giddy minds' and to bring his countrymen together that they might forget the usurpation of his father. He does not shy away from washing his hands in blood, and the result is victory and peace. Thus, despite actions that seem to depart sharply from Christian precepts, Shakespeare's Henry V does come across as an ideal. Gray argues that one way to make sense of this 'ethical ambiguity is to see him as attempting to navigate between the incongruent claims of two rival ethical systems, on the one hand Christianity, on the other a political order driven by imperatives of honour'.[186] Hence, although *Henry V* explores, as Manheim observes, 'the means by which Machiavellianism could be seen as attractive and

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[183] Goddard, p. 267.

[184] Manheim, p. 169.

[185] Tillyard, p. 240.

[186] Gray, *War*, 10.

even desirable as a guide to political behaviour', the play hardly represents 'a complete acceptance of the Machiavellian spirit'; rather, 'it only seeks to make the spirit palatable'.[187] In short, Henry represents a popular coming to terms with Machiavellianism, accepting the Machiavel as 'the inevitable alternative' to what Manheim identifies as 'the problem of the weak king'.[188] Immediately preceding the Battle of Agincourt, Henry gives a soliloquy that Rabkin calls the 'thematic climax of the entire tetralogy', because it shows us 'that at last we have a king free of the crippling disabilities of his predecessors and wise in what the plays have been teaching'.[189] While Henry's actions do, at times, seem reprehensible, Phialis argues that his soliloquy, 'Upon the King', explains why: 'the difference between a king and his subjects is his greater care'.[190] In other words, a king is responsible not only for himself, but for his nation, and at times this responsibility forces him to make decisions that he would never dream of taking were he a private individual. Such is the responsibility of a king.

Norman Rabkin argues in his famous essay 'Rabbits, Ducks, and Henry V', that critics 'could hardly disagree more radically' when it comes to Henry V.[191] Each reader or viewer sees what he or she wishes to see—a rabbit, a duck, an ideal monarch, a Machiavellian villain—but each of these visions is only part of the picture. Henry V is a complicated character because he lived during a complicated transition. He recognises the fragility of his initial claim to the throne. Nonetheless, he is determined to cement his power and provide the stability that England, up until his reign, has not been able to enjoy. Given the difference between his reign and that of his son, Henry VI, in the first tetralogy, one

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[187] Manheim, p. 161, 166.

[188] Ibid., p. 186.

[189] Norman Rabkin, 'Rabbits, Ducks, and Henry V', *Shakespeare Quarterly,* 28.3 (1977), 287.

[190] Phialis, *Henry V*, 170.

[191] Rabkin, 279.

might assume that Henry V's Machiavellian prowess leads the king to a position of strong authority and peace. It is his son, Henry VI, however, whom Shakespeare surrounds with Christ-like imagery, implying that he, like Christ, is also worthy of imitation, if perhaps in a different sense. Shakespeare gives us two characters: one the perfect saint, the other the perfect king. In a Machiavellian world, these two cannot be one. Although Shakespeare views forgiveness favourably, in the end he demonstrates that it is nearly impossible as a political act on the part of a king; in a fallen world, St. Augustine's City of Man, it too dangerously undermines the king's necessary, sometimes ruthless authority. If, then, having finished Shakespeare's two tetralogies, we are left with feelings of discomfort or dissatisfaction, we might do well to remember Patrick Gray's argument that the playwright 'answers the questions he asks to his own satisfaction, rather than to ours'.[192]

[192] Patrick Gray, 'Seduced by Romanticism : Re-imagining Shakespearean Catharsis', in *Routledge Companion to Shakespeare and Philosophy*, ed. by Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne, (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 517.

2

SHAKESPEARE AND SENECA: HONOUR, FORGIVENESS, AND THE DILEMMA OF REVENGE

> Life every man holds dear; but the brave man / holds honour far more precious-dear than life.[1]

In pagan Greek and Roman society honour was a man's most prized possession. Aristotle describes it as that 'which people of the highest position aim at, and which is the prize appointed for the noblest deeds'.[2] In these societies, men took affronts to their honour seriously and tended to believe that such slights could not be left unavenged. Seneca for his part rejects this idea of vengeance, arguing that it actually lacks honour. According to the philosopher, such vengeful acts differ little from wrongdoing, except that he who renders pain for pain commits a more pardonable sin.[3] He even goes so far as to compare the man who offends an honourable man to a cur whose bark does not deserve the recognition of a superior beast.[4] 'The more honourable a man is by birth, reputation, and patrimony, the more heroically he should bear himself, remembering that the tallest ranks stand in the front line'.[5] Seneca would have the honourable man also be a stoic wise man or *sapiens*, one whose disposition remains unchanged, whether by the garlands of victory, or by the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune'.[6] As David Konstan explains, 'the stoics regarded anger, like other passions, as unbecoming to a sage;' the wise man, on a personal level, was to ignore

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[1] *Troilus and Cressida*, 5.3.27-28, in *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015). All subsequent quotations from Shakespeare's plays are taken from this same edition.

[2] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* trans. by W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), 4.3.

[3] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, 'On Anger', in *Moral Essays: Volume 1*, trans. by John W. Basore (London: W. Heinemann, 1928), 2.32, p. 237.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, 'On Firmness', in *Moral Essays: Volume 1*, trans. by John W. Basore (London: W. Heinemann, 1928), 19.3, p. 105.

[6] *Hamlet*, 3.1.58.

slights because they were the result of ignorance, and therefore, worthy of disdain.[7] Theoretically, if the injured party chooses to treat the offence as 'negligible', the denial that an offence actually took place precludes the possibility of forgiveness.[8] More typically, however, as in Seneca's own tragedies, a perceived loss of honour led to the possibility of violence in its defence.

Anger and revenge often go hand in hand; a perceived wrong generating a disproportionate response in an attempt to regain something lost. While an ordinary man might find it difficult to redress his own wrongs, the idea of revenge was deeply ingrained in Renaissance literature, and, it was all but encouraged in the popular revenge tragedy that took its cue from Seneca's plays. A deeper look at Senecan philosophy, however, reveals a more nuanced consideration of anger, its motivations, and its possible consequences. At the time of Shakespeare's theatrical debut, philosophies of antiquity were all the rage. It was, as Pierre Villey notes, a 'mass intoxication'.[9] Of particular importance in this case are Seneca's *De Ira* and *De Clementia*, which Susanna Morton Braund aptly describes as 'a diptych exploring rage and its motivations'.[10]

In *De Ira*, Seneca argues that anger, and the vengeance to which it gives rise, are to be avoided by the wise and virtuous man. For, as Braund rightly points out, 'self-restraint was central to the Roman aristocratic male value system'.[11] In *De Ira* Seneca describes anger as the act of one

> Raving with a desire that is utterly inhuman for instruments of pain and reparations in blood, careless of itself so long as it harms the other…Oblivious of decency, heedless of personal

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[7] David Konstan, *Before Forgiveness: The Origins of a Moral Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), p. 32.

[8] Ibid., p. 7.

[9] Pierre Villey, quoted by Curtis Brown Watson, in *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1960), p. 57.

[10] Braund, Susanna Morton, 'The Anger of Tyrants and the Forgiveness on Kings', in *Ancient Forgiveness: Classical, Judaic, and Christian*, ed. by Charles L. Griswold and David Konstan (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), p. 84.

[11] Ibid., p. 86.

> bonds, obstinate and intent on anything once started, closed to reasoning or advice, agitated on pretexts without foundation, incapable of discerning fairness or truth.[12]

In other words, anger blinds the one who gives way to it; it takes away the ability to see clearly or to reason in any meaningful way; 'it rages at truth itself, if truth appears to conflict with its wishes'.[13] As such, anger might be considered brutish. It slowly engulfs the mind until the whole person is diseased and bereft of reason.

Seneca argues that in order to avoid anger at individuals one must forgive everyone; one must 'pardon the whole human race'.[14] Only in following this directive is a man able to clearly distinguish between acts of justice and acts of vengeance. When punishment must happen, Seneca argues that it 'should never be directed towards the past but towards the future, being as it is an expression not of anger but of caution'.[15] The purpose of punishing an offender is, thus, rehabilitation, or, if that is impossible, the instruction of the populace as a whole through the punishment of the individual. Seneca stresses the importance of considering why a thing is done: it is the motive, more so than the act itself, which should be considered. He demands that we ask if an offence was intended or an accident; if the perpetrator was forced or misled, or if he was acting out of hatred or for reward. Finally, he stresses, it is important to ascertain whether or not he was 'indulging himself or assisting another'.[16] These considerations are necessary in order to determine the voluntariness of an act, which in turn can either mitigate or aggravate an offence. Seneca refuses to listen to the excuses of those who take vengeance when angry with the excuse that they could not do otherwise, arguing that 'we should draw a distinction between being unable and being unwilling'.[17] Furthermore, the sage contends that mercy, which he distinguishes from pardon

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[12] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, 'On Anger', in *Moral and Political Essays*, ed. by John Cooper and J. F. Procope (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), p. 17.

[13] Ibid., p. 37.

[14] Ibid., p. 49.

[15] Ibid., p. 70.

[16] Ibid., p. 88.

[17] Ibid., p. 105.

and pity, should be practised, especially by rulers, not least because it is a display of true superiority.

In Senecan Rome, mercy was a gift that only the powerful could bestow, not least because in order to bestow mercy one must be in a position to give it away. Braund argues that

> the Roman concern with *clementia*, especially under the new regime of the Principate, corresponds with the wider Roman preoccupation with power, hierarchy, and social status. In a society where the *paterfamilias* had absolute jurisdiction in legal, social, and economic matters over his entire household—even over adult sons holding high office—it should not surprise us that the only kind of 'forgiveness' to receive attention in Roman texts is one that reinforces absolute and arbitrary authority.[18]

As mercy is the territory of the powerful, 'it is mercy which makes there be a great distinction between king and tyrant'.[19] Seneca contends that 'no one could conceive of anything more becoming to a ruler than mercy'.[20] Furthermore, he argues that it is in the best interests of a ruler to show mercy because it increases his safety and the love that his people have for him. Mercy, to him, means 'self-control by the mind when it has the power to take vengeance' and 'leniency on the part of a superior towards an inferior when imposing punishments'.[21] Seneca is careful, however, to distinguish between mercy, pity, pardon, and forgiveness. Pity, he says, 'looks at the plight, not the cause of it. Mercy joins in with reason'.[22] As such, Seneca condemns pity, as a 'fault of minds unduly frightened by misery'.[23] Meanwhile, he dismisses pardon as the remission of deserved punishment.[24] Finally, there is forgiveness, which is complicated because, as Seneca says, 'a person can only be forgiven if he deserves to be punished'.[25] The complication arises from the fact that

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[18] Braund, pp. 95-96.

[19] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, 'On Mercy', in *Moral and Political Essays*, ed. by John Cooper and J.F. Procope (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), p. 144.

[20] Ibid., p. 150.

[21] Ibid., p. 160.

[22] Ibid., p. 161.

[23] Ibid., p. 163.

[24] Ibid., p. 163.

[25] Ibid., p. 163.

the wise man does not, in Seneca's eyes, omit anything which ought to be done, including punishing one who is deserving of punishment; 'forgiveness, on the other hand, is failing to punish what in your judgement should be punished'.[26] In consequence, Seneca believes mercy to be superior to pity, pardon, or forgiveness, because it recognises and declares that those released from punishment should not have suffered anything different; as such, in his view, 'it is completer…and more honourable'.[27]

The underpinning premise of Senecan teaching on anger and mercy is Stoicism, which advocates self-control and the subordination of desire to reason. Geoffrey Aggeler notes that there was a particular interest in Stoicism amongst Protestant sects: 'in England, as on the continent, Stoicism seems to have been most attractive to Protestants with strong Calvinist leanings, to the extent that some later commentators have seen Calvinism itself as "baptised Stoicism"'.[28] Aggeler contends that the Protestant need for introspection was 'strongly encouraged by contemporary Neostoic writings in which there is the recurrent classical Stoic theme that self-knowledge is an avenue to knowledge of the divine'.[29] This affinity between Calvinism and Stoicism is in keeping with Gordon Braden's observation that 'the tradition of distinguishing Stoicism from Christianity is as durable as the wish to assimilate them'.[30] Both philosophical systems are built on a foundation of self-control. 'Stoic *virtus* is', as Braden explains, 'a resignation that is intended to preserve the high classical style of personal pride, and as such it can closely resemble Christian virtue on the surface while convicting itself of one of the greatest Christian sins'.[31] Nonetheless, he

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[26] Ibid. p. 164.

[27] Ibid., p. 164.

[28] Geoffrey Aggeler, "'Sparkes Of Holy Things': Neostoicism and the English Protestant Conscience', *Renaissance and Reformation*, 14.3 (1990), 223-24.

[29] Ibid., 231.

[30] Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger's Privilege* (Yale UP: New Haven, 1985), p. 92.

[31] Ibid., pp. 89-90.

argues, although 'Graeco-Roman culture may recognise the possible excesses and dangers of *superbia*…they are not weighted against any serious commitment to humility as a central standard'.[32] At the core of Seneca's thought, therefore, is what Christians would call the sin of pride.

Whereas in Greek tragedy, reasons for revenge tend to be relatively clear, in Senecan tragedy, the representation of motive is often more ambiguous. One complicating factor is the withdrawal of the gods. Greek tragedy is rife with divine intervention; the gods take an interest in their heroes and even direct them explicitly. In Senecan tragedy, the gods stand further off. Even when they do appear, which is rare, they are more removed from the action. Heroes tend to blame them and complain about their injustice, rather than accepting fate as an indication of their will. Since the gods, in this sense, are more remote, Seneca's characters find themselves obliged to reason through their decisions without any obvious divine moral anchor. As Braden observes,

> if Greek tragedy is the tragedy of the failure of human will and pride in a moral universe that deals harshly with them, Senecan tragedy is the tragedy of the success of the human drive for moral and personal self-sufficiency, the drive for an autonomous selfhood that is subject to no order beyond itself.[33]

Seneca's heroes act with an independence that is missing in characters such as Achilles and Orestes. This independence, however, as Patrick Gray observes, is 'tragically misleading'.[34]

In *Phaedra*, for instance, the title character, feeling both slighted and afraid, brings about the death of her stepson Hippolytus. The young man, horrified by the advances of his stepmother, cries out to Jupiter, 'Great ruler of the gods, dost thou so calmly hear crimes, so calmly look upon them?'.[35] He then turns on Phaedra and exclaims, 'O thou, who hast

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Gordon Braden, 'Senecan Tragedy and the Renaissance', *Illinois Classical Studies*, 9.2 (1984), 285.

[34] Patrick Gray, 'Shakespeare vs. Seneca: Competing Visions of Human Dignity', in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Senecan Tragedy: Scholarly, Theatrical and Literary Receptions*, ed. by Eric Dodson-Robinson (Boston: Brill, 2016), p. 214.

[35] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, 'Phaedra', in *Seneca's Tragedies: In Two Volumes*, trans. by Frank Justus Miller (London: Heinemann, 1927), ln. 671.

outsinned the whole race of women…Away with thy impure touch from my chaste body!'.[36] Phaedra, who has made some attempt to quell her awful feelings, continues to pursue him, but he shuns her and will not even defile his sword by killing her with it. As he rushes away her nurse determines to try to save her mistress' reputation, and Phaedra, to avenge herself on Hippolytus, goes along with the lie: she tells the just returned Theseus that Hippolytus ravished her. The result of this lie is a father's curse and a horrible death for his chaste, innocent son. Although the guilt she feels at Hippolytus' death does cause Phaedra to confess in the end, it was revenge for the original rejection and the fear of her incestuous love being known that caused her to lie, in order to shift the blame to the one who scorned her. Too late Phaedra repents of her revenge on Hippolytus, and her change of heart leads her to take vengeance on herself; she kills herself for the death her lie has caused. *Phaedra*, then, is a series of revenges: Phaedra's revenge on Hippolytus, Theseus' revenge on Hippolytus, and finally, Phaedra's revenge on herself.

In *Hercules Furens*, Hercules, having returned victorious from hell, once again becomes the subject of Juno's rage. The goddess causes an incredible frenzy to come over him, in which he mistakes his family for his enemies and kills them all. Awaking from a divinely induced slumber, Hercules sees his dead family and asks, 'who has given my loved ones to death, all of them at once?'.[37] The audience knows the dreadful truth, and with Amphitryon, they protest, even as they back away, 'truly the woe is thine; the crime thy step dame's. This mischance is free from sin'.[38] Hercules, however, like Oedipus from Greek tragedy, refuses to see himself as innocent; he is set on punishing himself. Even so, Hercules' father slowly convinces him that error is not guilt, answering every argument that

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[36] Ibid., ln. 685, 704.

[37] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, 'Hercules Furens', in *Seneca's Tragedies: In Two Volumes*, trans. by Frank Justus Miller (London: Heinemann, 1927), ln. 1174.

[38] Ibid., ln. 1200.

Hercules makes against himself. When Hercules still seems bent on self-destruction, Amphitryon threatens to add to Hercules' crimes that of patricide. Finally the hero relents and bids his soul 'yield, do a father's will; add this task also to Hercules' toils—and live!'.[39] The contrast here between Hercules and Oedipus is startling. Both are unknowingly guilty of atrocious crimes; both want self-vengeance; in *Hercules Furens,* however, this vengeance consists not in self-harm, but instead in continuing to live with full knowledge of the evil that has been perpetrated. Vengeance is accomplished by not taking vengeance.

The incongruity between how his characters act and his own personal philosophy is the genius of Seneca. In his plays he demonstrates the devastating consequences of not living out his philosophical principles. Phaedra, for instance, does little to quench her desire for vengeance when Hippolytus refuses her advances, rather, as Braden says, she 'embrace[s] [her] villainy', she uses her wickedness 'as a form of radical freedom from an external restraint on individual will and action'.[40] Where Senecan philosophy would call for calm, recognising that 'the greatest remedy for anger is delay',[41] both Phaedra and Hercules rush to embrace their *furor* as if it were a friend. They fail to realise that in welcoming their anger they are relinquishing their reason in favour of their emotions, and, as Seneca notes, 'there is no emotion which anger cannot master'.[42] In a very real sense, then, Gray is correct in his argument that 'Seneca's tragedies are designed to illustrate the disastrous effects of unchecked emotion'.[43]

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[39] Ibid., ln. 1314.

[40] Braden, *Senecan Tragedy*, p. 285.

[41] Seneca, *Anger*, p. 67.

[42] Ibid., p. 75.

[43] Gray, *Seneca*, 218.

Revenge in Elizabethan England

Elizabethan revenge tragedy, which drew its most immediate inspiration from Senecan tragedy, competed with Christian ideals of mercy and forgiveness in an effort to legitimise revenge. Calvinist fascination with a vengeful God did little, moreover, to alleviate this tension. Lily B. Campbell argues that 'the great tragic theme of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century teaching is this theme of God's revenge for sin'.[44] 'Writers of tragedies', she argues, 'were necessarily preoccupied with this fundamental teaching'.[45] Robert Grams Hunter puts the problem in perspective:

> one should remember, in considering the medieval and sixteenth-century attitudes toward the problems of mercy and forgiveness, that, for the men of these periods, the virtue of justice was not notable for any admixture of benignity. Deeds of what seem to us abominable cruelty were regarded as praiseworthy when they were performed in justice's name…Justice implied the horrible but deserved sufferings of the guilty and God's justice implied them in the highest degree.[46]

Because the sufferings of the wicked were deserved, the ministers of justice were not responsible for the pain; on the contrary, they would have been held responsible had they not administered it. This strict notion of God's justice understandably trickled down into human interactions, creating an atmosphere in which revenge was seen as not only normal, but even justified.

As in Senecan revenge tragedy, there is often a close link between vengeance and 'honour' in Renaissance England. In his treatise on the concept of honour in the Renaissance, Curtis Brown Watson argues that honour was a social virtue, and as such determined social capital. Speaking of honour as an exclusively social virtue, he explains what is at stake:

> honour, in this sense, may refer to one's *reputation* in the community, to one's *credit* as a man of integrity, to the *honours* or *rewards* which are bestowed publicly as a testimony to

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[44] Lily B. Campbell, 'Theories of Revenge in Renaissance England', *Modern Philology*, 28.3 (1931), 290.

[45] Ibid., 290.

[46] Robert Grams Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness* (New York: Columbia UP, 1966), p. 12.

> one's virtue, to the *glory* and *fame* which one acquires as the result of exceptional or heroic accomplishments, or to the *good name* which is gained when one consistently behaves in a fashion which wins the *respect* and *esteem* of one's fellows…But honour also refers to one's *private* and *personal* judgment of one's *own* actions, one's *inner* conviction of *innate* moral rectitude. Honour, in other words, relates to *self-esteem* as much as to public approbation.[47]

Because honour had such a penetrating influence, it is not surprising that men sought to maintain and defend this social currency at any cost. For the aristocracy, in particular, honour was of paramount importance. Consequently, a preoccupation with maintaining personal honour can be found in most of the popular writing of the period. As Watson observes

> honour as man's most precious possession, honour as the reward of virtue, honour as the ensign of virtue, honour as the testimony of the good opinion of others, and dishonour as a thing to be feared worse than death itself, are notions which are so all-pervasive in the 16th century that we hardly think of them as integral parts of a systematic philosophy.[48]

Revenge, by this light, presented a conundrum for the Renaissance man: his religion demanded forgiveness, but his social code required vengeance.

For Paul A. Cantor, Hamlet struggles not least because, 'no matter what he does, he will be forced to violate some legitimate principle'.[49] As Cantor explains, 'the Renaissance was characterised by an uneasy alliance of classical and Christian elements', and 'no single issue was more perfectly calculated to expose the inner tensions of the age than revenge'.[50] For Watson, 'the duality of Renaissance ethics is striking in any discussion of revenge': 'the powerful hold of the pagan-humanist ethics, and of the code of honour which resulted from it, led to sharp cleavage between religious theory and the civil law on the one hand and actual Elizabethan practice on the other'.[51] Thus it was, then, that the taking of revenge in order to restore honour was a common practice.

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[47] Curtis Brown Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1960), pp. 11-12.

[48] Ibid., p. 66.

[49] Paul A. Cantor, *Shakespeare: Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), p. 23.

[50] Ibid., p. 25.

[51] Ibid., p. 127.

While many are familiar with the practice of duelling, a more striking example of the era's honour-bound mindset is the protection afforded to men who killed their own wives if they caught them in the act of adultery. During this period an unmarried woman's honour consisted in the preservation of her virginity; once married, her fidelity remained of paramount importance to the honour of her family, particularly her husband. As a result, as Robert S. Miola observes, 'in English legal practice the burden of the mandates for punishment fell on wives rather than husbands'.[52] English law protected a man who murdered his wife and her lover, because, as Watson explains, 'since honour was dearer than life, the taking of the wife's life for bringing dishonour on her husband was considered a lesser wrong than the injury which she had done to him'.[53] It would not be an exaggeration to say that the preoccupation of Renaissance men with personal honour was akin to obsession. As Watson notes, 'dishonour was the one thing in life which could not be tolerated'.[54] Renaissance men used theatre as one way to explore the complicated nature of honour and the possible validity of revenge.

This fascination with revenge, however, in keeping with the perceived need to maintain one's honour no matter what the consequence, howsoever violent or even self-destructive, was impossible to reconcile with Christian moral principles. In fact, 'the theatrical usefulness of revenge as a theme', as Braden points out, is precisely that 'it allows some of the widest but also most intimate exploration of that indeterminacy'.[55] He continues, 'the avenger is much more fully and consciously a member of the society whose restraints he violates than is the villain hero'.[56]

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[52] Robert S. Miola, '"Wrying but a Little?": Marriage, Punishment, and Forgiveness in Cymbeline', in *Shakespeare and Renaissance Ethics*, ed. by John D. Cox and Patrick Gray (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014), 192.

[53] Watson, p. 160.

[54] Ibid. p. 155.

[55] Braden, *Anger's Privilege*, p. 113.

[56] Ibid., p. 113.

In his tragedies, which acted as a model for English revenge tragedy, Seneca shows the consequences of not following the precepts laid out in his essays. Seneca explores here the nature and consequences of *furor,* an emotion Braden aptly describes as 'heroic anger diffused uncontrollably when the honourific borders it had once maintained become elusive and unreal'.[57] *Furor* is the opposite of *ratio*: 'a primal force of unreason that cannot be managed or diverted, only supported or resisted'.[58] Once *furor* is awakened, it so consumes the mind that it cannot be laid to rest until its designs are accomplished. It is in such a state that Theseus in Seneca's *Hippolytus* rashly wishes for the death of his son, assuming, also while in a fit of rage, that his son had raped his wife, the queen. Senecan tragedy reveals the destructive potential of the kind of unbridled anger that the philosopher criticises at length and in more abstract terms in his essays; in other words, anger is a dehumanising influence that destroys everything in its path. The tragedies are designed to leave readers with an aversion to revenge and anger by showing that the consequences of such weakness are often catastrophic. Nevertheless, Seneca's fascination with vengeance proved influential. Renaissance playwrights built upon Seneca's idea of *scelus*, making it the central principle of tragic action and design. Seneca taught these writers, in effect, as Miola notes, 'how to focus on the crime, the perpetrators, the victims, and on the moral framework violated'.[59]

In addition to his popularity as a tragedian, Seneca was, according to Colin Burrow, 'principally known in the later sixteenth century as the most notable Roman expositor of Stoic thought'.[60] This reputation is significant, because, as Braden notes, 'stoic tenets are present very close to the origins of Renaissance literary culture, and they arrive linked to a

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[57] Ibid., p. 14.

[58] Ibid., p. 28.

[59] Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 16.

[60] Colin Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), p. 167.

renewed feeling for the honorific ambition of Roman civilisation as well'.[61] Senecan tragedy allowed for the exploration of a link between honour and the self that the the mind of Renaissance man saw as inextricable. As Braden explains,

> the self is always more implicated than it knows in the conditions it strives to transcend: however, disproportionately, Senecan tragedy carries within itself what will become one of the great stories of Renaissance drama, and it provides some of the essential techniques for telling it. Seneca bequeaths to later times some extraordinary standards for the self's ambitions and some ways of realising those ambitions dramatically, in a rhetoric of psychic aggression that seemingly allows a character to make himself and his world up out of his own words.[62]

The world of the revenge tragedy is neither dependent on a clear understanding of the universe, nor beholden to any true interpretation of events; rather, every action, every event, is seen through the rage-induced frenzy of an injured hero whose sole ambition is revenge. The subjective world of the tragic hero becomes so coloured by this driving force that he is eventually entirely convinced of the rightness of his aim. Seneca, as per Burrow, provides the clearest example of this poetic drama, drama 'in which action and metaphor, and perhaps a substrate of philosophical and metaphorical thinking, cooperate to create plays which not only hang together, but which knit together mental experiences, material catastrophes, rhetorical mode, and metaphorical structures'.[63] Reading Seneca, therefore, is an exercise in understanding the performance of suffering; it forces the reader to consider the lengths to which a broken human being might go to redeem his honour, all the while questioning the legitimacy of his pursuit. In adopting Seneca as a model, 'part of what the Renaissance bequeaths to later European civilisation', Braden argues, 'is a deeply complicated concept of personal honour',[64] one from which our morality might recoil even as our humanity looks on with morbid curiosity and a silent cheer.

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[61] Braden, *Anger's Privilege*, p. 73-74.

[62] Ibid., 62.

[63] Burrow, p. 177-78.

[64] Braden, *Anger's Privilege*, p. 113.

Due to his popularity, there can be little doubt that Shakespeare was influenced by Seneca. Colin Burrow explains that Seneca was 'the only surviving classical tragedian whom Shakespeare could have read comfortably in the original language, and [he] would have been mad not to have done so' because 'Seneca was the high-status model for drama in the formative years of the English professional stage, and playwrights who influenced Shakespeare at the beginning of his career—Kyd, Marlowe, Peele—not only read but showed their audiences that they had read Senecan tragedy'.[65] Shakespeare was no exception to this rule. Patrick Gray maintains, however, that Shakespeare and Seneca hold competing visions of human dignity.[66] Seneca admires pride, whereas Shakespeare finds dignity in accepting the limits of human agency in the interest of compassion. In a recent lecture on Shakespeare and Virgil, Gray argues that the bard demonstrates a closer affinity to Virgil than to Seneca.[67] Whereas Senecan tragedy seems, if perhaps against the grain of Seneca's philosophical intention, at times to glorify revenge, for Shakespeare 'true nobility is not found in dominance, but in compassion; not in mastery, not in constancy, but in pity; in taking on the weakness of others and sharing it as one's own'.[68] 'Shakespeare', Gray maintains, 'discerns Seneca's doubts about his sense of human dignity, and he expands those misgivings into a comprehensive and more powerful vision of an alternative ethical universe: the moral world of Christianity'.[69]

While much close reading has been done comparing Senecan and Shakespearean language, the more interesting comparison is one of ideas. Shakespeare, like Seneca, uses his 'revenge' tragedies not to validate vengeance, but instead to question its efficacy as a

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[65] Burrow, p. 163.

[66] Gray, *Seneca*, 215.

[67] Patrick Gray, 'Shakespeare's Senecan Virgil: Coriolanus as Aeneas', lecture given at Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen, 30 June 2020.

[68] Patrick Gray, 'Shakespeare and the Other Virgil: Pity and Imperium in Titus Andronicus', *Shakespeare Survey*, ed. by Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016), 46-57.

[69] Gray, *Seneca*, 227.

means of achieving self-fulfilment. Burrow argues that Seneca's *Hippolytus*, in particular, had a 'deeper and more sustained influence on Shakespeare than any other play by Seneca, and perhaps than any other play by any author'.[70] *Hippolytus*, then, offers a clear argument why vengeance is not the way of the rational (or virtuous) man; it shows the consequences of disregarding Seneca's teachings in *De Ira*. Like Seneca, Shakespeare uses his craft to explore the relationship between action and consequence; between religious fervour and philosophy. As Watson writes, 'Shakespeare's heroes, like the great lords of Elizabeth's court, feel an allegiance to Christian as well as to Greek and Roman ideals'.[71] This divide presents the tragic hero with a moral conundrum. While many of Shakespeare's plays contain elements of vengeance, the playwright's 'most extensive criticism of violence in the name of honour can be found', as Gray maintains, 'in his depiction of ancient Rome'.[72]

Shakespeare's first attempt at the genre of revenge tragedy was *Titus Andronicus,* which he wrote at the very beginning of his career. The relatively straightforward way in which the playwright treats vengeance and forgiveness in the first of his Roman plays evolves as he himself matures, to the extent that Prospero in *The Tempest* bears little real resemblance to Shakespeare's Titus. While Prospero may begin his story in a similar state of mind, bent on vengeance for his own lost honour, his transformation creates an ending that would have been impossible in the world of Titus. When considering the Roman plays, however, we must also consider that forgiveness in the modern sense, as Konstan has argued, did not exist in the ancient world. It was not so much a bilateral process in which the offender repented and both parties underwent an internal transformation, as it was the decision of the one offended to forgo vengeance. Beginning with *Titus Andronicus*, therefore, I will consider the consequences of *furor*, that all-encompassing anger that blinds

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[70] Burrow, p. 178.

[71] Watson, p. 73.

[72] Patrick Gray, 'Shakespeare and War: Honour at the Stake', *Critical Survey*, 30.1 (2018), 12.

the mind to reason and motivates it to embark on a journey of revenge. In contrast to the previous chapter, where the subject was kings and the affairs of state, the focus here will be on private vengeance, that is, revenge exercised by the individual as an individual.

Individual Revenge

Titus Andronicus is the play that most closely resembles the revenge tragedy of Shakespeare's contemporaries. As Eric Dodson-Robinson observes, it 'resonates synchronically with the Elizabethan seizure of Rome's literary and political traditions'.[73] Although scholars generally acknowledge Shakespeare's indebtedness to the Roman theatrical and philosophical tradition, opinions vary, nonetheless, as to which authors exerted the most influence. While many look to Ovid or Seneca for the bard's inspiration, Patrick Gray makes a strong case for the influence of Virgil. Espousing the 'Harvard School' of Virgil criticism, Gray contends that 'in the opening scene of *Titus Andronicus*, the author shows, like Virgil himself, that what Romans such as Titus consider virtuous, the subordination of the individual to the state, is not necessarily a virtue at all, but instead compromised by its indifference to human suffering'.[74] Shakespeare's indebtedness to Seneca and Ovid, however, as well as Virgil, is apparent in his passionate use of *furor* as a catalyst, as well as his unmistakable borrowing of the myth of Philomel.

The play itself tells the story of its namesake, Titus, a decorated Roman general, and begins, tellingly, with his own refusal to be merciful, a refusal that precipitates the tragedy that follows. In the opening scene, we encounter a victorious Titus, just returned from a successful campaign against the Goths. His first act as a conquerer is to placate the souls of

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[73] Eric Dodson-Robinson, ed., *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Senecan Tragedy: Scholarly, Theatrical and Literary Receptions* (Boston: Brill, 2016), p. 3.

[74] Gray, *Virgil*, 52.

the sons he lost in battle so that their 'shadows be not unappeased'.[75] In other words, Titus wishes to honour his dead sons with a human sacrifice. Gray sees this parallel between Aeneas and Titus as a commentary on the cost of *imperium*: blood must be shed in order to ensure the honour of Rome.[76] Chosen for this blood sacrifice is the eldest son of Tamora, the queen of the Goths. In agony, she pleads for the life of her son:

> Andronicus, stain not thy tomb with blood.
> Wilt thou draw near the nature of the gods?
> Draw near them then in being merciful.
> Sweet mercy is nobility's true badge:
> Trice noble Titus, spare my first-born son.[77]

This tearful supplication calls to mind Seneca's *De Clementia*, where he argues that mercy is what distinguishes kings from tyrants. Titus has the power to spare the queen's son. The Goths have been defeated, and his prisoners have been lead through the streets of Rome, a living testament to the glory of their conquerer. Nonetheless, Titus remains unmoved. His sons have been slain, and he has decided that both their honour and his own require that the son of Tamora be sacrificed at their tomb.

M. L. Stapleton argues that 'Shakespeare, fascinated by the capacity for violence that Senecan women possess, transfuses their unpredictability into his own characters', and Tamora is a case in point.[78] In an unexpected turn of events—following a fight over who will marry Titus' daughter Lavinia, the emperor or his younger brother, Bassianus—Tamora becomes the empress of Rome, and from her newfound position of power she proves intent on exacting vengeance. Like Titus she values honour, and like Titus she decides that a blood sacrifice is the only way to restore what she has lost. Thus we discover, as Gray observes, that 'the Stoic and the *femina furens* are in fact two sides of the same coin, two versions of

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[75] *Titus Andronicus*, 1.1.103.

[76] Gray, *Virgil*, 55.

[77] *Titus Andronicus*, 1.1.119-123.

[78] M. L. Stapleton, *Fated Sky: The Femina Furens in Shakespeare* (London: Associated University Presses, 2000), p. 36.

the same preoccupation: an obsession with personal honour'.[79] Tamora is determined to restore both her own honour and that of her family, but without drawing attention to herself. Unlike Titus, Tamora decides to operate in secret, so as to destroy him from a safe distance. She feigns forgiveness and even goes so far as to reconcile the emperor and Titus after they had fallen out over Lavinia's refusal to accept the emperor's hand in marriage. The destruction of Lavinia, however, is to be Tamora's first act of revenge, and in it she demonstrates the full extent of her barbarity: a child for a child. Despite Lavina's desperate tears, Tamora gives her over to be ravished by her own sons with this exhortation:

> Remember, boys, I poured forth tears in vain
> To save your brother from the sacrifice,
> But fierce Andronicus would not relent.
> Therefore away with her and use her as you will:
> The worse to her, the better loved of me.[80]

Titus' refusal to show mercy results in a like refusal. Tamora is so blinded by her anger that she is determined to make Titus feel, as she has felt, desperate grief and powerlessness. Moreover, she is intent, as she says, that her heart know no cheer until 'all the Andronici be made away'.[81] Thus, as a direct result of Titus' initial decision to exact vengeance for his fallen sons, a course of death and destruction gathers momentum. Fed by unreasoning *furor,* neither Tamora nor Titus will survive the ensuing miserable contest.

Stapleton insists that the '*femina furens* not only lives but thrives in early Shakespeare', and Tamora is a paradigmatic example.[82] The next two acts move swiftly, and in very little time she achieves the deaths of two of Titus' remaining sons, executed for the murder of Lavinia's husband Bassianus. Titus, moreover, is very nearly driven mad by the sight of his once lovely daughter, now ravished, with tongue cut out and hands cut off: by far

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[79] Gray, *Seneca*, 213.

[80] *Titus Andronicus*, 2.2.163-167.

[81] Ibid., 2.2.189.

[82] Stapleton, p. 53.

Shakespeare's most shocking plot development.[83] Titus's grief drives him to continue the cycle of revenge, as he exclaims,

> Let us that have our tongues
> Plot some device of further misery
> To make us wondered at in time to come.[84]

Initially, Titus does attempt to get justice from the emperor and the senate, but he is rebuffed, left to 'wonder', as Miola notes, 'at man's capacity for evil'.[85] Even the gods seem blind and deaf to his plight, leaving the wounded hero to protest against what Miola aptly describes as 'divine silence and inaction'.[86] Finally, pleas unanswered and prayers unheard, Titus resolves to make his own justice.

With real skill and determination, Titus feigns madness, and, in so doing, lures Tamora into a false sense of security. Thinking she has triumphed, the empress goes herself to speak to Titus on behalf of the emperor when news spreads that Titus' son Lucius has raised an army to attack Rome. In a fascinating scene, Titus 'mistakes' Tamora for the personification of Revenge 'sent from below / to join with him and right his heinous wrongs'.[87] The discussion with Revenge that follows allows Titus to justify his further cruelty, for in it he tricks Tamora and her sons into condemning their own acts of depravity. They even go so far as to swear to be 'revenged on him' who hast committed the deeds that brought poor Titus low.[88] Tamora herself, still under the illusion that Titus is actually mad, swears,

> I will bring in the empress and her sons,
> The emperor himself and all thy foes
> And at thy mercy shall they stoop and kneel,
> And on them shalt thou ease thy angry heart.[89]

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[83] Whereas Philomela, from Ovid's original tale, was ravished, imprisoned, and had her tongue cut out, with Lavinia Shakespeare takes things one step further and includes the cutting off of the victim's hands.

[84] *Titus Andronicus*, 3.1.134-36.

[85] Miola, *Seneca*, p. 15.

[86] Ibid., p. 15.

[87] *Titus Andronicus*, 5.2.3-4.

[88] Ibid., 5.2.95, 97.

[89] Ibid., 5.2.116-19.

With this promise the final scene is set.

Titus' final banquet is the ultimate act of vengeance; it is, as Braden says, 'a purposeful killing of the future'.[90] Miola describes it as a 'bloody spectacle of revenge that exceeds the accepted bounds of human action'.[91] Even a Renaissance audience, one imagines, grown accustomed to blood and murder on stage, would have been shocked by the on-stage feast of human flesh. For this final scene Shakespeare borrows directly from classical sources, specifically Ovid, when he has Titus literally cook Tamora's sons and serves them to their mother at the meal. As soon as she has understood the feast, he kills her. To paraphrase Miola, the immense sense of self in play here, the entirely unrestrained action, marks Titus out as a Senecan hero.[92] When the justice of men and gods fails him he refuses to acknowledge defeat on their terms; instead, he makes his own justice and leaves his earthly vessel in a blaze of self-satisfied reprisal. In the end, Titus, Lavinia, Saturninus, Tamora, and her sons are all dead by one another's hands, and the audience is left wondering how such a catastrophic conclusion could have ever come about.

One of the main textual references that Gray points to in his argument for Virgilian influence in *Titus Andronicus* is the compassion that is consistently shown to Lavinia. The *furor* of Titus and Tamora, however, just as easily points to Seneca, while the method of vengeance is most certainly borrowed from Ovid. *Titus Andronicus*, then, is indebted to the classical tradition in more ways than one. Spoilt for choice, Shakespeare here embraces and leverages the best qualities of multiple authors. The result is a play that is truly horrific in its violence. The cycle of grief and murder that Titus lets loose with his sacrifice of Alarbus creates a whirlpool that swallows all the main players. As his audience, we empathise with

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[90] Braden, *Senecan Tragedy*, p. 292.

[91] Miola, *Seneca*, p. 23.

[92] Ibid., p. 169.

Titus' fate: the destruction of his honour, the murder of his family, and the amputation of a hand that had served Rome faithfully. Nevertheless, that same empathy cringes at the form of his revenge. For, as Miola declares, 'Titus imperiously dismisses the counsel of reason and moderation, sanctifying his passion, insisting on its full and terrible expression'.[93] Even in the ancient world of Shakespeare's sources an audience would be horrified by a feast of human flesh. Hence, Adrian Howe reads this play as 'a profound questioning of how homicide is justified or excused' and argues that '*Titus Andronicus* invites a re-examination of the legitimating of retaliatory interpersonal violence whatever form it takes'.[94] If it is true, as Seneca suggests, that anger, once entertained, can no longer be directed by reason, then Titus' actions make sense, not least because his anger is the result of an overwhelming grief. His methods, however, as Howe explains, create 'an interpretive space for re-examining the process by which violence, whatever form it takes, is legitimated'.[95] *Titus Andronicus* forces audiences to consider the extent to which vengeance is justified by presenting them with a spectacle of extreme violence that both shocks and horrifies. Confronted with man's capacity for evil we dare not take a side, and yet our empathy remains.

In sum, *Titus Andronicus* is entirely devoid of mercy or forgiveness for those deemed 'other'. As such, it presents a somewhat one-dimensional view of the dilemma of human suffering. In his later plays, Shakespeare considers the human condition more in-depth, leading his characters to question not only the value but also the legitimacy of revenge. In some instances, *Hamlet* and *Timon of Athens*, for example, the characters do eventually carry their designs to completion, but not before grappling with questions of right and wrong. In plays such as *Coriolanus* and *The Tempest,* however, Shakespeare's heroes

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[93] Ibid., p. 28.

[94] Adrian Howe, '"Red Mist" Homicide: Sexual Infidelity and the English Law of Murder (Glossing *Titus Andronicus*)', *Legal Studies*, 33.3 (2013), 416.

[95] Ibid., 429.

manage to overcome their anger and show that mercy to others which they themselves were refused. As Shakespeare matures, he moves from the raw emotion of *Titus Andronicus,* to the philosophical soliloquies of *Hamlet*, before finally arriving at *The Tempest*, which combines ancient and Christian, emotion and philosophy, *furor* and forgiveness.

Nearly ten years after writing *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare completed *Hamlet*. The most familiar of all his plays, Stephen Greenblatt notes that it is, nonetheless, 'a play of contagious, almost universal self-estrangement', of the tragic hero feeling separated and alienated from the society of which he is a part.[96] By the time Shakespeare completes *Hamlet*, he seems more interested in sabotaging than following the conventions of revenge tragedy. Although the play does begin, as Sarah Beckwith points out, 'with all the hyperbolic trappings of the revenge plot—the Senecan ghost, the secret murder, the lack of justice in the centres of power', throughout its five acts young Hamlet struggles with the idea of vengeance to a degree that is unique even within the Shakespearean canon.[97] His crisis of conscience demonstrates his sensitivity to the supernatural, as he grapples with the command of a voice from beyond the grave. His mental martyrdom is the result, as Eric Dodson-Robinson notes, of a well-trained conscience: 'for Hamlet, who takes both the Ghost and his own conscience seriously, his decision about whether to take revenge against Claudius will determine the destiny of his soul: his identity as either saved or damned'.[98] This sentiment is especially clear in his most famous soliloquy, where he complains that 'conscience does make cowards of us all'.[99] Hamlet's scrupulosity is what makes him

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[96] Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001), p. 212.

[97] Sarah Beckwith, 'Hamlet's Ethics', in *Shakespeare's Hamlet: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. by Tzachi Zamir (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018), p. 229.

[98] Dodson-Robinson, *Senecan Tragedy*, p. 13.

[99] *Hamlet*, 3.1.83.

unique among avengers. Indeed, Curtis Perry observes that 'no prior revenge play in English treats this kind of ethical deliberation about revenge as part of the burden of the avenger'.[100]

Hamlet's oscillation between forgiveness and revenge might be seen not so much as a battle he wages within himself as a collision between the classical and the Christian.[101] His struggle exists precisely because he lives in a neo-classical world. *Hamlet*, then, offers a compelling amalgamation of ancient and Christian: it has all the makings of a revenge tragedy, yet the avenging hero cannot bring himself to violate the Christian commandment to forgive. In Hamlet's uncertainty Miola sees a link to Seneca: 'Shakespeare seizes upon the momentary doubt of, say, Clytemnestra or Medea, and transforms it into a persuasive, anguished questioning that probes the validity of the supernatural imperative and the morality of revenge action itself'.[102] Patrick Gray takes Miola's argument a step further and asserts that

> in Shakespeare's tragedies, as in those of Seneca, the two sides of the ethical dilemma at the heart of each play tend to be presented, not as opposing characters, but instead within the psyche of the 'tragic hero'. They appear as contending moral paradigms: rival imperatives, each grounded in a different emotional impulse.[103]

In *Hamlet* this ethical dilemma is especially pronounced; within the hero's numerous soliloquies the audience follows his mental processes. He is confused, and, as a result, he continually questions his own beliefs and motivations. Hamlet's uncertainty and hesitation in following the ghost's directive, however, is what most conspicuously sets Shakespeare's best-known play apart from the revenge tragedy tradition.

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[100] Curtis Perry, 'Seneca and the Modernity of *Hamlet*', *Illinois Classical Studies*, 40.2 (2015), 423.

[101] It should be noted here that one could also read Hamlet's oscillation as a collision between Catholic and Protestant understandings of death and the afterlife. As will be discussed at length in Chapter 4, there was not a place for purgatory in Protestant soteriology. Therefore, the ghost of Hamlet's father returning to demand vengeance, could be read as a Catholic ghost returning from purgatory. This would, of course, open up an entirely different conversation on notions of forgiveness, following more of a theological line. In this section, however, I wish to focus on the classical versus the Christian divide, rather than the Catholic versus Protestant doctrinal issues that *Hamlet* interrogates.

[102] Miola, *Seneca*, p. 35.

[103] Patrick Gray, Choosing between Shame and Guilt: Macbeth, Othello, Hamlet, and King Lear', in *Shakespeare and the Soliloquy in Early Modern English Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2018), p. 105.

In *Phaedra*, for instance, Seneca does not dwell on a revenger's hesitation, but instead emphasises the inevitability of obsession and the dangers of an unbridled mind. From Hippolytus to Theseus to Phaedra herself, a mind in the midst of passion lacks the self-control that Seneca praises in his philosophical treatises as the highest moral good. At one point in the play, after being warned by her nurse of the danger of her desires, Phaedra laments:

> What you say is true, but does no good at all.
> I know what's good and what's bad…
> …I'm drawn
> like a sailor whose ship is caught in a strong tide
> and fears the rocks but sees himself coming closer
> moment by terrible moment, and nothing he does
> can change his ruinous course![104]

Unlike Phaedra, Hamlet attempts to fight the tide. Despite the ghost's clear directive to 'revenge his foul and most unnatural murder', Hamlet hesitates.[105] He did not come to the decision to take vengeance on his own, but rather was commanded to do so by the ghost of his murdered father. Hamlet is a scholar, however, not an avenging warrior in the vein of Hercules or Medea. He is an unwilling avenger, more akin to Orestes. Throughout the play, as Dodson-Robinson argues, Shakespeare emphasises the duty of a son to avenge his father's death and honour, 'only to complicate and challenge its prerogatives against individual conscience'.[106] 'This dialogue', he asserts, 'articulates a non–Senecan resistance to fate and to allowing the revenge tragedy tradition to saturate agency or determine identity'.[107] Hamlet struggles with the idea of surrendering his own agency, his own soul, to the demands of the ghost. R. A. Foakes puts it this way: 'whenever Hamlet reflects upon revenge, he cannot carry it out because the very idea clashes with his awareness of biblical

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[104] Seneca, *Phaedra*, ln. 177-83.

[105] *Hamlet*, 1.5.25.

[106] Eric Dodson-Robinson, "'By a Brother's Hand': Betrayal and Brotherhood in Shakespeare's Hamlet and Senecan Tragedy', in *Playing False: Representations of Betrayal* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), p. 95.

[107] Ibid., 95.

injunctions against taking life'.[108] Consequently, although he desires to be a dutiful son, Hamlet either cannot or else will not succumb to the *furor* of a Senecan avenger.

Although Hamlet certainly wrestles with the idea of a deeply personal act of vengeance, Beckwith is right to point out that he does not, even so, 'question the necessity of avenging his father's murder as an act of retributive justice'.[109] Hamlet does believe Claudius' murder of his father was wrong and deserving of punishment, even hell—if we are to trust his reason for not killing the usurper at prayer. Claudius himself acknowledges the wickedness of his sin in his confessional soliloquy. As Dodson-Robinson points out, however, Claudius 'does not repent or seek the forgiveness that might redeem him from this corruption', but instead chooses to despair.[110] Later, in act five, Hamlet ponders the legitimacy of revenge within the context of Claudius' many crimes:

> Is't not perfect conscience,
> To quit him with this arm? And is't not to be damn'd,
> To let this canker of our nature come
> In further evil?'[111]

Hamlet's musings here on revenge are framed as questions to which he himself does not presume to know the answer; instead, he seeks the truth, whatever that might be. In this search for answers, he differs significantly from Senecan avengers, who are led by their passions rather than their minds. Consequently, even though Curtis Perry maintains that 'Hamlet feels constrained to live up to the imperatives of his dramatic role as an avenger',[112] Gordon Braden can argue that 'by the end Shakespeare's moral lesson is not the immortality (or mortality) of revenge, but the Christian abnegation of the individual will'.[113]

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[108] R. A. Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2003), p. 93.

[109] Beckwith, *Hamlet*, p. 225.

[110] Dodson-Robinson, *Hamlet*, p. 89.

[111] *Hamlet*, 5.2.67-70.

[112] Perry, 412.

[113] Braden, *Anger's Privilege*, p. 222.

In the end, Hamlet cannot convince himself that taking matters into his own hands is morally acceptable. For Miola, 'his hesitation underlines the brutality of the revenge ethic and constitutes a new kind of moral heroism'.[114] In an era when a man *was* his honour, Shakespeare dared to question the validity of such a code; he invited his audience to consider the implications and consequences of personal revenge. Nonetheless, in the end Claudius does die, and so perhaps our sense of outraged justice is appeased. The pause, however, inherent in the four long acts that separate the knowing from the conclusion gives audiences an opportunity to interrogate the revenge act itself. In doing so, *Hamlet* offers us something new: the possibility of a different ending. In *Timon of Athens* and *Coriolanus,* Shakespeare further explores and develops this new prospect.

Revenge Against the Motherland

Timon of Athens and *Coriolanus* offer readers and audiences alike the chance to consider how far a champion will go in order to avenge himself on an ungrateful city. At the end of Act III of *Timon of Athens*, Alcibiades quarrels with the Athenian senators over the life of an Athenian soldier. The senators have determined that he must die for taking another man's life, arguing that 'nothing emboldens sin so much as mercy'.[115] In Alcibiades' mind, however, as E. C. Pettet observes, 'his friend has done nothing more than draw sword on a point of honour'; in his eyes 'there is no essential difference between a private act of this kind and the act of a State in going to war'.[116] Alcibiades tries to convince the senators that 'pity is the virtue of the law, / and none but tyrants use it cruelly', but they are unmoved by

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[114] Miola, *Seneca*, p. 61.

[115] *Timon of Athens*, 3.5.3.

[116] E. C. Pettet, 'Timon of Athens: The Disruption of Feudal Morality', *The Review of English Studies*, 23.92 (1947), 336.

both his arguments and his tales of the soldier's valour.[117] When Alcibiades continues to push for leniency, the senators banish him from the city, an act of ingratitude that prompts him to exclaim:

> I'm worse than mad…
> Is this the balsam that the usurping senate
> Pours into captains' wounds? Banishment.
> It is a cause worthy my spleen and fury,
> That I may strike at Athens…
> 'Tis honour with most lands to be at odds,
> Soldiers should brook as little wrongs as gods.[118]

Alcibiades is understandably enraged that he has been banished for the act of begging mercy for one who gave his youth and blood for Athens. In the world of the play, honour and valour are the virtues by which a man, especially a soldier, is measured. In Alcibiades' estimation, then, a soldier should not be punished for acting according to the very nature that affords protection to the Athenian state. Amanda Bailey explains that 'for Alcibiades, the soldier's good deeds should serve as collateral and thus animate the restorative principal of equivalence in exchange. Unlike bounty, the soldier's deeds cannot be used up or debased but rather may be construed as an investment toward the future security of Athens'.[119] When the senators disagree with Alcibiades' reasoning, and even go so far as to banish him, he enters into a controlled rage. Nevertheless, as R. P. Draper points out, Alcibiades 'does not attack Athens for his personal grievance only'.[120] By his own estimation, soldiers are like unto the gods, presumably because their exploits determine the fate of nations, and so they should be treated with a similar deference. Hence, Alcibiades resolves that Athens must atone for her pride with blood.

By the beginning of Act 4 the injured captain has already raised an army and returned to Athens, and by Act 5.2 the Athenian senators are at the door of Timon's cave

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[117] *Timon of Athens*, 3.5.8-9.

[118] Ibid., 3.5.99, 109, 113-17, 119-20.

[119] Amanda Bailey, '*Timon of Athens*: Forms of Payback, and the Genre of Debt', *English Literary Renaissance*, 41.4 (2011), 396.

[120] R. P. Draper, 'Timon of Athens', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 8.2 (1957), 196.

begging for his intercession with his warlike friend. Timon refuses to help the city that betrayed him, but Alcibiades proves more reasonable. Unlike Titus, who allowed his unbridled anger to destroy both his enemies and himself, Alcibiades is truly Senecan, in the sense of Stoic, in his restraint. While he does initially succumb to anger after he is banished from the city, upon his return he allows his *furor* to be tempered by reason. Thus, when the Athenian senators plead with Alcibiades,

> March, noble lord,
> Into our city with thy banners spread;
> By decimation and a tithed death,
> If thy revenges hunger for that food
> Which nature loathes, take thou the destined tenth,[121]

he listens to their prayers and grants them mercy. Despite the injustice he suffered, Alcibiades agrees to punish only those whom the senators themselves 'set out for reproof'.[122] This move toward restraint, this yielding to the call of mercy, while still a long way off from Christian forgiveness, offers a compromise between the restoration of injured honour and the biblical directive to 'forgive your enemies'. Although Alcibiades resides in a definitively pre-Christian world, with what is at times a very different set of values, Shakespeare gives us here a hero who is closer to the Christian ideal.

In *Timon of Athens* we have a conqueror who forgoes decimating his city, yet still requires satisfaction. Although Alcibiades willingly grants mercy to the innocent, he still demands that the guilty face justice. Alcibiades' resolve closely mirrors the Stoic principle Seneca presents in his *De Clementia*: 'to pardon everyone is as much a cruelty as to pardon no one'.[123] With *Coriolanus,* by contrast, Shakespeare moves markedly away from Stoicism and Seneca. *Coriolanus* represents exactly the kind of *furor*, weakness, and pity that Seneca would have despised; nonetheless, despite his tempestuous passions, or perhaps even on

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[121] *Timon of Athens*, 5.4.29-33.

[122] Ibid., 5.4.57.

[123] Seneca, *On Mercy*, p. 131.

account of these emotions, the tragic hero moves closer to the Christian idea that revenge should be relinquished altogether. As R. A. Foakes argues, 'in his flexible notions of virtue, and in implying that anger is natural to men, Alcibiades raises issues that are more fully explored in *Coriolanus*, a play in which violence is shown as inseparable from human aspirations, ideals, and even the desire for peace'.[124]

The tragedy of *Coriolanus* unfolds due to his contempt for the opinions of the common people and his inability to humble himself before them. Coriolanus, like Alcibiades, is a soldier, not a statesman. From his boyhood his mother considered 'how honour would become such a person' and she was pleased to 'let him seek / danger where he was like to find fame'.[125] Thus, his entire identity is bound up with war and the honour that victory brings. Geoffrey Miles notes that even Rome sees him as playing a role: 'that of the heroic Roman warrior'.[126] As a result, Leah Whittington explains, he is 'committed to the idea that action constitutes identity', and he is 'so shaped by his society's ideology of military valour that any show of weakness sickens him'.[127] Unfortunately, as Russell M. Hillier points out, 'Rome's cruelty and pitilessness are the conditions of its valour and forcefulness'.[128] Surprisingly, however, t takes very little for Rome to forget her duty to her champion, and even less for Coriolanus to turn all the ire and strength that he once used to fight Rome's battles into that which gives purpose to his vengeance. This Roman fascination with honour, then, is a double-edged sword, because, as Robin Headlam Wells writes, 'the

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[124] Foakes, p. 181.

[125] *Coriolanus*, 1.3.10-11, 13-14.

[126] Geoffrey Miles, '"I Play the Man I Am": Coriolanus', *Shakespeare and the Constant Romans* (Oxford UP, 1996), p. 157.

[127] Leah Whittington, *Renaissance Suppliants: Poetry, Antiquity, Reconciliation* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2016) p. 147, 148.

[128] Russell M. Hillier, '"Valour Will Weep": The Ethics of Valour, Anger, and Pity in Shakespeare's Coriolanus', *Studies in Philology*, 113.2 (2016), 359.

honour that is so valuable to Rome in time of war comes very close to ensuring the destruction of the city' when the people turn on Coriolanus.[129]

A. D. Nuttall observes that 'in Stoic philosophy the heroic ethic of pride, of glory in the sight of others, is cut off from its reliance on social esteem and made self-sufficient in each individual'.[130] In Shakespeare's universe Coriolanus represents the epitome of this self-sufficiency; he thinks he is entirely independent, with no use for politics or for the Roman people. For, as Stephen Greenblatt rightly attests, 'the laws that govern the lives of others do not govern Coriolanus. He seems to have willed himself outside them, just as he wills himself outside the social laws that regulate everyone else, from the proudest aristocrat to humblest artificer, in the polis'.[131] This refusal to stoop to the desires of the people, to placate their own sense of self-worth, proves his undoing. Coriolanus is a proud man, and as such, Ewan Fernie notes, he 'repulses all circumstances that he considers even potentially shame-producing'.[132] In short, he is a hero who does not play well with others. His prowess as a warrior is beyond question, yet his emotional intelligence is stunted. He is, as Nuttall puts it, 'like a 2 year old in his tantrums, his stubbornness, his tendency to stamp or hide his face'.[133] As such, he does not have the ability to control the rage that consumes him.

By the end of Act 4 Coriolanus has made a pact with his former enemy, Aufidius, to fight against his 'cankered country'—former enemies uniting in a common cause of revenge. [134] For Robin Headlam Wells, this uneasy truce is 'one of the most striking messages that Coriolanus offers' because it demonstrates that 'heroic values in their most

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[129] Robin Headlam Wells, '"Manhood and Chevalrie": Coriolanus, Prince Henry, and the Chivalric Revival', *The Review of English Studies*, 51.203 (2000), 395.

[130] A. D. Nuttall, *A New Mimesis: Shakespeare and the Representation of Reality* (London: Methuen & Co, 1983), p. 105.

[131] Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespeare's Freedom* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2010), p. 107.

[132] Ewan Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 209.

[133] Nuttall, p. 113.

[134] *Coriolanus*, 4.5.94.

exaggerated form are inherently divisive, setting citizen against citizen, and obliging warrior-aristocrats to assert their superiority over lower orders in the relentless competition for *laus* and *gloria*'.[135] When it is a question of injured honour, personal pride supersedes the good of the majority. And so, Coriolanus marches on Rome, an action that, for Coppélia Kahn, 'exemplifies one of his most distinctive, oft-noted traits: his inability to temper his convictions or his anger, his absolute, univocal stance, his either-or, all-or-nothing mentality'.[136] This seeming lack of agency in the face of injured pride and honour is what prompts Geoffrey Miles to argue that *Coriolanus* is 'the most deterministic of Shakespeare's tragedies'.[137] Coriolanus has been carefully moulded since childhood to embody those virtues that shaped and maintained the greatness of Rome; and he has been taught to act and respond to situations based on his association with those virtues. Thus, Russell Hillier proposes, 'Martius, the selfless Roman warrior, may be precisely that: a man without a self'.[138] His entire identity is based on his external identification with Rome.

When the play is distilled, however, it is the relationship between Coriolanus and his mother, Volumnia, that *is* the tragedy of *Coriolanus*. Leah Whittington even goes so far as to say that '*Coriolanus* seems to exist for the sake of one scene', the supplication scene at the end of the play.[139] A true Roman matron, Volumnia is both the one who created Coriolanus and the one who destroys him. Renowned theatre director Peter Brook puts it thus:

> He seems uncompromising. He goes over to the enemy. His wish for vengeance and destruction, even on his own people, is a theme with which today we are painfully familiar. But Coriolanus has a mother who knows how far this is from her son's true nature, and, in one of the most magnificently conceived human situations, the mother is compelled to bring out all the qualities of her son to a late, but absolute fruition. As a Roman she saves Rome

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[135] Wells, 410.

[136] Coppélia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 166.

[137] Miles, p. 156.

[138] Hillier, 374.

[139] Whittington, p. 138.

> and seals Coriolanus's doom. The inevitable tragedy is the destruction of a son through the insight of the one who constructed his persona.[140]

Volumnia undoubtedly loves her son, yet she possesses the same sense of honour and duty that she gifted to him, and so, when Rome calls on her, she, like him, answers.

Reduced to dire straits, a desperate Rome does the only thing it can: send Volumnia to plead for mercy. Of all the people in Coriolanus' life, only his mother has the power to turn his anger from the city, and she proceeds to do so, knowing full well what it will mean for her son. It was Volumnia who, Nuttall reminds us, 'forged Coriolanus as an instrument of war'; who encouraged his destructiveness in the pursuit of honour and glory; who shaped him into an embodiment of the Roman ideal.[141] It is fitting, therefore, that Coriolanus' creator should also be, in a sense, his destroyer. For Russell Hillier, it is precisely this dynamic that causes *Coriolanus* to 'stand apart from Shakespeare's other Roman plays in that pity and compassion overwhelm wrath and fury. Roman tears quell Roman fire'.[142] Coriolanus tries to resist Volumnia's tears, as she pleads with him on her knees, but he fails, and he knows it. The anguish in his realisation is palpable:

> O mother, mother!
> What have you done?…
> You have won a happy victory to Rome;
> But for your son, believe it, O believe it,
> Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,
> If not most mortal to him.[143]

In the end, however, as Kahn notes, Coriolanus, 'cannot defend the peace he has made at his mother's urging'.[144] As a man, as a Roman, Coriolanus is stripped of himself, and in giving up his quest for vengeance he dies even before the death of his physical body.

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[140] Peter Brook, *The Quality of Mercy: Reflections on Shakespeare* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2014), p. 57.

[141] Nuttall, p. 116.

[142] Hillier, 388.

[143] *Coriolanus*, 5.3.185-86, 189-92.

[144] Kahn, p. 171.

It is in this play, Leah Whittington argues, that Shakespeare 'narrows his lens to focus on the reconciliation process as a physical encounter'.[145] Perhaps it is on account of this 'zoomed in' experience that the final scenes are so painful. Patrick Gray maintains, however, that even though Coriolanus' decision does lead to his death, 'nevertheless, the same etiolated pity which leads him to abandon his march on Rome, and which he sees as a shameful weakness, appears in contrast to the audience as his most attractive quality'.[146] This idealisation of 'weakness' is undoubtedly a response to Christian ethics, which favours forgiveness over vengeance. In abandoning his revenge Coriolanus takes us a step closer to this forgiveness. Unlike Alcibiades, he does not even insist on the punishment of the guilty: he simply walks away. His response is akin to pity, a much-despised reaction in a Stoic universe. And so, even though Coriolanus does model for us, as Hillier puts it, 'the fit human response to the tragic situation', we are left deeply unsettled.[147] Something is lacking; even though Rome is spared, the price is too high. As an audience we cannot help but desire a more complete ending; we want Coriolanus' capitulation to mean more; we want a true reconciliation between him and his city. In *The Tempest*, 'a revenge plot that overcomes revenge', Shakespeare will finally satisfy this yearning.[148]

Family Betrayal and Vengeance

Immortalised in paintings and performances, *The Tempest* considers the epitome of betrayal, and so, by extension, the height of dishonour: that perpetrated by family. It tells the story of Prospero, a duke betrayed and banished by his own brother. In true Renaissance fashion

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[145] Whittington, p. 144.

[146] Gray, *Seneca*, 227.

[147] Hillier, 394.

[148] Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2011), p. 150.

Prospero decides that Antonio must be punished for his crime, so that both honour and dukedom might be reclaimed. Maurice Charney explains that 'revenge springs from a psychological context, especially the idea of victimisation, and from the effort to restore some sort of integrity and personal wholeness to one's life'.[149] With this end in mind, Prospero spends his banishment perfecting his use of magic, waiting patiently for an opportunity to exact his revenge. For twelve years Prospero nurses his grudge and stokes his *furor.* A man of learning, he possesses a sensitive soul, and so the injury he endures touches him deeply. In essence, then, as Sarah Beckwith observes, '*The Tempest* examines the hold of the past over the one who has been harmed'.[150] The depth of Prospero's anger is reflected in how far he is willing to go to avenge himself. Seneca rightly points out in his *De Ira* that 'nothing is permissible when you are angry. Why? Because you want everything to be'.[151] Prospero, in his eagerness to obtain vengeance, turns to magic and in doing so himself commits a crime, a fact which he will later come to recognise.

Lois Feuer and Brian Sutton see parallels between Prospero and the biblical story of Joseph. For, Feuer explains, both 'Joseph and Prospero assume the role of Providence by acting as directors of their dramas, bringing their casts together, planting props…entrapping wrongdoers, exacting confession and prompting repentance'.[152] In their optimistic reading of *The Tempest*, these scholars build on the reading provided by Paul Cantor four decades ago wherein he argues that Prospero 'is a wise man, distinguished by his knowledge of the world, not by the force of his passion'.[153] While there is evidence to suggest that Prospero is a 'wise man' in that he is learned, to call him worldly-wise or dispassionate is somewhat

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[149] Maurice Charney, review of *The Shapes of Revenge: Victimization, Vengeance, and Vindictiveness in Shakespeare* by Harry Keyishian, Shakespeare Quarterly, 49.4 (1998), 456.

[150] Beckwith, p. 147.

[151] Seneca, *On Anger*, p. 89.

[152] Lois Feuer, 'Happy Families: Repentance and Restoration in "The Tempest" and the Joseph Narrative', *Philological Quarterly,* 76.3 (1997), 282.

[153] Cantor, p. 65.

misleading, especially given that the basis of his overthrow was precisely that he neglected his kingdom in favour of his books. Feuer, however, is not afraid to hone in on Prospero's irascibility, and even goes so far as to accuse him of setting the stage for his own betrayal.[154] The magician has had twelve years, moreover, to temper his rage. Rather than letting go of his vengeance, however, in favour of exercising his higher faculties, Prospero chooses to allow his passions to commandeer his reason; it is not until the final act that he relinquishes his desire for vengeance, and even then he only arrives at this decision with the help of Ariel.

Given Prospero's anger throughout the play, it is perhaps surprising that he should ultimately prove a model of forgiveness. Throughout the play, however, Prospero demonstrates an openness to growth that tends to be missing in Shakespeare's earlier plays. Bernardine Bishop goes so far as to argue that 'until *The Tempest*, Shakespeare's characters cannot forgive, nor can they feel forgiven. For when they do feel real guilt, it overwhelms them'.[155] Macbeth, Othello, and Lear, for example, find forgiveness, especially self-forgiveness, impossible, and in other romances, characters such as Leontes and Posthumus find themselves overwhelmed by guilt. With Prospero, however, Shakespeare seems to have finally found the answer, and that answer lies in the realisation of his own weakness and need for forgiveness—a realisation that happens gradually over the course of the play. Prospero recognises that he has committed, on a much grander scale, the same crime as Antonio. Consequently, Bishop argues,

> When we get to *The Tempest*, we find there is forgiveness. But we also find repentance. The repentance is not to be found in the obvious miscreant, Antonio. It is in Prospero himself… What Prospero comes to repent of is precisely what at the beginning of the play gave his life most meaning: his magic…Prospero forgives Antonio at this stage because he himself is

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[154] Feuer, 278, 279.

[155] Bernardine Bishop, '"The Visage of Offence": A Psychoanalytical View of Forgiveness and Repentance in Shakespeare's Plays', *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 23.1 (2006), 32.

> repenting of a larger version of the same crime. They have both interfered with the right order of things to gain selfish ends.[156]

Throughout the entirety of his exile magic was Prospero's hope, and he tended and cared for it until it was strong enough to be the instrument of his reincarnation. For Beckwith, 'Prospero's harnessing of the power of magic is a wish to escape his terrible vulnerability as he confronts the murderous conspirators. In his case, as in so many others, nothing is more human that the desire to escape being human'.[157] Magic is Prospero's shield against the hurt he feels.

Prospero's obsession is the reason Bishop argues that the greatest shift in the play is the internal change that takes place in Prospero himself. Finally, she maintains, in his last play Shakespeare has 'won through to a depiction of forgiveness in the true sense of the word, a dynamic shift in the internal world and a change in the relationship of internal objects'.[158] For all of his manipulation of elements, emotions, and spirits, Prospero's greatest achievement is one of self-knowledge. He recognises that he cannot expect, as Seneca puts it, '*carte blanche* for himself, but not for any opposition'.[159]

In the end, then, Prospero succeeds where other Senecan and Shakespearean heroes have failed. He succeeds in mastering himself, in controlling his *furor*, and in giving up his need for vengeance. Although he admits that he is 'struck to th' quick' on account of 'their high wrongs', he decides, nevertheless, to walk a different path: to take the part of his 'nobler reason 'gainst [his] fury'.[160] This internal transformation, like his magic, manifests itself in the physical world. When Prospero finally admits to Ariel, as well as himself, that 'the rarer action is / in virtue that in vengeance',[161] he finds himself at a crossroads: as he

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[156] Ibid., 35.

[157] Beckwith, p. 167.

[158] Bishop, 28.

[159] Seneca, *On Anger*, p. 68.

[160] *Tempest*, 5.1.25-27.

[161] Ibid., 5.1.27-28.

has determined to give up his vengeance, so must he also relinquish the means by which he might achieve it. Ultimately, Prospero recognises that the link between his magic and his revenge is so strong that the one cannot be destroyed without the other following, and so he exclaims:

> This rough magic
> I here abjure; and when I have required
> Some heavenly music (which even now I do)
> To work mine end upon their senses that
> This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
> Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
> And deeper than did ever plummet sound
> I'll drown my book.[162]

Prospero's last act as a magician is thus one of reparation; he will undo the charm he laid upon his enemies. Peter Brook observes it is 'only when he's done that is he able to take a totally new step, and this step is the step from vengeance to forgiveness'.[163] Once he has released them from the charm, Prospero is keen to move on.

As a result of his own conversion, Prospero follows through with his forgiveness of Antonio. This forgiveness, however, seems to be more for his own benefit than for that of his brother. Twice Prospero says the words 'I do forgive', and yet in each case these words are sandwiched between phrases that are filled with resentment. Read out of context one could even be forgiven for thinking that Prospero's forgiveness is either forced or a joke:

> You, brother mine, that entertained ambition,
> Expelled remorse and nature, whom, with Sebastian,
> (Whose inward pinches therefore are most strong)
> Would here have killed your king, I do forgive thee,
> Unnatural though thou art.[164]

Although it is perhaps natural to list the faults one is forgiving, the final phrase here creates a feeling of hesitation which is not exactly mitigated by Prospero's second offer of forgiveness:

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[162] Ibid., 5.1.50-57.

[163] Brook, p. 105.

[164] *Tempest*, 5.1.75-79.

> For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother
> Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive
> Thy rankest fault, all of them.[165]

Prospero's continued use of pejorative language when speaking to his brother is enough to make one question the reality of his forgiveness; because, as Whittington points out, 'he pardons, but he lacks the corresponding soft emotions. The offer of forgiveness has an undercutting high-handedness about it, even if it is a better option than revenge'.[166] From Whittington's perspective, 'Prospero never quite gives up the anger he feels toward his brother'.[167] Then again, it is worth noting that Antonio remains unrepentant. This hard-heartedness leads Brain Sutton to maintain that 'while Shakespeare's play seems to end with a vision of perfect order and reconciliation, the forces of disorder remain intact and largely unrepentant'.[168] Nonetheless, despite his continued hostility toward Antonio, Prospero begs that the party 'not burden [their] remembrances with / a heaviness that's gone'.[169] In recognising and repenting of his own sin in upending the natural order of the universe, Prospero is able to extend the forgiveness which he himself hopes to acquire. Thus, while he continues to struggle with the emotions and fury that sustained him during his long exile, on an intellectual level he is able to recognise that holding onto these sentiments is not what he wants for his future. Consequently, his mind offers forgiveness, even as he struggles to keep his feelings in check.

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[165] *Tempest*, 5.1.131-33.

[166] Whittington, p. 116.

[167] Ibid., p. 116.

[168] Brian Sutton, '"Virtue Rather Than Vengeance": Genesis and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*', *The Explicator*, 66.4 (2008), 228.

[169] *Tempest*, 5.1.200-201.

Concluding Remarks

> Raving with a desire that is utterly inhuman for instruments of pain and reparations in blood, careless of itself so long as it harms the other, it rushes onto the very spear-points, greedy for vengeance that draws down the avenger with it.[170]

Seneca's description of *furor* provides an apt description of *Titus Andronicus,* a man tortured by grief, who loses or destroys nearly everything he loves. As perhaps the most recognisably 'Senecan' of Shakespeare's plays, *Titus Andronicus* represents the worst in humanity; a depth of depravity to which none of Shakespeare's other heroes ever stoop. In *Hamlet*, *Timon of Athens*, and *Coriolanus*, however, Shakespeare's heroes are more reflective. The wrongs they suffer affect them to the very core of their being, and the emotions that swirl within them mount an assault against their higher reason. Their pain creates empathy. Their searching captivates. As Reuben Bower eloquently concludes, 'Shakespeare dramatises the way of suffering and self-denial, and the way of action and self-assertion'; in the profundity and penetration of Hamlet or Coriolanus we can see 'what moved him most deeply in the human condition'.[171]

The debate about Seneca's influence on Shakespeare is still ongoing. Some scholars have attempted to find parallels, while others remain skeptical.[172] Setting aside Seneca's tragedies, however, it seems clear that the philosophy Seneca espoused, namely, Stoicism, was familiar to Shakespeare. As Bower writes, 'however hard it may be for us to take Stoicism seriously as philosophy, metaphysics, ethics, or religion, this is not a feeling that would be shared by Shakespeare's contemporaries—and we may infer—by Shakespeare himself'.[173]

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[170] Seneca, *On Anger*, p. 17.

[171] Reuben Arthur Brower, *Hero & Saint: Shakespeare and the Graeco-Roman Heroic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), p. 418.

[172] Burrow, p. 162.

[173] Bower, p. 143.

Stoicism championed the superiority of *ratio* over the other faculties of the soul: a not entirely un-Christian concept. Richard Sorabji goes so far as to argue that 'the Stoic theory of how to avoid agitation was converted by early Christians into a theory of how to avoid temptation'.[174] In *Titus Andronicus* we witness the horrifying acts of a hero who lacks self-possession and the ability to resist temptation. Shakespeare quickly transitions, however, from gratuitous violence to an exploration of individual identity and self-rule. Burrow argues that '"Stoicism" provided Shakespeare with…a stock type of character, whose Roman virtue would express itself through his desire to order his passions or to control his fortune'.[175] Consequently, Shakespeare's 'Roman' plays represent nothing less than a moral treatise in simplified form. He grapples with the same questions of *furor*, *clementia*, honour, identity, and the self that Seneca discusses in his moral epistles. Only, as Gray postulates,

> Shakespeare, in contrast, and in keeping with the precepts of Christianity, sees dignity in accepting the limits of individual agency, as long as it is in the interests of compassion…The most important expression of this acceptance of intrinsic human weakness is for forgiveness, which includes not only pardoning others, but also acknowledging and making peace with one's own particular sins and failures.[176]

Although the journey toward forgiveness is a long one, one which weaves in and out of his plays for decades, eventually Shakespeare arrives at *The Tempest.* Prospero's internal struggle is twelve years in the making, but it is fitting, because, as Paul Hughes explains, 'to forgive another is to engage in an internal drama: one struggles with oneself to overcome one's resentment'.[177] Prospero has cause to want vengeance. Looking deep into his own soul, however, he recognises that no man is without sin. Eric Dodson-Robinson succinctly

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[174] Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), p. 8.

[175] Burrow, p. 169.

[176] Gray, *Seneca*, 225.

[177] Paul Hughes, 'What Is Involved in Forgiving?', *Philosophia*, 25.1 (1997), 36.

captures the departure here from Seneca's tragedies: 'for Seneca, there is no recovery from a brother's betrayal, but for Shakespeare, forgiveness redeems primal betrayal'.[178]

Although, the concept of forgiveness jostles with the ideas of honour and pride in the male mind, and although male protagonists seldom forgive, and still less often ask for forgiveness, in his later plays Shakespeare does not shy away from forcing them to engage in serious introspection. Just because they recoil from the idea of forgiving, does not mean that they should not try; it does not mean that it is not a worthwhile exercise. Coppélia Kahn asserts that Shakespeare's 'male characters are engaged in a continuous struggle, first to form a masculine identity, then to be secure and productive in it'.[179] In a society where honour, in many senses, *is* the masculine identity, Shakespeare questions the norm and interrogates the validity of common assumptions. For the playwright, the legitimacy of revenge is not a given. In fact, as his career progresses he moves further and further away from the prevalent idea of the age that honour must be preserved at any cost, and slowly, as though feeling his way carefully, he ultimately concludes that 'the rarer action is / in virtue that in vengeance'.[180]

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[178] Dodson-Robinson, *Hamlet*, p. 102.

[179] Kahn, p. 1.

[180] *Tempest*, 5.1.27-28.

3

ARISTOTLE, EQUITY, AND FORGIVENESS IN SHAKESPEARE

> For pity is the virtue of the law, / and none but tyrants use it cruelly.[1]

Elizabethan England was a quagmire of confusion: religious practice and social customs, as well as the legal system, were all in turmoil. The Reformation had caused a repositioning of the ecclesiastical courts, while at the same time enabling the rise of English common law, which in turn was manipulated by the Crown in order to establish the legitimacy of Queen Elizabeth I more firmly and confirm Protestantism as the national religion.[2] As it navigated these changes, the English legal system drew extensively upon the concept of 'equity' (Gk., *epieikeia*; Lat., *aequitas*) laid out by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Aristotle begins his treatise with a discussion of causality, wherein he asserts that all arts, all teaching, each act, and every choice have the attainment of some good as their object, that everything is directed towards an end, and that this end is the good.[3] As far as human beings are concerned, Aristotle concludes that their ultimate good, the desire that motivates all their actions, is happiness and their unending quest to achieve it. He then goes on to explain that, as some acts and arts are subordinate to others, there must exist a hierarchy of ends. In keeping with this hierarchy there must, moreover, be some ultimate end for human beings. The master art concerned with this ultimate end is political science;

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[1] *Timon of Athens*, 3.5.8-9, in *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015). All subsequent quotations from Shakespeare's plays are taken from this same edition.

[2] On the place of the ecclesiastical courts in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, see Laura Gowing, *In Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998). Gowing illustrates the importance of the church courts in dealing with domestic and community matters, particularly where issues of marriage, sex, and infidelity were concerned. She also proposes that the ecclesiastical courts supported the emergence of women as 'legal agents in their own right', and created an environment that 'gave women an important local power' (268). For a discussion of how the courts influenced the English Reformation, see John Guy, 'Law, Lawyers and the English Reformation', *History Today* (1985), 16-22. For further analysis of the legal dilemmas of 16th century England, see David Ibbetson, 'A House Built on Sand: Equity in Early Modern English Law', in *Law & Equity Approaches in Roman Law and Common Law*, ed. by E. Koops & W.J. Zwalve (Boston: Brill, 2014), 55-77.

[3] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* trans. by W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), I.i.

the purview of those who study it is to 'study virtue above all things' so that they might make their fellow citizens 'good and obedient to the laws'.[4]

For Aristotle, there is an indelible connection between the law and our concept of justice, a conclusion he draws based on the fact that the lawless man is seen as unjust, while the law-abiding man is considered just.[5] The 'just', he explains, is a measure of proportion, whereas the unjust is a violation of this measure. In other words, what is 'just'—justice—is an equilibrium; injustice, by contrast, is when 'one term becomes too great, the other too small': 'for the man who acts unjustly has too much, and the man who is unjustly treated too little, of what is good'.[6] Because justice plays such a significant role in maintaining a proper balance between individuals, Aristotle argues that it 'is not part of virtue but virtue entire, nor is the contrary injustice a part of vice but vice entire'.[7] This privileged position belongs to justice because it alone of all the virtues 'is thought to be "another's good", because it is related to our neighbour; for it does what is advantageous to another'.[8] To summarise, then, justice is a measure of proportion, and the proportion that it measures is the relationship between individuals.

When we consider these ideas in relation to the law, it is clear why justice holds such a privileged place, because the purpose of law is to restore the balance of justice. There is a reason, however, that statues of Lady Justice are depicted blindfolded: Justice is blind. In keeping with this conception of justice, according to Aristotle,

> it makes no difference whether a good man has defrauded a bad man or a bad man a good one, nor whether it is a good or a bad man that has committed adultery; the law looks only to the distinctive character of the injury, and treats the parties as equal, if one is in the wrong and the other is being wronged, and if one inflicted injury and the other has received it.[9]

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[4] Ibid., I.ii, I.xiii.

[5] Ibid., V.i.

[6] Ibid., V.iii.

[7] Ibid., V.ii.

[8] Ibid., V.ii.

[9] Ibid., V.iv.

If justice is practiced in this way, then a judge need only examine the actual crime itself, and it is unnecessary for him to consider who committed the crime, the state of mind in which he committed it, or the circumstances which might have driven him to it. So, a man who stole a loaf of bread to feed his family would be treated in the same way as the man who stole it to sell it on at a higher price; the man who killed his neighbour in self-defence would be convicted of the same crime as the assassin. Aristotle describes the process in the impersonal terminology of mathematics:

> Now the judge restores equality; it is as though there were a line divided into unequal parts, and he took away that by which the greater segment exceeds the half, and added it to the smaller segment. And when the whole has been equally divided, then they say they have 'their own'—i.e. when they have got what is equal.[10]

The argument in favour of such strict legalism is that 'justice exists only between men whose mutual relations are governed by law; and law exists for men between whom there is injustice'.[11] Because no society is without injustice, due in large part to the fact that men, as the philosopher points out, generally seek what is in their own best interests, laws are established and upheld apart from any single individual. They are governed by convention and expediency, enacted according to the needs of a particular people, because 'the things which are just not by nature but by human enactment are not everywhere the same'.[12]

Although Aristotle recognises the importance of justice, both for the state and the individual, he would not have it practiced, even so, in such a legalistic way. Instead, he introduces the concept of equity, or mitigating circumstances, in distributing justice. The first tenet of equity is voluntariness. 'Whether an act is or is not one of injustice (or of justice) is determined by its voluntariness or involuntariness; for when it is voluntary it is blamed, and at the same time is then an act of injustice'.[13] In order for something to be truly

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[10] Ibid., V.iv.

[11] Ibid., V.vi.

[12] Ibid., V.vii.

[13] Ibid., V.viii.

unjust, it must be voluntary, for an act of injustice requires that a man both have power over what he does and knowledge of it. It follows, therefore, that 'that which is done in ignorance, or though not done in ignorance is not in the agent's power, or is done under compulsion, is involuntary'.[14] Acts which are involuntary in any way, such as the man who must steal (i.e. is under compulsion) to feed his family, or the man who kills in order to protect himself, should not be dealt with in the strictest sense of the law. When delivering judgment the law must maintain equity, not equality.

Aristotle concludes that the equitable is superior to what is strictly just because the equitable is a correction of legal justice. Legal justice, according to the philosopher, presumes that 'all law is universal', but also recognises that 'about some things it is not possible to make a universal statement which shall be correct', because no two sets of circumstance will be exactly the same. It is, thus, the nature of the equitable to correct the law where it is defective because of its universality.[15] That is to say, the law must adapt itself to the facts of each particular case, and it must consider all the circumstances surrounding the commission of the illegal act. This concept of equity provided a conceptual foundation for the development of the English legal system under Queen Elizabeth.

The political chaos engendered by the Reformation did not fail to shake up English courts. Before the *Act of Supremacy* in 1534, ecclesiastical courts played a prominent role in the distribution of justice. After Protestantism became the religion of the crown, however, the separation of church and state became untenable. John Guy offers the following explanation:

> The English Reformation was declared and enforced by parliamentary statutes and by common-law procedures: the theory was that of the unitary sovereign state. Treason, not heresy, was the penalty for denying royal supremacy…Common law triumphed over canon law which was retained by the church courts but on a strictly limited basis, and the legal immunities formerly enjoyed by criminous clergy and sanctuarymen were stifled by

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[14] Ibid., V.viii.

[15] Ibid., V.x.

> Parliament. In this way the duality of the Middle Ages whereby the jurisdictions of church and state co-existed independently was ended.[16]

In effect, by declaring himself the head of the English Church, Henry VIII forced the marriage of church and state. Unlike his own marriages, the dissolution of this union would prove impracticable, as it both protected the authority and legitimacy of Elizabeth I, and safeguarded the wealth of those who had profited from Henry's dissolution of the monasteries.[17] As the ecclesiastical courts lost their influence, the Courts of Common Law and Chancery naturally struggled for primacy. Although the question of judicial primacy would remain unsettled until the Earl of Oxford's case in 1615,[18] over the course of the 1570s 'equitie', as a concept, gained prominence.

Put simply, the main difference between the Courts of Common Law and Chancery was that the former abided by a strict set of rules and processes, whereas the latter took a less legalistic approach. In 1518 Christopher St. Germain published a treatise—*The Doctor and Student*—in which he introduced and explained the concept of 'equity'. Equity, he proclaims, is 'a right wiseness that considereth all the particular circumstances of the deed, the which also is tempered with the sweetness of mercy'.[19] As David Ibbetson notes, St. Germain's ideas arose from his reading of Aristotle's ethics, which lead him to believe that equity is the 'mitigation or tempering of the rigour of the law'.[20] St. Germain's work was so influential that, as Ibbetson observes, 'a generation later [1565] the Aristotelian approach was being used to ground this approach to statutory interpretation'.[21] The idea of a court

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[16] John Guy, 'Law, Lawyers and the English Reformation', *History Today* (1985), 20.

[17] Guy argues that 'what England wanted in 1559 was comprehensive insurance. She settled for Protestantism as the best available policy, for it guaranteed royal supremacy which, in turn, resolved the legal issues [specifically with regards to who owned properties that had belonged to the church before Henry VIII's confiscation]' (22).

[18] It was this case that decided that equity takes precedence over common law.

[19] Christopher St. German, *The Doctor and the Student*, Ch. 16.1., quoted in David Ibbetson, 'A House Built on Sand: Equity in Early Modern English Law', in *Law & Equity Approaches in Roman Law and Common Law*, ed. by E. Koops and W. J. Zwalve (Boston: Brill, 2014), 55-77.

[20] Ibbeston, p. 59.

[21] Ibid., p. 61.

being one of 'equity' became synonymous with saying that strict law would not be applied; as such these courts were not, according to Ibbetson, 'hamstrung by Common rules and processes'.[22]

By the 1570's, Aristotle's theory of equity was gathering support within the judicial system, to the point that, as Akil Mahesh explains, Shakespeare's England was 'marked by an emerging conflict between the courts of common law and equity'.[23] The battle between the courts was an issue of power: both the Court of Common Law and the Court of Chancery desired the ultimate veto. The victor of the struggle emerged in 1615, when, Ibbetson observes, *The Earl of Oxford's Case* established the 'legitimacy of Chancery intervention to set at nought judgments at Common law—and hence the practical primacy of Chancery and equity over Common law'.[24] From this point forward, Ibbetson demonstrates, equity had two main functions, 'to allow the application of statutes beyond their literal meaning, and to formulate the basis of the intervention of the Chancery (and other courts) against the rules of the Common law'.[25] Thus it was that the English legal system gradually aligned itself with Aristotle, and those who came before the courts could be confident that their crimes or petitions would be considered according to both the facts and the circumstances thereof.

As an Elizabethan playwright who had personal experience with the courts and counted many lawyers among his audiences, Shakespeare would have been well aware of the changes taking place within the legal system, and he did not fail to address issues of law and legality within his plays. When considering Shakespeare and the law the two plays that immediately come to mind are *Measure for Measure* and *The Merchant of Venice*, both of

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[22] Ibid., p. 56.

[23] Akil Mahesh, 'Elizabethan Jurisprudence: A Reading of the Trial Scene in *The Merchant of Venice*', last accessed 1 June 2020 <www.lawctopus.com>.

[24] Ibbeston, p. 74.

[25] Ibid., p. 76.

which have prolonged trial scenes. Many scholars and students of the Renaissance read these plays and applaud the cleverness of Portia, while at the same time condemning the cruelty of Angelo. Considered in light of Aristotle's concept of equity, however, I propose that both characters fall short of delivering a truly just sentence. In this chapter, I argue that we should think of Shakespeare's treatment of law as a continuum stretching from autocracy to equity to formalism, in which case both these plays would be situated on the formalist side of the spectrum.

On the one hand we have autocracy, an arbitrary, might-makes-right approach to law, where 'the law' is whatever the person with the most power wants it to be. I explored the ethical implications of this kind of autocratic role in the previous chapter on Machiavellianism. Formalism, by contrast, is an emotionless system with no regard for empathy that adheres to the letter of the law, refusing to make allowances for circumstances or human weakness. It is, in the words of Frederick Schauer, 'excessive reliance on the language of a rule'.[26] Practically speaking, as Ernest Weinrib explains, 'formalism postulates that law is intelligible as an internally coherent phenomenon'.[27] As such, Erwin Chemerinsky observes, it 'promises objective law'.[28] Aristotle's concept of equity lies in the middle: it takes into account principles of fairness and does not necessarily act according to the strict formulation of the law. Shakespeare's opus considers law at all points on this continuum, and in this chapter we will revisit some of the characters and scenes previously discussed in order to consider them from a slightly different angle. Autocracy, for instance, is represented by Saturninus in *Titus Andronicus*, as well as Richard Plantagenet and Jack Cade in *Henry VI*, all characters we encountered in previous chapters. Meanwhile,

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[26] Frederick Schauer, 'Formalism', *Yale Law Journal*, 97.4 (1988), 510.

[27] Ernest J. Weinrib, 'Legal Formalism: On the Immanent Rationality of Law', *Yale Law Journal*, 97.6 (1988), 951.

[28] Erwin Chemerinsky, 'Getting beyond Formalism in Constitutional Law: Constitutional Theory Matters', *Oklahoma Law Review*, 54.1 (2001), 1.

formalism can be discerned in Shakespeare's representation of the senate in *Timon of Athens*, John of Lancaster in *2 Henry IV*, Shylock and Portia in *Merchant of Venice*, and Angelo in *Measure for Measure.* Shakespeare also considers the merits of equity. In Henry V's dealings with the conspirators, the Jack Cade rebellion in *2 Henry VI*, and the Prince from *Romeo and Juliet,* the playwright gives examples of just and equitable application of the law.

Considering how the law was managed and implemented in Elizabethan England, as well as how this process is represented in Shakespeare's plays, leaves us not only with an interesting continuum of law, but also a continuum of forgiveness. As became apparent in the previous chapter, in an autocratic society, forgiveness can be dangerous to the power of the individual forgiving. Consequently, when forgiveness does occur it is more often a display of power than a genuine sentiment. Meanwhile, in a formalist system, which tends to have a well-established set of laws, the focus on the letter of the law almost entirely negates the possibility of forgiveness. Thus, only in a legal system based on equity does forgiveness seem to be truly possible. Nevertheless, its practicality remains dependent on the strength of the government, lest forgiveness lead to an overthrow of the state.

Autocracy

Absolutism. Tyranny. Totalitarianism. Many names have been given to autocratic governments. What they have in common is that, in a very real sense, 'law' is dependent on the will and whims of a single individual. This person, whatever his formal title, is not only above the law, but often is the law, maintaining control through military might. For this reason Francis Oakley argues that 'it is nothing other than his dedication to the common

good rather than concern for himself that distinguishes a king from a tyrant'.[29] Nonetheless, because the authority of a ruler is so fragile in a militaristic, Machiavellian society, revenge, rather than forgiveness, represents the status quo. Swift retaliation is seen as the most effective way to maintain power and control.

In *Titus Andronicus*, the legal landscape is chaotic. At the beginning of the play, Titus, a war hero, has outsized political influence, which he rapidly loses. Saturninus, the emperor, rules the state in conjunction with the Senate, but sees himself as outside the law. Finally, there are the gods, to whom Titus prays for justice as the ultimate arbiters of right and wrong, before taking matters into his own hands. *Titus Andronicus*, as a revenge tragedy, interrogates the place of precedent within a system of law, while at the same time illustrating the consequences of acting both above and outside the accepted legal system. Adrian Howe contends that, 'read as a profound questioning of how homicide is justified or excused, *Titus Andronicus* invites a re-examination of the legitimating of retaliatory interpersonal violence whatever form it takes'.[30] From act one *Titus Andronicus* is steeped in blood.

Titus' first act upon his victorious return to Rome is to order a blood sacrifice so that the souls of his dead sons, who fell in battle with the Goths, might be appeased. The unfortunate victim of this demand is the eldest son of Tamora, the Queen of the Goths. Although Titus is in a position to show mercy, he chooses not to; he sets himself up as the arbiter of life and death. He is a law unto himself, and he trusts in his own decrees. Nevertheless, he also holds the authority of the emperor in high esteem. As Katherine Rowe observes, Titus 'imagines himself in a heroic relation of fealty to the emperor and to the state of Rome', so much so that he does not hesitate to kill his own son Mucius when the

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[29] Francis Oakley, *The Watershed of Modern Politics: Law, Virtue, Kingship, and Consent (1300-1650)* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2015), p. 82.

[30] Adrian Howe, '"Red Mist" Homicide: Sexual Infidelity and the English Law of Murder (Glossing *Titus Andronicus*)', *Legal Studies*, 33.3 (2013), 416.

boy tries to defend his sister's right to marry the emperor's brother.[31] Upon being rebuked that he has unjustly slain the boy, Titus responds,

> Nor thou, nor he, are any sons of mine;
> My sons would never so dishonour me:
> Traitor, restore Lavinia to the emperor.[32]

Throughout the play Titus is keenly conscious of his role as the *paterfamilias*.

In Roman history the role of the *paterfamilias* is an apt example of autocratic government, albeit on a smaller scale. As Emma Johnson explains, according to Roman law,

> the eldest male in the family possessed this role which gave him *potestas*, or power, over the subsequent generations of his family; the *paterfamilias* was the only one who could own property, manage financial affairs, permit marriage, and perhaps most shockingly, he held the *vitae necisque potestas*, the power of life and death, over everyone under his *manus*.[33]

In short, the *paterfamilias* held the power and final authority within the family structure. Johnson argues, however, that this understanding was 'an ideology rather than a legally-enforced patriarchy'.[34] Most scholars seem to agree with this assessment, including John Curran, who cites 'the paucity of credible examples',[35] and Richard Saller, who argues that 'a comprehensive survey of all uses of *paterfamilias* in classical texts…reveals a major disjunction between this modern understanding of the term (rooted in Roman law) and ancient usage'.[36] Within *Titus Andronicus*, however, the notion of *paterfamilias*, and

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[31] Katherine A. Rowe, 'Dismembering and Forgetting in Titus Andronicus', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 45.3 (1994), 290.

[32] *Titus Andronicus*, 1.1.299-301.

[33] Emma Johnson, 'Patriarchal Power in the Roman Republic: Ideologies and Realites of the Paterfamilias', *Hirundo*, 5 (2007), 99.

[34] Ibid., 99.

[35] John Curran, 'Ius Vitae Necisque: the Politics of Killing Children', *Journal of Ancient History*, 6.1 (2018), 112.

[36] Emma Johnson argues that 'Sallust is the only primary source that gives us an example of the *vitae necique potestas*' (110). According to Sallust, during the Catiline uprising, there were some young men, 'unconnected with the conspiracy, who set out to join Catiline at an early period of his proceedings. Among these was Aulus Fulvius, the son of a senator, whom, being arrested on his journey, his father ordered to be put to death' (Sal. Cat. 39). This same story is recounted in both Cassius Dio and Valerius Maximus, with Valerius adding the famous line, that 'he [Aulus Flavius] had not begotten him for Catiline against his country, but for his country against Catiline' (Bk V, 8.5). For his part, Cassius Dio is careful to mention that Aulus Flavius 'was not the only private individual, as some think, who ever acted thus. There were many others, that is to say, not only consuls, but private individuals as well, who slew their sons. This was the course of affairs at that time. (Cassius Dio, Bk 37, 36.4). Curran argues, however, that 'the belief that the Roman pater enjoyed a formal, legal right to do his children to death is not tenable' (113).

especially the *vitae necisque potestas*, is a recurring theme, as Titus struggles to control both the internal working of his family and their ultimate fate. At the end of the play Titus exercises his *vitae necisque potestas* a second time when he kills his daughter, Lavinia.

Despite his willingness in Act I to kill his own son in defence of the emperor, Titus soon finds himself out of favour. Saturninus, for his part, tries to secure himself in power by appealing both to the law and to his own authority. Despite the fact that Lavinia is betrothed to his brother, Bassianus, the emperor believes that he has a right to her. He even goes so far as to threaten him, saying, 'traitor, if Rome have law or we have power, / thou and thy faction shall repent this rape'.[37] When Bassianus accepts Saturninus' appeal to the law, however, and agrees to 'let the laws of Rome determine all',[38] the emperor backs down and instead takes Tamora for his wife. Throughout the entirety of the play Saturninus continues in this vein: he uses the law both as a shield to protect himself and as a weapon to destroy others.

As the plot unfolds, horrifying and steeped in blood, Saturninus uses the law to execute two of Titus' sons for the supposed murder of his brother. He tells the Senate,

> My lords, you know, as know the mightful gods,
> However these disturbers of our peace
> Buzz in the people's ears, there nought hath pass'd,
> But even with law against the wilful sons
> Of old Andronicus.[39]

The emperor needs the Senate to recognise and acknowledge that he has behaved in a lawful, just, and appropriate manner, despite the fact that his interpretation of the law has allowed him to accomplish his revenge against Titus. Somewhat later, when word of Titus' laments and prayers for justice reaches Saturninus, he again uses the law as his shield and justification, going so far as to complain that it is he who has been treated unjustly:

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[37] *Titus Andronicus,* 1.1.408-09.

[38] Ibid.*,* 1.1.412.

[39] Ibid.*,* 4.4.5-9.

> Despiteful and intolerable wrongs!
> Shall I endure this monstrous villainy?
> I know from whence this same device proceeds:
> May this be borne? – as if his traitorous sons,
> That died by law for murder of our brother,
> Have by my means been butcher'd wrongfully![40]

Although the emperor might be unaware of his wife's evil machinations, he cannot claim innocence when the swiftness with which he executed Titus' sons left no room for them to prove their innocence. This miscarriage of justice precipitates Titus' desire for revenge.

Once Titus reaches the point of action, he realises he will find no justice among men and decides therefore to implore the help of the gods:

> Sith there's no justice in earth nor hell,
> We will solicit heaven and move the gods
> To send down Justice for to wreak our wrongs.[41]

'Justice' ultimately takes the form of Titus himself, however, and he exacts it in the form of a banquet. Adrian Howe argues that 'his revenge', like his sacrifice at the beginning of the play, is 'patterned on precedent', much as Shakespeare's plot is patterned on Ovid's story of Philomela.[42] Howe notes that 'when Titus speaks of 'precedent' and 'warrant', he sounds like he is creating 'a new system of case-law' following the breakdown of established law'.[43] In his speech before the banquet Titus describes to Chiron and Demetrius how he will cook them and feed them to their mother, saying,

> This is the feast that I have bid her to,
> And this the banquet she shall surfeit on;
> For worse than Philomel you used my daughter,
> And worse than Procne I will be revenged.[44]

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[40] Ibid., 4.4.50-55.

[41] Ibid., 4.3.50-52.

[42] Howe, 427. In Ovid's story Pronce's husband, Tereus, treacherously rapes Philomela, her sister, before cutting out her tongue and locking her away deep in the forest. Unable to speak, Philomela weaves a tapestry recounting Tereus' evil deed and sends it to her sister, who presently comes and rescues her. In a frenzied revenge, Procne then kills their son and feeds him to his father. (*Metamorphosis*, 6.412-674).

[43] Howe, 427.

[44] *Titus Andronicus,* 5.2.192-95.

In the words of Robert Miola, 'Titus imperiously dismisses the counsel of reason and moderation, sanctifying his passion, insisting on its full and terrible expression'.[45]

When we consider the position of the emperor in Roman society, Titus' decision to act should not be unexpected. Francis Oakley notes that, 'just as the pope stands in the church so, too, stands the emperor in the empire. He is, as a result, *legibus solutes* and is bound or constrained only by the divine and natural law'.[46] Titus, therefore, could not hope for justice unless he made it himself. Saturninus was afraid of Titus' power, yet Titus had to resort to tricks in order to obtain his vengeance. In the world of *Titus Andronicus*, where the autocratic tyrant and the *paterfamilias* step outside the law to fight their battles, it would appear that the principle of 'might makes right' means everyone ends up dead.

Shakespeare's plays about the reign of Henry VI give a different picture of the perils of autocracy. Here, Shakespeare provides two separate examples of individuals who believe themselves to be above the law and who use their military strength to try to mould others to their will. The first of these is Richard Plantagenet, who believes himself to be the true heir to the throne. The second is Jack Cade, who also believes he should be king, but whose claim is laughable. Both cases, one serious, the other comic, illustrate Francis Oakley's observation that the divine right of kings 'involves an unlimited sovereign authority bringing with it the power to make law while being itself *legibus solutus*'.[47] For these two characters, Richard and Jack, 'no one can be king who is bound by the laws'.[48]

From the beginning Richard acts in defiance of the law. Thus, even though he believes in the legitimacy of his claim, he prepares for war. As Eric Heinze explains, 'to submit to legal argument is to submit to legal procedure, in recognition of the current sovereign's

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[45] Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 28.

[46] Oakley, p. 143.

[47] Ibid., p. 161.

[48] Ibid., p. 161.

authority over law, and to the possibility of losing one's case'.[49] Richard does not want to risk defeat in a court that favours the reigning king, and therefore chooses to fight for his right, knowing that Henry has no stomach for the battlefield. Before the commencement of hostilities, in a discussion between several lords, Richard asserts his right to the throne and demands of Suffolk 'say at once if I maintain'd the truth'.[50] Suffolk replies,

> Faith, I have been a truant in the law,
> And never yet could frame my will to it;
> And therefore frame the law unto my will:[51]

a response that foreshadows exactly what will come to pass. This idea of compelling the law to conform to the will of an individual is the hallmark of autocracy. Heinze goes so far as to say that 'to bypass legal authority is to assert one's will regardless of how the law is ultimately interpreted, as Richard constantly does'.[52] This exchange with Suffolk ends with Richard's declaration that

> And for those wrongs, those bitter injuries,
> Which Somerset hath offer'd to my house:
> I doubt not but with honour to redress;
> And therefore haste I to the parliament,
> Either to be restored to my blood,
> Or make my ill the advantage of my good.[53]

Richard is a proud man, and, as David Crawford notes, 'reputation and honour were not just vague notions but key components of status…people were sensitive to insults and slurs on their character'.[54] Now that his honour has been assaulted, Richard will not rest until it has been restored. Even Henry VI's display of just rule, wherein he restores Richard to the dukedom of York which is his by blood, is not enough to quell the flame of rebellion. Neither Henry's benevolence to, nor his trust in, Richard have the desired effect, and it is not

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[49] Eric Heinze, 'Power Politics and the Rule of Law: Shakespeare's First Historical Tetralogy and Law's "Foundations"', *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 29.1 (2009), 150

[50] *1 Henry VI,* 2.4.5.

[51] Ibid., 2.4.7-9.

[52] Heinze, 150.

[53] *1 Henry VI,* 2.5.124-29.

[54] David Crawford, 'The Rule of Law?: The Laity, English Archdeacons' Courts and the Reformation to 1558', *Parergon*, 4.1 (1986), 161.

long before we hear that 'from Ireland thus comes York to claim his right, / and pluck the crown from feeble Henry's head'.[55] Ironically, the army with which he marches was given to him by the king. As Heinze points out Henry and Richard see kingship differently: Henry believes that the competent performance of the duties of a ruler is a necessary condition for legitimate rule, whereas Richard 'insists on the legitimacy of [his] title solely by peremptory, lineal right'.[56] In the end, Henry's firm belief in his duty compels him to surrender so as to save his people from further civil war.

Jack Cade is much closer to Richard's perspective than to Henry's. His actions, as well, resemble Richard's: both claim to be king; both are determined to take the throne by force, if necessary; both use armies of men who are not their own; neither is willing to bow before the law if it contradicts his position. Cade takes his rebellion a step further, however, in that he wishes to destroy both the aristocracy and the law so that he can set himself up in their place. From the very beginning we see Cade claiming to have power over life and death; he recognises no law save his own, and relishes the ability to say such things as 'unless I find him guilty, he shall not die'.[57] Cade recognises, however, that his disregard for established law does not negate its ingrained power, and he sets about, therefore, trying to dismantle not only the law, but also the power behind it. As he tells his followers,

> … you that love the commons, follow me.
> Now show yourselves men; 'tis for liberty.
> We will not leave one lord, one gentleman:
> Spare none but such as go in clouted shoon;
> For they are thrifty honest men, and such
> As would, but that they dare not, take our parts.[58]

Liberty, he maintains, can only exist in a realm free from lords and gentlemen: a kingdom in which everyone is equal under Cade.

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[55] *2 Henry VI,* 5.1.1-2.

[56] Heinze, 163.

[57] *2 Henry VI,* 4.2.90.

[58] Ibid., 4.3.173-78.

The establishment of this Cadian utopia, however, is dependent on the uprooting of the established order. Thus, in addition to slaughtering the aristocracy, Cade commands the destruction of legal documents. His henchman, Dick, famously exclaims 'kill all the lawyers'.[59] His order, 'go some and pull down the Savoy; / others to the inns of court; down with them all' is a physical manifestation of Richard's fallacious onslaught on established law.[60] Both men, Cade as well as Richard, believe that they can force their way onto the throne; their stark disregard for accepted institutions and authorities stands in marked contrast to Henry's concern for the wellbeing of all. The fact that either man is equally as likely to have uttered the following exclamation substantiates their similarity:

> I have thought upon it, it shall be so.
> Away, burn all the records of the realm:
> My mouth shall be the parliament of England.[61]

For Cade and Richard it is not force of law, but force of arms that determines legitimacy. In such a capricious environment justice is hardly possible, let alone forgiveness.

Formalism

Desmond Manderson maintains that 'the enforcement of law is an intrinsic part of how we experience it'.[62] That is to say, the way in which the decrees of law are carried out—whether through the power of an individual or the authority of the state—affects the attitude of the populace towards the law. Thus, if the interpretation of the law changes based on the power and desires of a single individual, people will respond differently than if the law is based on constitution and precedent. Consistency of interpretation, as well, influences people's perception of the fairness or justice of the law. In a formalist legal system, there is no room

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[59] Ibid., 4.2.73.

[60] Ibid., 4.7.1-2.

[61] Ibid., 4.7.11-13.

[62] Manderson, 5.

for mercy or forgiveness because the law is exercised as written: it does not take into account the situation of the offender, nor does it consider possible distinctions between voluntary and involuntary. Each violation of the law is dealt with in an unfeeling, 'legalistic', 'letter of the law' way.

One apt example is the formalism of the Athenian senate in *Timon of Athens*, and their aforementioned sentencing of Alcibiades' friend. The senators refuse to consider mitigating circumstances when it comes to the sentencing of this soldier, arguing, instead, that he must die because 'nothing emboldens sin so much as mercy'.[63] Alcibiades tries to reason with them, observing that 'pity is the virtue of the law, / and none but tyrants use it cruelly'.[64] When the argument against mercy, however, is that mercy begets crime, how can any argument to the contrary succeed? Alcibiades tries to remind the senators of the services his friend has rendered to the state and maintains that it is unjust to punish a man for using his sword in anger when it is that same sword that protects the very laws that now threaten him. Amanda Bailey puts it thus: 'for Alcibiades, the soldier's good deeds should serve as collateral and thus animate the restorative principal of equivalence in exchange'.[65] Alcibiades continues to plead with the senators:

> If by this crime he owes the law his life,
> Why, let the war receive 't in valiant gore
> For law is strict, and war is nothing more.[66]

He has already explained that his friend was 'in hot blood' when he 'stepp'd into the law', and so, again he begs for mercy, citing his own deeds in service of Athens as a reason for them to show leniency.[67] Nonetheless, the senators refuse to listen. Instead, they assert,

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[63] *Timon of Athens,* 3.5.3.

[64] Ibid., 3.5.8-9.

[65] Amanda Bailey, '*Timon of Athens*: Forms of Payback, and the Genre of Debt', *English Literary Renaissance*, 41.4 (2011), 396

[66] *Timon of Athens,* 3.5.86-88.

[67] Ibid., 3.5.11-12.

> We are for law: he dies; urge it no more,
> On height of our displeasure: friend or brother,
> He forfeits his own blood that spills another.[68]

When Alcibiades continues to sue for mercy, the senators banish him from the city.

E. C. Pettet argues that Alcibiades' quarrel with the Senate is a point of honour, because Alcibiades believes the State 'is punishing him for an act that really isn't criminal at all' as 'his friend has done nothing more than draw his sword on a point of honour "seeing his reputation touch'd to death"'.[69] 'In Alcibiades' eyes, Pettet maintains, 'there is no essential difference between a private act of this kind and the act of a State in going to war'.[70] The refusal of the Athenian senate to acknowledge this similarity, to consider mitigating circumstances, and to show mercy to the unfortunate soldier leads to a declaration of war. In the end, however, Alcibiades demonstrates the mercy that was not shown to his friend when he agrees to spare the innocents of the city and only punish those responsible for his humiliation and banishment. In maintaining, by contrast, that the law must be carried out no matter what, the senators foreshadow the brand of justice that will determine their own fate. Once a strict, legalistic approach to justice is espoused, one gives up any right to leniency, as becomes apparent in *Measure for Measure.*

Whereas *Timon of Athens* contains a critique of formalism with regards to persons, *2 Henry IV* looks at formalism as a strict understanding of the language of the law. Depending on whether one sympathises with the crown or the rebels, John of Lancaster, from *2 Henry IV,* offers an example either of a clever subject protecting the interests of his king or of a dastardly Machiavel who stands on semantics and betrays the rebels' faith on a technicality. John's meeting with the rebels at Gaultree begins with an airing of their grievances, after

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[68] Ibid., 3.5.89-91.

[69] E. C. Pettet, 'Timon of Athens: The Disruption of Feudal Morality', *The Review of English Studies*, 23.92 (1947), 336.

[70] Ibid., 336.

which the prince feigns sympathy and promises that their complaints against the crown will be considered and redressed. He oozes sincerity when he says

> M**y** lord, these griefs shall be with speed redress'd,
> Upon my soul they shall. If this may please you,
> Discharge your powers unto their several counties,
> As we will ours, and here between the armies
> Let's drink together friendly and embrace,
> That all their eyes may bear those tokens home
> Of our restored love and amity.[71]

Unfortunately for the rebels, they believe John is trustworthy. According to Jane Yeang Chui Wong, this belief rests on their trust that 'negotiating with the prince is in effect the same as negotiating with the king himself'.[72] Feeling secure, they disband their armies. John is not the king, however, even though he acts in the king's name; as Wong explains, 'the authority delegated to him allows him to make decisions that *he* perceives to be in the best interest of the crown, which is not quite the same as carrying out the wishes of the king'.[73] As soon as they are unprotected, therefore, John has the rebels arrested. When they accuse him of acting dishonourably and in bad faith he replies,

> I promis'd you redress of these same grievances
> Whereof you did complain, which, by mine honour,
> I will perform with a most Christian care.
> But for you rebels, look to taste the due
> Meet for rebellion and such acts as yours.[74]

Whilst what John says is technically true—he did not promise the rebels pardon, only that their complaints would be redressed—he knew that they had understood his overture to be one of complete reconciliation. Thus, as Sherman Hawkins points out, 'it is not so much the harshness of the sentence that disturbs us…what offends us here is the pretence of justice, the legal trickery by which Prince John accomplishes his ends'.[75] The rebels would hardly

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[71] *2 Henry IV,* 4.2.59-65.

[72] Jane Yeang Chui Wong, 'John of Lancaster's Negotiation with the Rebels in 2 Henry IV', *Critical Survey*, 30.1 (2018), 54.

[73] Ibid., 55.

[74] *2 Henry IV*, 4.2.113-17.

[75] Sherman H. Hawkins, 'Virtue and Kingship in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*', *English Literary Renaissance,* 5 (1975), 336.

have disbanded their armies if they had realised that John planned to have them hanged. For Franziska Quabeck, 'this disguise is also a typical example of political or moral ambush, which is unjust, because it undermines the necessary principle of surrender'.[76] As a result, even though John does, strictly speaking, keep his word, and although he does successfully end the rebellion with very little bloodshed, his logical and lexical semantics leave one with the sense that an egregious injustice has been committed. Such attention to the exact words of an agreement is something that appears again in *Merchant of Venice*.

The trial scene in *Merchant of Venice* is probably one of the most well-known scenes in the Shakespearean canon. Scholars are divided in their feelings toward, and interpretation of, a scene that seemingly triumphs over injustice only to inflict it. Antonio's laughing agreement to Shylock's terms at the beginning of the play turns to consternation when he realises that he cannot pay his debt. Suddenly, what he thought of as an impossible joke becomes a grim reality: Shylock insists he be given his pound of flesh. According to the law, Shylock is due the forfeit that Antonio willingly agreed to, and he refuses to be moved by bribes or pleas. Even before the actual trial scene, Antonio realises that prayers are useless, as Shylock swears over and over again, 'I'll have my bond'.[77] When the jailor comments that surely the Duke will never allow this forfeiture to hold, Antonio reluctantly admits that the law cannot be undermined for the sake of a single individual:

> The Duke cannot deny the course of law,
> For the commodity that strangers have
> With us in Venice, if it be denied,
> Will much impeach the justice of the state,
> Since that the trade and profit of the city
> Consisteth of all nations.[78]

Antonio recognises the danger of making exceptions to the law, as any exception will impact the credibility and reputation of Venice as a centre of trade and weaken the power of the

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[76] Franziska Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars in Shakespeare* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co, 2013), p. 234

[77] *Merchant of Venice*, 3.3.5, 12, 13.

[78] Ibid., 3.3.26-31.

state to enforce the law in the future. As the legality of the bond is unquestioned, Rick Laws maintains that *Merchant of Venice* might be read as 'a skilful examination of the tension between law and equity'.[79] In an elaborate scene, Shakespeare engages with, and directly critiques, formalism, equity, and the intersection of the two.

From the beginning, it is clear that the Duke opposes the deliverance of the forfeiture; he has tried without success to move Shylock to mercy. Even his final attempt is in vain, however, as Shylock rejoins that he has sworn by the 'holy Sabbath…to have the due and forfeit of [his] bond', and insists that he does no wrong because he is within his right.[80] At this juncture Portia, disguised as Balthazar, enters to plead Antonio's case. Portia immediately acknowledges that Venetian law is powerless to inhibit Shylock from exacting his pound of flesh, but she implores that 'the Jew be merciful'.[81] Her speech on the quality of mercy is similar to Aristotle's argument for the same virtue: she asserts that mercy is 'twice blest':

> It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
> 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
> The thronèd monarch better than his crown.[82]

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[79] Rick Laws, 'Conflicts of Law and Equity in *The Merchant of Venice*', last accessed 1 June 2020 <www.shakespeare-online.com>.

[80] *Merchant of Venice*, 4.1.36-37.

[81] Ibid., 4.1.180.

[82] *Merchant of Venice*, 4.1.184-87.

She even goes so far as to say that 'it is an attribute of God Himself'.[83] [84] In so arguing, she articulates, according to Laws, 'the fundamental conflict between law and equity; while justice can be found in each separately, there is a better form of justice to be obtained when mercy and fairness become considerations in the administration of the law'.[85] Nevertheless, Shylock is unmoved. He cries, 'my deeds upon my head! I crave the law, / the penalty and forfeit of my bond'.[86] When Bassanio begs the Duke to use his authority to overturn the law, Portia is adamant:

> It must not be. There is no power in Venice
> Can alter a decree establishèd;
> 'Twill be recorded for a precedent
> And many an error by the same example
> Will rush into the state. It cannot be.[87]

Portia acknowledges that the law is sacrosanct, and Shylock, believing he has triumphed, refuses once again to take three times his bond if he will forego his forfeiture. It is this refusal, Peter Kishore Saval contends, that makes Shylock 'villainous in the eyes of the city', because 'no quantity of monetary damages no matter how usurious will satisfy [his] desire for revenge'.[88] In defence of Shylock, Kathryn Finin argues that the Duke and the

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[83] Ibid., 4.1.193.

[84] Saval argues that 'Portia's "mercy" argument is based on a myth of primordial debt. The doctrine is that all life has its basis in an originary gift of salvation and redemption that none of us "deserve" and for which none of us can ever give an adequate counter-gift, or exchange an equivalent item. Therefore, since the very content of our existence is connected to an originary supernatural debt that can never be paid back, we show our equivalence to that supernatural order most clearly when we also imitate the primordial debt of salvation through an act of generous gift giving so great that no reciprocal offer is even possible. Such an act of generous gift giving shaming the other party into incapacity for reciprocity is "mercy"' [Peter Kishore Saval, *Reading Shakespeare through Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 100]. Unfortunately, as Finin states, Portia's speech about mercy is a performance directed at everyone but Shylock [Kathryn R. Finin, 'Ethical Questions and Questionable Morals in *Measure for Measure* and *Merchant of Venice*', in *Shakespeare and Moral Agency*, ed. by Michael Bristol (London: Continuum Publishing, 2010), p. 108]. Portia is arguing from a Christian perspective, for a Christian audience, rather than creating an argument that would appeal to Jewish sensibilities. Shylock, as a Jew, would not entertain the notion that some 'primordial debt' had been paid by the Son of God, because, as a Jew, he would not acknowledge the primary premise that Jesus was the Messiah.

[85] Laws.

[86] *Merchant of Venice*, 4.1.204-05.

[87] Ibid., 4.1.216-220.

[88] Peter Kishore Saval, *Reading Shakespeare through Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p.103. At this point it must be noted that Shylock is the first to stand on a formalist interpretation of the bond when he says he will not provide a surgeon to stay the bleeding because it is not written therein. In so doing he inadvertently sanctions and agrees to an exact interpretation of the bond. Thus, when sentence is given, he is awarded his pound of flesh, but he is told he must take it without shedding a single drop of blood, for 'blood' is not directly mentioned in the bond.

people of Vienna are asking him to show the sort of mercy to Antonio that would exist between friends or family, all while demonstrating an 'unwillingness to engage Shylock in an authentic way'.[89] Throughout the entire play Shylock is kept at arm's length; they treat him as *other* and constantly use derogatory names and terms when speaking about him or addressing him. Most frequently he is referred to simply as 'Jew', which, in the context of Christian Vienna, is a way of reminding him of his otherness, of his place as less than his Christian counterparts. Hence, when the Duke appeals to Shylock's sense of community and decency to his fellow human being, he is asking Shylock to demonstrate his commitment to a community of which he has never actually been a part. Shylock is intensely aware of his otherness, however, and refuses to be moved by such appeals of convenience. As an outsider, Shylock asserts that he is under no obligation to act according to the Christian code of a community of which he is not a part.

Both the Duke and Portia make every appeal possible, and up to this point Shylock has had every opportunity to show mercy. He refuses. One might argue, therefore, as many have, that Shylock's callousness makes him undeserving of the mercy he refused to show. To repay injury with injury, however, is exactly what Portia argues against at the beginning of the trial scene. Although we might applaud her use of formalism to save Antonio, we also question how she finally applies it to Shylock. Finin argues that 'despite saving Antonio's life, Portia's excessive condemnation of Shylock raises questions about her motivation', and that her 'overly-legalistic and harsh reading of the bond renders her as "tyrannous" as Angelo in *Measure for Measure*'.[90] This contradiction is precisely why Heinze argues that comedies like *Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure* 'display the hypocrisies of legal

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[89] Kathryn R. Finin, 'Ethical Questions and Questionable Morals in *Measure for Measure* and *Merchant of Venice*', in *Shakespeare and Moral Agency*, ed. by Michael Bristol (London: Continuum Publishing, 2010), p. 108.

[90] Ibid., pp. 108-109.

regimes, not their collapse'.[91] Likewise, although Mahesh acknowledges that 'equity rightly defeats the penalty in Shylock's bond', he is also adamant that 'it is improperly carried to unjust ends that offend conscience, morality, and Natural Law' because 'the Christians do not season justice with mercy, but rather poison it with hypocrisy, vengeance, and hatred'.[92] Although, this view is, perhaps, somewhat extreme it is difficult to reconcile forced conversion and confiscation of property with the mercy that Portia advocates for earlier in the scene. Shylock himself complains that death would be preferable. Owen Hood Philips agrees with Mahesh, maintaining that 'the weakness of Portia's judgment lies juridically in this, that as she did not decide against the validity of the bond on the ground of it being *contra bonos mores*'.[93] He too is disappointed with what he calls 'a wretched subterfuge, a miserable pettifogging trick'.[94]

It must be remembered, however, that even though a modern audience might have difficulty viewing Shylock's treatment as merciful, a contemporary audience would not have felt the same. As John Drakakis, the editor of the Arden edition, maintains, 'in the *Merchant of Venice* the Jew is a theatrical stereotype, a cultural fantasy, invoked as a manifestation of the principle of *otherness* against which Venice is made to define its own identity'.[95] Shakespeare's audience lived in a world where one's religion was not simply a matter of personal choice, but also a sign of allegiance to country and queen. 'Otherness' and lack of conformity was seen as dangerous. Consequently, those who refused to conform were faced with persecution and even, at times, execution. It is not difficult, then, to imagine why Portia's treatment of Shylock might seem merciful to Elizabethan Englishmen. In the world

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[91] Heinze, p. 140,

[92] Mahesh.

[93] Owen Hood Philips, *Shakespeare and the Lawyers* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 93.

[94] Ibid., p. 93.

[95] John Drakakis, ed., 'Introduction' to *The Merchant of Venice* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2014), p. 24.

of the play, and in Elizabethan England, forcing an unbeliever to convert would be considered a merciful sentence, because, in their minds, it meant the saving of his soul. Furthermore, George W. Keeton reminds us, English law in Shakespeare's England did not function according to the principles of equity that are widely accepted today.[96] Rather, England had separate courts for the administration of law and equity. *Merchant of Venice*, then, might be interpreted as an exploration of this intertwining of formalism and equity. The play recognises time and again that laws must be upheld if the state is to maintain its reputation and its control of the populace. Nonetheless, at the same time, Shakespeare embeds a critique of laws which do not take fairness into account. The difficulty, therefore, lies in the marriage of the two: how might law be enforced according to the principles of equity, how might it combine mercy and justice, while also preserving its power and influence? These questions are further considered in *Measure for Measure.*

Whereas the Venetian laws in *Merchant of Venice* have been well maintained and enforced, the laws of *Measure for Measure'*s Vienna have become entirely ineffective. The Duke himself readily acknowledges this fact at the beginning of the play:

> We have strict statutes and most biting laws.
> The needful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds,
> Which for this nineteen years we have let slip;
> …Now, as fond fathers,
> Having bound up the threatening twigs of birch,
> Only to stick it in their children's sight
> For terror, not to use, in time the rod
> Becomes more mock'd than fear'd; so our decrees,
> Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead;
> And liberty plucks justice by the nose.[97]

Although laws exist, their administration has been neglected for so long that, as the Duke laments, they no longer mean anything. On account of these unfortunate circumstances, the Duke pretends to leave the city, entrusting it to the care of Angelo in his absence, in the hope that Angelo's austerity and rigour might right the city. As J. W. Lever explains,

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[96] George W. Keeton, quoted in Laws.

[97] *Measure for Measure*, 1.3.19-21, 23-29.

> there was need for policy to be switched from over-indulgent laxity to a new severity; and the Duke's desire to avoid a semblance of arbitrary tyranny by leaving the task to his deputy would be understood and approved under an absolute monarchy where no two-party system automatically shielded the throne.[98]

From the beginning, however, Angelo is an unyielding ruler.

As Stacy Magedanz points out, when the audience first meets Angelo, 'he seems to have almost no personal qualities at all; he is his role, all magistrate and no person'.[99] His one salient characteristic, one might say, is his pride in always following the law to the letter. As he boasts to Escalus, ''tis one thing to be tempted…another thing to fall'.[100] Because he does not see himself as having ever experienced moral weakness or failure, Angelo has no pity for it: everything is black and white. As Magedanz explains, 'the law that Angelo upholds is entirely exterior and impersonal'.[101] In Angelo's view, one always has a choice to break the law or not to break it; he can see no middle ground, and so he makes no allowances for human weakness. Instead, as Daniel Gates observes, 'he presents himself as the mere executor of the abstract law'.[102] As Angelo himself announces,

> We must not make a scarecrow of the law
> Setting it up to fear the birds of prey,
> And let it keep one shape, till custom make it
> Their perch and not their terror.[103]

He even goes so far as to haughtily proclaim, 'when I, that censure him, do so offend, / let mine own judgement pattern out my death'.[104] Angelo decides that strict enforcement of the law is the only way to make it effective, because as soon as exceptions are made, he believes, they quickly become normalised. When young Claudio is arrested for impregnating

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[98] J. W. Lever, ed., 'Introduction' in *Measure for Measure* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2012). p. lxv.

[99] Stacy Magedanz, 'Public Justice and Private Mercy in *Measure for Measure*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 44.2 (2004), 322.

[100] *Measure for Measure*, 2.1.17-18.

[101] Magedanz, 322.

[102] Daniel Gates, 'The Law Made Flesh: St. Paul's Corinth and Shakespeare's Vienna', *Christianity and Literature*, 62.4 (2013), 521.

[103] *Measure for Measure*, 2.1.1-4.

[104] Ibid., 2.1.29-30.

a women out of wedlock, Angelo thus decrees that he must die.[105] When Claudio's sister, Isabella, leaves her convent to sue for her brother's life, her conversation with Angelo provides a long discourse on the function of law and the possibility of mercy.

Isabella begins her gentle assault by acknowledging the serious nature of her brother's sin, then begs that it be the sin that is condemned and not her brother. Angelo replies that because 'every fault's condemned ere it be done', men know the consequences they face.[106] The sentence, he insists, must therefore be carried out. Isabella responds with the same argument used by Portia: that nothing becomes a ruler so much as mercy. This argument fails as well, as does her argument that all men would be condemned were it not for the merits of Jesus Christ. From begging, to flattery, to an appeal to the passion of Christ, Isabella pushes her suit from every possible angle. Nevertheless, Jennifer Flaherty argues, 'her primary attacks on Angelo are those that condemn him for not living up to a heavenly standard of justice and mercy'; hardly surprising given that she was literally pulled from the convent to plead for her brother's life.[107] Despite her persistence, however, Angelo insists that the law must be enforced or it will not be obeyed, and contends that he shows pity 'most of all when [he] show[s] justice, / for then [he] pit[ies] those [he does] not know'.[108] He tells Isabella that he will consider her petition and that she may come again the next day.

This argument between Angelo and Isabella is often framed as a debate between the Old and New Testaments, between legalistic formalism and the more forgiving nature of the Christian era. Gates declares, however, that the play's 'most important biblical allusion is in its title, which refers simultaneously to the Sermon on the Mount's instruction to judge

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[105] 'As several critics have observed, *Measure for Measure's* severe law against fornication was not an impossible notion in 1604, since the death penalty for adultery had been proposed in Parliament in 1584 and 1604' (Shugar, 30, quoted in Gates, 518).

[106] *Measure for Measure*, 2.2.38.

[107] Jennifer Flaherty, 'Heaven and Earth: Confession as Performance in *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure*', *Theatre Symposium*, 21 (2013), 82.

[108] *Measure for Measure*, 2.2.101-02.

others mercifully and the the *lex talionis* of Mosaic Law'.[109] Old Testament law is incredibly detailed. It contains rules for worship and sacrifice and outlines the way in which the Jewish people are expected to live: everything from which animals can be consumed to which acts are worthy of death is laid out in detail. The Pharisees' strict adherence to Old Testament law is often remarked upon in the Gospels, where Jesus accuses them of sticking to the letter of the law but violating its heart.[110] Jesus himself handles violations of the law very differently from the Pharisees. The Gospel of John provides two particularly poignant examples: when the Pharisees bring Jesus a women caught in adultery and ask him what they should do with her (the Old Testament penalty being stoning), he replies, 'he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her'.[111] The Pharisees do not appreciate Jesus' mercy and forgiveness, nor do they appreciate the fact that he forces them to acknowledge their own sinfulness; when Pilate later tries to save Jesus from crucifixion, for example, they insist, 'we have a law; and according to the law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God'.[112] As Daniel Gates recognises, Angelo, like the Pharisees, always 'insists on the law as an abstract form that must disregard the particularity of individuals in order to remain just'.[113] Isabella, on the other hand, advocates for the mercy and forgiveness that are the cornerstones of Jesus' New Testament teachings. As the play was written for a Christian audience, during a time of religious upheaval, the contrast between Angelo and Isabella would have been immediately apparent.

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[109] Gates, 512. The verse upon which the title of *Measure for Measure* is based comes from the Gospel of Matthew: 'Judge not, that you may not be judged, / For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again' (7.1-2).

[110] Matthew, 23. In the *Oxford English Dictionary* the second definition of *Pharisee*, which became normalised in the middle of the sixteenth century, defines it as 'a person of the spirit or character commonly attributed to the Pharisees in the New Testament; a legalist or formalist' (OED, 'pharisee').

[111] John, 8.7.

[112] John, 19.7.

[113] Gates, 521.

Following Angelo and Isabella's first conversation, Ronald Berman reminds us that 'we must never lose track of the word "will" used so often by both Angelo and Isabella, for it shows us that this finally determines the concept of "law"'. 'The guilt of Angelo', he concludes, 'is more complex than it appears: the "law" exists only as he interprets it'.[114] Angelo and Isabella both believe in and insist upon the freedom of the will: whereas Angelo, however, focuses on the freedom of the offender to act or not to act in accordance with the law, Isabella, by contrast, concentrates on the power that Angelo has to commute the sentence, should he so will it. Once Isabella leaves, Angelo is forced to reassess his understanding of voluntariness, as he finds himself full of desire for her. Confused by his feelings, he exclaims in his frustration

> O cunning enemy that, to catch a saint,
> With saints dost bait thy hook. Most dangerous
> Is that temptation that doth goad us on
> To sin in loving virtue. Never could the strumpet
> With all her double vigor, art and nature,
> Once stir my temper, but this virtuous maid
> Subdues me quite. Ever till now
> When men were fond, I smiled and wondered how.[115]

The desire Angelo feels for Isabella is an entirely new experience for him—one which he cannot control. Like the Pharisees, outwardly he appears just, but inwardly he is full of hypocrisy and iniquity.[116] Consequently, when Isabella comes to him the next day, he proposes an exchange: Claudio may live if she will give up her own body to the same uncleanness as the woman her brother stained. Isabella refuses, proclaiming that 'better it were a brother died at once / than that a sister, by redeeming him, / should die forever'.[117] Angelo then dismisses Isabella, telling her he expects her answer by the next day.

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[114] Ronald Berman, 'Shakespeare and the Law', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 18.2 (1967), 147.

[115] *Measure for Measure*, 2.2.180-87.

[116] Matthew, 23.28

[117] *Measure for Measure*, 2.4.106-08.

Unknowingly, Isabella confides her predicament to the Duke.[118] Disguised as a friar, he convinces her to consent to a ruse whereby Angelo's jilted lover, Mariana, will recover what she lost, and Isabella will save Claudio. Sarah Beckwith, among others, takes issue with the Duke's subterfuge, arguing that 'consent is conspicuously evacuated in *Measure for Measure*', because the disguise the Duke uses to win the trust of the various other characters 'changes the nature of the actions they have undertaken and violates their consent'.[119] As Beckwith points out, by hiding the truth from them the Duke essentially takes away the information they need to make an informed, and therefore voluntary, decision. St. Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle both point out that consent is required for an human action; but how, Beckwith asks, 'can Angelo have consented to sleep with Mariana when he thought he was sleeping with Isabella?'[120] 'Consent cannot', she continues, 'be retroactively granted without violating all norms of action. Consent is part and parcel of what makes an act a voluntary act. Human actions must proceed from a deliberate will, [as Aquinas has said]'.[121] Despite these concerns about how the trick is accomplished, the ruse works. Angelo, however, does not remain true to his word: he orders Claudio to be killed in the middle of the night. Having ensured that the provost delays Claudio's execution, the Duke prepares for his 'return', at which point he intends to deal with Angelo 'by cold gradation and well-balanced form'.[122]

Subsequently, the Duke arranges to re-enter Vienna with trumpets and meet Angelo in a public place, there to take back his power. Upon seeing him the Duke proclaims,

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[118] Sarah Beckwith rightly states that the Duke's tactic 'systematically converts the discourse of self-knowledge and transformation into the acquiring of information' (73). His action is a violation of sacramental confession for secular ends, and it creates a parallel universe within the play. On the one had we have the Duke, who manipulates the action of the other characters and is the only one who understands what is truly happening, and on the other hand we have everyone else, who is operating under the illusion that the Duke has created for them. Having lived within the Duke's fantasy world, how can the other characters, but especially Isabella, not feel lied to and betrayed. Yes, they all end up alive and married, but at what cost? Their understanding of society, religion, and themselves has been violated. It is a cruel trick.

[119] Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2011), p. 69.

[120] Ibid., p. 72.

[121] Ibid., p. 72.

[122] *Measure for Measure*, 4.3.100.

> We have made inquiry of you, and we hear
> Such goodness of your justice that our soul
> Cannot but yield you forth to public thanks.[123]

When Isabella comes forward to accuse Angelo of all his crimes, the Duke feigns outrage, and Angelo affects ignorance. This scene is fascinating in that only the Duke knows the whole truth of all the events that have come to pass. In his own person, however, he is in disguise, even more so than he was in the robes of a friar,. The Duke is thus able to test both the honesty and the loyalty of his subjects.

Angelo is given every opportunity to confess his wrongdoing: when Isabella first accuses him, when Marianna claims him as her husband, and when the 'friar' calls him out for his crimes. Nevertheless, nothing the women say, nor even their condemnation to prison, moves Angelo to confess the truth. It is only when he recognises that the Duke, disguised as a friar, has been in Vienna all along that he realises the game is up. Seeing no more point in continuing the charade, Angelo immediately admits his guilt and begs

> O my dread lord…
> …No longer session hold upon my shame,
> But let my trial be mine own confession.
> Immediate sentence then and sequent death
> Is all the grace I beg.[124]

Such an ending, although fitting, would hardly satisfy Shakespeare or his audience. Instead, we must endure a cascade of information and emotion in the final two hundred lines of the play. Like water propelled by gravity over the edge of a cliff, the action continues: Angelo and Marianna marry. Angelo is condemned to die. Marianna and Isabella sue for mercy. Angelo is let to live. Claudio is found to be alive. Claudio is made to marry Juliet. The Duke professes his love to Isabella. Everything seems to be tied up quite neatly. Nevertheless, Gates points out the obvious, 'despite the Duke's spectacular performance of forgiveness

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[123] Ibid., 5.1.5-7.

[124] Ibid., 5.1.363, 368-71.

and his effort to reestablish his city as an inclusive, virtuous society, the city's problems obviously remain'.[125]

Although the rate of progress is incredible at this point, it is notable that Isabella begs the Duke to spare Angelo even though she still believes Claudio is dead. As Charles Williams points out, 'what is of interest here is that, by chance or by choice, Shakespeare allows the two persons between whom the wrong existed to make to the Duke two opposed requests. He who has caused the wrong asks for his punishment; she who has suffered it asks for his pardon'.[126] When Marianna asks Isabella to kneel with her and beg for mercy, even the Duke thinks it is 'against all sense'.[127] Nevertheless, Isabella bends her knee and begs 'look, if it please you, on this man condemned / as if my brother liv'd'.[128] Although she does not realise the perfection of her request, the Duke knows that Claudio is alive, and thus, the suit carries more weight than Isabella realises. In pleading that Angelo be forgiven, Isabella arguably shows more kindness than Portia: she does not require that Angelo be made unhappy because he has caused suffering. Instead, her argument remains clearly consistent throughout the entirety of the play: human weakness must be considered and mercy rendered on account of it.

Nonetheless, as Beckwith argues, 'this play is based not on the energy of desire, or on the consent so carefully preserved in ecclesiastical law, but on the complexities and legalities of contracts, contracts broken or kept by ruse and subterfuge'.[129] Roberta Kwan cites both Andrew Barnaby and Joan Wry, who 'contend that Shakespeare's Duke appropriates divine authority and biblical rhetoric, including "privileging of mercy over

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[125] Gates, 525.

[126] Charles Williams, *He Came Down From Heaven and The Forgiveness of Sins* (London: Faber and Faber, 1950), p. 113.

[127] *Measure for Measure*, 5.1.430.

[128] Ibid., 5.1.441-42.

[129] Beckwith, p. 60.

justice" embodied in Christ's Sermon on the Mount, in order to question it and, by the final act, undermine its application within the civil state'.[130] Within the play there is a very real lack of consent: often the characters make decisions based on false information or under duress. According to Aristotle, a person is less culpable, if at all, for an involuntary act. For, although any given act can certainly be called right or wrong in and of itself, human beings do not exist in a vacuum. Did a person intend to perform an action? If the answer is 'no', our sense of their responsibility for that action radically changes.

Reflecting on *Measure for Measure*, Desmond Manderson postulates that 'the Duke's abstract disinterest, Angelo's rule fetishism, and Isabella's interpretive dogmatism, each capture a distinct critique of law and illustrate the failure of orthodox legal judgement to do justice to persons'.[131] One could argue that the Duke leaves the city precisely because he cannot be bothered to straighten things out himself and that he uses Angelo's 'fetishism' to accomplish an end that he later decides he does not in fact desire. One might also argue that Isabella speaks from a place of fantasy where principles are expounded as undeniably true without consideration for evidence or the opinions of others. This viewpoint, however, does not fully explain why Vienna remains static. Having decided against the harsh, unfeeling rule of Angelo, Shakespeare ends the play with marriage and forgiveness, and we are left with the feeling that, although formalism is unacceptable and ultimately unsuccessful, there is nothing that can satisfactorily take its place. In ignoring such things as circumstance and human nature, formalism, as a basis of law, both lacks completeness and is undermined by the lack of consent present in those who live under its rule. The Duke's summary of Angelo's duplicity might also, by this light, be applied to the law: 'O, what may man within

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[130] Roberta Kwan, '"Then Shalt Thou See Clearly": The Hypocrites, Law and Mercy in *Measure for Measure*', *English Studies*, 98.3 (2017), 224.

[131] Manderson, 15.

him hide, / though angel on the outward side!'[132] A formalist interpretation of the law would seem to provide justice; like Angelo, however, when put to the test it betrays its reason for existence. Angelo's insistence on a strict reading of the law bares some semblance to Portia's judgement against Shylock in *Merchant of Venice.* Nonetheless, the explicit biblical references in *Measure for Measure*, considered alongside the play's title, Angelo's prescriptiveness, and the mercy and forgiveness of the final act, draw the reader into a deeper consideration of the religious elements of the play: the contrast between Old and New Testament law, Judaic formalism and Christian equity.

Equity

Daniel J. Kornstein notes that a full 'two-thirds (that is more than twenty) of Shakespeare's plays have trial scenes, which vary from posing serious problems of justice and mercy to mere burlesque'.[133] When discussing formalism we looked at some of the more serious scenes, each of which left something to be desired in terms of justice. Autocracy, too, fell short of impartiality and fairness. In a formalist system rigidity hinders mercy; autocrats, however, allow pride and a desire for power to countermand forgiveness. In all instances, abuse of the law results in suffering and sorrow. With equity, however, we finally have a system that can, and does, consider circumstances, voluntariness, and contrition. Just as Aristotle's Lesbian ruler 'adapts itself to the shape of the stone and is not rigid', so, too, in a system based on principles of equity 'the decree is adapted to the facts'.[134] Equity allows justice to be tempered by mercy and creates a space for forgiveness to exist. One of the main principles of equity, then, is the acknowledgement that human beings can and do make

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[132] *Measure for Measure*, 3.2.264-65.

[133] Daniel J. Kornstein, *Kill All the Lawyers?: Shakespeare's Legal Appeal* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), p. xii.

[134] Aristotle, V.x. As the Lesbian ruler was made of lead, it could be easily moulded.

mistakes. In *Hamlet,* the Prince of Denmark asks Polonius, 'use every man / after his desert and who shall 'scape whipping?'.[135] Like the author of *Proverbs*, Hamlet recognises that no one could possibly escape punishment if their faults were weighed and measured, because even 'a just man shall fall seven times' a day.[136] On account of the universal imperfection of human nature, Hamlet argues that he should base his treatment of others not on the deserts of the individual, but rather on his 'own honour and dignity', because 'the less they / deserve the more merit is in [our] bounty'.[137] The sentiment Hamlet expresses here, like that of Portia in her speech on mercy and Isabella in her debate with Angelo, echoes the principles of equity expounded by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*— mercy benefits both the giver and the receiver. In dealing with others it is not just the action itself that must be considered, but also the circumstances surrounding said action and the motivations and intentions behind it. Our own examination of equity will commence with *Henry V*, and a closer consideration of his interaction with his would-be assassins, which was first touched upon in chapter one.

Although Henry V's condemnation of his would-be assassins might appear to abrogate the idea of equity, the manner in which he passes sentence demonstrates not only his willingness to show mercy, but also his prudence and understanding of human nature. From the very beginning of the scene Henry signals his knowledge of the conspiracy. Speaking to Scroop, Cambridge, and Grey, he says

> …We are well persuaded
> We carry not a heart with us from hence
> That grows not in a fair consent with ours,
> Nor leave not one behind that doth not wish
> Success and conquest to attend on us.[138]

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[135] *Hamlet*, 2.2.530-31.

[136] Proverbs, 24.16.Verses concerning the imperfection of mankind are scattered throughout the Bible. Further examples include: 'for there is no just man upon earth, that doth good, and sinneth not' (Ecclesiastes, 7.21);'for all have sinned, and do need the glory of God' (Romans, 3.23); 'if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (1 John, 1.8). There are, of course, many more.

[137] *Hamlet*, 2.2.532-33.

[138] *Henry V*, 2.2.20-24.

Such an utterance should have given the conspirators pause; nevertheless, only a few lines later they are encouraging Henry not to show mercy to a poor drunk who spoke against the king while under the influence of wine. Scroop's response is almost a reprimand: 'let him be punished, sovereign, lest example / breed, by his sufferance, more of such a kind.[139] When Henry indicates that he desires to show mercy, Cambridge responds, 'so may your Highness, and yet punish too', and Grey adds, 'Sir, you show great mercy if you give him life / after the taste of much correction'.[140] Ignorant of Henry's knowledge of their plot, the conspirators all advise the king to be stern and unyielding. Ironically, their argument hinges on the belief that crimes left unpunished beget more crimes of a similar nature: a formalist argument similar to Angelo's in *Measure for Measure*.[141] The king releases the drunk, nonetheless, and asks,

> If little faults proceeding on distemper
> Shall not be winked at, how shall we stretch our eye
> When capital crimes, chewed, swallowed, and digested,
> Appear before us?'.[142]

The question is directed at the lords, yet they still do not perceive that in arguing so forcefully against mercy they have sealed their own fate.

Thirty lines later a horrible realisation dawns on Scroop, Cambridge, and Grey: they have been found out. Their first instinct is to beg for mercy, to which King Henry rightly responds,

> The mercy that was quick in us but late
> By your own counsel is suppressed and killed.
> You must not dare, for shame, to talk of mercy.[143]

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[139] Ibid., 2.2.45-46.

[140] Ibid., 2.2.49, 50-51.

[141] See *Henry V*, 2.2.1-4: 'We must not make a scarecrow of the law, / setting it up to fear the birds of prey, / and let it keep one shape, till custom make it / their perch and not their terror'.

[142] *Henry V*, 2.2.54-57.

[143] Ibid., 2.2.79-81.

Henry gave his would-be murderers a chance to demonstrate the mercy that they would soon require, but, in their eagerness to appear concerned for the safety of the king, they demanded strict justice. It is only fitting, then that Henry repay them according to their own advice. Before he passes sentence on them, however, Henry laments the gravity of their crime, which has cut him deeply, so deeply, in fact, that he tells them

> … thy fall hath left a kind of blot
> To [mark the] full-fraught man and best endued
> With some suspicion. I will weep for thee,
> For this revolt of thine methinks is like
> Another fall of man.—Their faults are open.
> Arrest them to the answer of the law,
> And God acquit them of their practices.[144]

One would not have thought a warrior king capable of such a depth of feeling, yet Henry experiences their betrayal so acutely that he protests all men will now fall under suspicion. Their contrition is immediate. There are no more appeals for mercy, no cries to be spared the executioner's block, only willing acceptance and pleas for forgiveness. Scroop begins by exclaiming,

> I repent my fault more than my death,
> Which I beseech your Highness to forgive,
> Although my body pay the price of it.[145]

Cambridge follows this speech with a prayer of thanksgiving:

> God be thankèd for prevention,
> Which [I] in sufferance heartily will rejoice,
> Beseeching God and you to pardon me.[146]

And Grey concludes,

> Never did faithful subject more rejoice
> At the discovery of most dangerous treason
> Than I do at this hour joy o'er myself,
> Prevented from a damnèd enterprise.
> My fault, but not my body, pardon, sovereign.[147]

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[144] Ibid., 2.2.135-44.

[145] Ibid., 2.2.152-54.

[146] Ibid., 2.2.158-60.

[147] Ibid., 2.2.161-65.

The turn-around of these three would-be regicides is almost unbelievable. Facing death, they welcome it as a fitting punishment for their crime; they express gratitude that God has not allowed them to commit such a grievous sin. Meanwhile, Henry, for his part, proclaims,

> Touching our person seek we no revenge;
> But we our kingdom's safety must so tender,
> Whose ruin you have sought, that to her laws
> We do deliver you.[148]

Despite the pain their betrayal has caused him, he desires nothing more than that the law take its course—not that he might have vengeance, but that his kingdom might remain secure. And so the justice that Scroop, Cambridge, and Grey sought for the drunk is visited upon their own heads.

What is crucial here is that Henry only condemns the conspirators after they have condemned another for a lesser crime. He takes into account the circumstances and gives them an opportunity to repent; only after they have shown themselves to be callous in their judgments and undeserving of mercy does he condemn and sentence them. Furthermore, although he does not offer them his own forgiveness, he does not begrudge them divine absolution. Instead, he encourages them to offer up their deaths for the forgiveness of their sins. In this measured response, Henry perfectly applies the Senecan principle expressed in *De Ira,* that 'nothing is less proper in punishment than anger, since punishment serves more to improve if it is imposed with considered judgement'.[149] *Henry V* thus offers here an example of law calmly and justly interpreted for the good of the collective, and in so doing demonstrates that 'killing is sometimes the best form of compassion'.[150] Although mercy is shown in the absence of torture and the swiftness of the execution, forgiveness proper is reserved to God.

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[148] Ibid., 2.2.175-78.

[149] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, 'On Anger', in *Moral and Political Essays*, ed. by John Cooper and J.F. Procope (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), p. 32.

[150] Ibid., p. 34.

Whereas Henry V was a warrior, his son, Henry VI, could not exist farther from the battlefield. The first tetralogy of English history plays show us a monarch who never fails to consider the circumstances within which an act is committed. Never does he treat everyone as having equal knowledge and culpability; rather, he always considers the circumstances of the individual. Henry VI wants the law to be the governing principle of his kingdom, and he mostly acts as though it is. Eric Heinze goes so far as to argue that Henry's 'constant recourse to legal process, arbitration and anti-militarism [in] the first tetralogy goes beyond questions about how to establish a *functioning* legal order. It examines the possibility, and meaning, of a *just* one'.[151] Henry VI is the embodiment in this sense of the Senecan ideal that nothing is 'more becoming to a ruler than mercy'.[152] Unfortunately, however, even though, as Heinze notes, Henry VI himself 'embodies an ideal of the rule of law', he lives in a world of 'might-makes-right legitimacy', where simply acting according to the law places him at a disadvantage—nevermind being merciful and forgiving.[153]

In order to demonstrate how the law might be applied in an equitable way, it is useful to consider Henry's response to Jack Cade's rebellion in *2 Henry VI*. After Cade and his rebel army kill Sir Humphrey Stafford and his brother at the beginning of Act IV, the scene shifts to Henry reading over their list of grievances. Although many might argue that the rebel army should be destroyed, Henry declares,

> I'll send some holy bishop to entreat,
> For God forbid so many simple souls
> Should perish by the sword! And I myself,
> Rather than bloody war shall cut them short,
> Will parley with Jack Cade, their general.[154]

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[151] Heinze, 139.

[152] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, 'On Mercy', in *Moral and Political Essays*, ed. by John Cooper and J.F. Procope (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), p. 150.

[153] Heinze, 142.

[154] *2 Henry VI*, 4.4.8-12.

The key here is the phrase ‘simple souls’. Henry recognises that his people have been lead astray. He acknowledges, with Aristotle, that ‘acts proceeding from anger are rightly judged not to be done of malice aforethought; for it is not the man who acts in anger but he who enraged him that starts the mischief.[155] Jack Cade is the one responsible for whipping the people into a frenzy; they would not have rebelled against their king had they not been duped by a clever man. Responsibility for the rebellion lies, therefore, with Cade, because the people, as Henry says, ‘know not what they do!’[156]

Following the murder of Lord Saye, Henry sends Clifford and Buckingham to address the people on his behalf. Buckingham assures the people that their king does not hold them responsible for the rebellion and that he willingly grants ‘free pardon to them all / that will forsake [Cade] and go home in peace’.[157] In a true demonstration of their fickleness and gullibility, the common people switch their loyalty back to the king, then back to Cade, then finally to the king again, all in the space of sixty lines. When Buckingham presents the people to Henry with halters around their necks, signifying their repentance, his joy is palpable:

> Then, heaven, set ope thy everlasting gates
> To entertain my vows of thanks and praise!
> Soldiers, this day have you redeemed your lives
> And showed how well you love your prince and country.
> Continue still in this so good a mind,
> And Henry, though he be infortunate,
> Assure yourselves, will never be unkind.
> And so with thanks and pardon to you all,
> I do dismiss you to your several countries.[158]

Henry has followed Seneca’s advice. He has considered motive: ‘[were they] forced or misled, [were they] acting out of hatred or for reward, [were they] indulging [themselves] or assisting another?’[159] In the end he chooses to forgive his people for their rebellion because

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[155] Aristotle, V.iii.

[156] *2 Henry VI*, 4.4.37.

[157] Ibid., 4.8.9-10.

[158] Ibid., 4.9.13-21.

[159] Seneca, *On Anger*, p. 88.

they acted in ignorance. Cade, however, does not enjoy such pardon, because he proceeded knowingly and with malicious intent. The difference, then, is in knowledge versus ignorance, malice versus passion. Henry's ability to determine when mercy and forgiveness are justified and when strict justice must be enforced makes him the most just of all Shakespeare's kings. As Heinze observes, 'Henry is not the successful monarch his father was; but effective employment of power and just adherence to law are not the same thing; if Henry fails at the former task, he embodies the latter more consistently than any other ruler in Shakespeare'.[160] In his condemnation of Cade and forgiveness of the common people for the same crime, Henry VI models the difference between formalism and equity.

In the section on formalism we discussed how Prince John (mis)used language in order to entrap the rebel leaders; when it comes to the soldiers under their command, however, the play is ambiguous. John does order his men to 'pursue the scattered stray', i.e. the soldiers that the rebel leaders had previously dispersed, but addressing Westmoreland not long after he says, 'the heat is past; follow no further now. / Call in the powers'.[161] His wish to end the pursuit is reiterated just a few lines later when he asks whether or not the pursuit has ended, to which Westmoreland replies, 'retreat is made and execution stayed'.[162] From these exchanges one could draw two conclusions: either Prince John had his men pursue and slay the retreating rebel soldiers, at least for a time; or, he gave the order, but then immediately thought better of it and sent Westmoreland to stop the massacre. Should one choose to go with the second interpretation, it is worth noting that John, like Henry VI, does not condemn the common people to suffer the same fate as their leaders. Consequently, like Henry, John must recognise that the there is a difference in knowledge, and therefore a difference in accountability. Either that, or he is simply practicing Machiavelli's principle

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[160] Heinze, 142.

[161] *2 Henry IV*, 4.2.120; 4.2.24-25.

[162] Ibid., 4.3.71.

that 'it cannot be called virtue to kill one's fellow-citizens',[163] as he has decided that mercy is better statesmanship.

If Henry V exhibits justice, and Henry VI and (possibly) Prince John demonstrate equity and forgiveness, then the Prince in *Romeo and Juliet* shows justice, equity, and mercy. At the beginning of the play the Prince warns the Capulets and Montagues to cease their quarrel. As might be expected, however, his command falls on deaf ears, and by Act III Mercutio has been slain by Tybalt and Tybalt by Romeo. Rather than allowing anger to take hold of him, the Prince seeks to understand the circumstances of the altercation before passing judgment. Hence, he asks, 'where are the vile beginners of this fray?'.[164] Immediately Benvolio and Lady Capulet start arguing about who is to blame, and Lady Capulet ends by saying, 'I beg for justice, which thou, prince, must give; / Romeo slew Tybalt, Romeo must not live'.[165] Lady Capulet is arguing for an 'eye for eye' reading of the law, however, the Prince still waits to pronounce sentence, instead asking another question: 'Romeo slew him; he slew Mercutio. / Who now the price of his dear blood doth owe?'.[166] Lord Montague is ready with a response: 'Not Romeo, prince, he was Mercutio's friend; / his fault concludes but what the law should end, / the life of Tybalt'.[167] Romeo was not a representative of the law, however, and therefore had no right to kill Tybalt. The Prince does, nonetheless, take Tybalt's crime into account when sentencing Romeo to banishment, as well as fining the two houses for the death of his kinsman. As he does so, he warns them,

> I will be deaf to pleading and excuses.
> Nor tears nor prayers shall purchase out abuses.
> Therefore use none…
> Mercy but murders, pardoning those that kill.[168]

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[163] Machiavelli, Niccolò, *The Prince*, ed. by Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988). p. 31.

[164] *Romeo and Juliet*, 3.1.142.

[165] Ibid., 3.1.181-82.

[166] Ibid., 3.1.183-84.

[167] Ibid., 3.1.185-87.

[168] Ibid., 3.1.193-95, 198.

Having shown mercy at the beginning of the play and given the families a chance to cease their quarrel, the Prince must now act in the interests of the state. He cannot allow more people to die on account of a petty family grudge. Nevertheless, he does rightly temper his righteous indignation when it comes to Romeo, and in so doing demonstrates that strict justice must not prevail when principles of equity call for mercy.

At the end of the play, after Romeo and Juliet's secrets have caused multiple new deaths, the Prince likewise chooses to consider what has happened before determining how to proceed. He even warns Lord Montague,

> Seal up the mouth of outrage for awhile,
> Till we can clear these ambiguities
> And know their spring, their head, their true descent.[169]

Throughout the play the Prince consistently proceeds with caution before pronouncing judgment: he questions; he considers; and only then does he act. Once he has ascertained the facts of the case from Friar Lawrence and the various servants, he turns accusingly to the parents of the dead lovers and asks

> Where be these enemies?—Capulet, Montague,
> See what a scourge is laid upon your hate,
> That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love,
> And I, for winking at your discords too,
> Have lost a brace of kinsmen. All are punished.[170]

This passage is interesting because the Prince blames, not only the families, but also himself for the tragic events that have unfolded. He acknowledges that in acting with too much leniency he has failed in his duty to the state and contributed to the tragedy. Perhaps, if he had dealt more firmly with the Capulets and Montagues from the beginning, their children might still be alive, as might be Mercutio, Tybalt, and Paris. The extent of the tragedy gives him pause, and he decides to think carefully before deciding what to do, although he does

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[169] Ibid., 5.2.216-18.

[170] Ibid., 5.3.291-95.

say that 'some shall be pardoned, and some punishèd'.[171] It is within this deliberation, this consideration of all facts and circumstances, that equity lies. The Prince's right to enforce the law is accepted, and as a result he is able to show mercy.

Concluding Remarks

Frequently involved in litigation himself, Shakespeare was aware of the distinction between the common law courts and the courts of equity that existed in his own day. At times he himself experienced rulings that did not go in his favour. Many lawyers attended plays, and various inns commissioned them, so his knowledge of the English legal system was both real and necessary. Throughout his canon there are many scenes where the law is either questioned or ignored entirely. This chapter sought to explore Shakespeare's treatment of the law, and, in particular, his understanding of the concept of equity and how personal intention and circumstance can or should affect the rulings of the court.

In *Titus Andronicus* and the first tetralogy Shakespeare gives numerous examples of how autocracy usurps the law in order to exert its own right. Saturninus, Titus, Jack Cade, and Richard Plantagenet each acknowledge that law exists, yet each also decide that if the law does not agree with his own personal desire then he will accomplish his ends by force. Power, not justice, dictates the outcome of each man's quarrel. In *Timon of Athens*, *2 Henry IV*, *Merchant of Venice*, and *Measure for Measure* the opposite is true. The Athenian senators, John of Lancaster, Portia, and Angelo, ultimately refuse to temper justice with mercy, preferring instead to rely upon a strict interpretation of the law. In a formalist world it is the letter of the law, not the spirit, that is important.

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[171] Ibid., 5.3.308.

As Seneca observes, however, 'to pardon everyone is as much a cruelty as to pardon no one'.[172] And so, in *Henry V*, *2 Henry VI*, and *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare considers equity. Since equity concentrates on fairness, considering factors such as intentions and circumstance, the ability of a judge or ruler to apply principles of equity depends on both his interpretation of events and the stability of the government. In *Merchant of Venice*, for instance, the playwright clearly states that the reason the Duke cannot countermand the law is because it would undermine the authority of the state to a dangerous degree. In *Henry V*, the king's power is strong enough, however, that he can both forgive a drunk and condemn three powerful lords in the same scene. Equity, then, like the situations it governs, is simple neither in determination nor in application. Thus, although it might be laudable in principle, it is more difficult to accomplish in fact, at least in the often-turbulent worlds of Shakespeare's plays.

Even given such complexities, however, equity provides a mean between autocracy and formalism, and it is within this mean that mercy, clemency, pardon, and forgiveness can exist. As Aristotle maintains, true justice can only be found when all the circumstances surrounding an act are considered alongside the act itself. When this consideration takes place, there is no limit to the number of mitigating factors that might lessen the culpability, if not the gravity, of a particular crime. The man who, like Henry VI, can see past his own anger and inclination to self-preservation is the man who can be relied upon to issue judgements that are truly just; only such a man is capable of knowing when to forgive and when to punish to the full extent of the law.

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[172] Seneca, *On Mercy*, p. 131.

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CALVIN'S REFORMATION AND SELF-FORGIVENESS IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

> To be, or not to be, that is the question.[1]

At the time of the Reformation, many points of theology were still being debated, even within the Catholic Church.[2] However, over the course of Shakespeare's lifetime new soteriological ideas were imported from the Continent, and these gradually came to influence English attitudes toward self-forgiveness. Although the initial break from the Roman Catholic church occurred during the reign of Henry VIII, the finer points of Reformed theology did not really begin to take hold, even at court, until the ascension of the boy king, Edward VI, in 1547. It was at this delicate juncture, as Philip Benedict proposes, that English eucharistic and predestination theology became more clearly affiliated with Reformed theology and differentiated itself from both Catholic and Lutheran orthodoxy.[3]

Although many Protestant theologians helped shape the English Reformation, John Calvin was far and away the most influential. Diarmaid MacCulloch points out that 'by 1600 there had been no fewer than 91 editions of Calvin's writings published in English'.[4] By the end of the sixteenth century, Benedict argues, the theological orientation of the English church was predominantly Calvinist.[5] Calvin's reimagining of the theology of salvation is, perhaps, the most monumental change introduced during the English Reformation. In reinterpreting the salvation narrative, Reformed theology influenced not only the way people viewed their relationship with God, but also how they interacted with

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[1] *Hamlet*, 3.1.56, in *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015). All subsequent quotations from Shakespeare's plays are taken from this same edition.

[2] Jaroslav Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 1984).

[3] Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002), p. 239.

[4] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Later Reformation in England, 1547-1603* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), p. 61.

[5] Benedict, p. 231.

one another. This shift had especially significant consequences when it came to self-forgiveness and the moral certainty that one might possibly entertain of eventually achieving salvation.

Calvin's distinctive doctrine of 'double predestination'—the teaching that God not only predestined the saved, but also the damned—changed the way in which English Protestants viewed salvation: aside from their initial conversion, individuals no longer saw themselves as contributing to the work of their own salvation. David C. Steinmetz observes that, 'like Aquinas, Calvin was a strongly Augustinian theologian who could not abide Pelagian tendencies in theology'; for Calvin, salvation was a result of God's grace, not the strength of a person's will to do or be good.[6] The main difference in their soteriology, rather, as Charles Raith explains, is that 'Aquinas depicts Christ's work as occurring *in* and *through* the sinner, while Calvin depicts Christ's work as occurring *for* and *to* the sinner'.[7] The difference, in other words, is between God acting *with* the individual or *in spite of* the sinner in order to bring about his salvation. Raith for his own part sees this latter view, Calvin's view, as 'unable to incorporate fully the human person and its manifold dynamics into God's work for salvation'.[8] In essence, then, Calvin's doctrine of predestination and justification changed the way in which English Protestants viewed salvation.

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[6] David C. Steinmetz, 'Calvin as Biblical Interpreter Among the Ancient Philosophers', *Interpretation*, 63.2 (2009), 153. With regards to the current conversation, both Aquinas and Calvin cite Augustine as an authority for their soteriology, in particular when dealing with predestination and justification. One reason for this similarity might be that Augustine's theology is sufficiently vague as to lend itself to multiple interpretations. For example, in *On the Predestination of the Saints*, Augustine says, 'although men do good things which pertain to God's worship, He Himself makes them to do what He has commanded; it is not they that cause Him to do what He has promised' (I.19). This statement is one with which both Calvin and Aquinas might agree (See *Institutes*, II.22.3 and *Summa*, I. Q23. A5). Whereas Calvin would focus on 'He Himself makes them to do what He has commanded,' Aquinas would focus on 'it is not they that cause Him to do what He has promised;' Calvin would focus on the omnipotence of God to the detriment of free will, whereas Aquinas would focus on the order of causality in order to reconcile divine power and human freedom. This difference of focus (the *for* and *to* versus *in* and *through* that Raith speaks of) is what leads our two theologians to use Augustine as support for vastly different systems of soteriology.

[7] Charles Raith II, *Aquinas and Calvin on Romans: God's Justification and Our Participation* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), p. 54.

[8] Ibid., p. 85.

Since Augustine wrote against the Pelegian heresy in the fifth century, the Church had been debating predestination and its relationship to free will and justification.[9] Does God predetermine who will be saved and who will be damned? If so, how does this determination affect man's free will? Can man merit salvation? In any discussion of predestination the dilemma usually centres on how to reconcile the free will of the individual with the omnipotence of God. Theologians consistently struggled to facilitate this reconciliation—any teaching that seemed to limit God, along with any that denied the free will of the individual, were condemned by various Church councils. In the end, pushed to make a declaration by the Reformation, the Catholic Church mainly adopted the teaching of Aquinas, which acknowledged the mysterious nature of predestination, while still maintaining that one can use reason to see that it is not unreasonable that an omnipotent God can choose whom He wants to save, and then bring about this salvation, necessarily, without compromising the integrity of the free will of the individual.[10]

In the first part of his *Summa Theologica,* Aquinas argues that 'it is fitting that God should predestine men,' because His providence guides all things to their end, which, in the case of man, is eternal life.[11] Aquinas is careful to explain, however, that 'predestination is in the one who predestines, not in the predestined'.[12] This explanation allows for man to retain freedom of will, for, even though predestination is active on the part of God, it is passive

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[9] During the fifth century Augustine wrote extensively to combat the Pelagian heresy, which denied the necessity of grace, and held that 'the moral strength of man's will, when steeled by asceticism, was sufficient in itself to desire and to attain the loftiest ideal of virtue' (Pohle, *Pelagius*). As the heresy he was combating erred in giving the power of salvation to man, Augustine's works stressed the necessity of God's grace for salvation—agreeing with the Council of Carthage (418) that without God's grace it is impossible for man to perform good works.

[10] The writings of Thomas Aquinas, who died in 1274, played a defining role in the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which was convened to provide a response to the Protestant Reformation. In his encyclical Aeterni Patri, Leo XIII reminds Catholics of Aquinas' unique place: 'the chief and special glory of Thomas, one which he has shared with none of the Catholic Doctors, is that the Fathers of Trent made it part of the order of conclave to lay upon the altar, together with sacred Scripture and the decrees of the supreme Pontiffs, the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas, whence to seek counsel, reason, and inspiration' (22). He was named a doctor of the Roman Catholic Church in 1567.

[11] Aquinas, I.23.1. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* trans Fathers of the English Dominican Provence, gen. ed. Kevin Knight, last accessed 1 June 2020 <www.newadvent.com>.

[12] Aquinas, I.23.1.

with regards to man. In other words, God, according to Aquinas, does not violate man's will in order to save him. Thus, he argues, although 'predestination most certainly and infallibly takes effect', it nevertheless 'does not impose any necessity': 'free will is not destroyed'.[13] The coexistence here of a predestined outcome with complete freedom on the part of the individual is where the mystery lies. Aquinas maintains that both are true. Furthermore, he argues, even though the divine ordination to predestine cannot be altered by the prayers or works of an individual, the effects of predestination can be furthered by such actions.[14] 'The salvation of a person is predestined by God in such a way', he maintains, 'that whatever helps that person towards salvation falls under the order of predestination'.[15] Thus, one's own prayers and works, as well as the works and prayers of others said or done on one's behalf, would be included. Aquinas concludes this question by saying that 'the predestined must strive after good works and prayer; because through these means predestination is most certainly fulfilled'.[16]

Some passages of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* seem to resemble Aquinas' conclusions:

> Although it is now sufficiently plain that God by his secret counsel chooses whom he will while he rejects others, his gratuitous election has only been partially explained until we come to the case of single individuals, to whom God not only offers salvation, but so assigns it, that the certainty of the result remains not dubious or suspended.[17]

Although Aquinas would agree with Calvin that the decrees of the divine will must necessarily come about, he and Calvin disagree as to *how* they come about. Aquinas, as has been shown, allows for cooperation between the divine and human wills to bring about salvation. Calvin, on the other hand, denies that man has any real choice. He argues instead

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[13] Ibid., I.23.6.

[14] Ibid., I.23.8.

[15] Ibid., I.23.8.

[16] Ibid., I.23.8.

[17] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* trans. by Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), III.21.7.

that although the actions an individual performs might move him ever closer to salvation or damnation, since it is God who inevitably decrees these actions, the individual in question cannot do anything to help himself either way. This lack of free will is most readily apparent when Calvin discusses reprobation. He maintains, for example, that

> since the arrangement of all things is in the hand of God, since to him belongs the disposal of life and death, he arranges all things by his sovereign counsel, in such a way that individuals are born, who are doomed from the womb to certain death, and are to glorify him by their destruction.[18]

If men are 'doomed from the womb to certain death', what becomes of free will? Do a man's choices have no effect on his eternal destiny?

When Aquinas admits that 'reprobation includes the will to permit a person to fall into sin, and to impose the punishment of damnation on account of that sin', he is careful to designate the sin, not God, as the cause of damnation.[19] Calvin makes a similar distinction when he says, 'man therefore falls, divine providence so ordaining, but he falls by his own fault'.[20] Calvin renders what might otherwise be a meaningful distinction moot, however, by insisting elsewhere, repeatedly and emphatically, on God's absolute control over 'all events', including, presumably, human sin:

> If God merely foresaw human events, and did not also arrange and dispose of them at his pleasure, there might be room for agitating the question, how far his foreknowledge amounts to necessity; but since he foresees the things which are to happen, simply because he has decreed that they are so to happen, it is vain to debate about prescience, while it is clear that all events take place by his sovereign appointment.[21]

Calvin solves the problem of necessity by refusing to debate it, maintaining that 'ignorance of things which we are not able, or which it is not lawful to know, is learning, while the desire to know them is a species of madness'.[22] This refusal to indulge argument, coupled with his consistent focus on God's active role in predestination, leads to the conclusion that

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[18] Calvin, III.23.6.

[19] Aquinas, I.23.3.

[20] Calvin, III.23.8.

[21] Ibid., III.23.6.

[22] Ibid., III.23.8.

human beings have no part to play in their own salvation: we are either saved or damned, and there is nothing we can do about that assignation either way.[23]

Calvin and Aquinas' different approaches to the question of predestination had knock-on effects for their teachings on justification, which describes the transformation of the sinner to a state of righteousness. In the *Summa*, Aquinas states that justification is the remission of sins, and that this remission is only made possible by an infusion of grace.[24] Nevertheless, he maintains, 'no one comes to the Father by justifying grace without a movement of the free-will'; the will remains free even though God 'so infuses the gift of justifying grace that at the same time He moves the free-will to accept the gift of grace'.[25] Having previously established that man cannot merit everlasting life without grace, Aquinas makes it clear that justification is impossible without the direct involvement of God.[26] He is equally careful, however, to emphasise that man participates in the act of justification through his acceptance of justifying grace.[27]

In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin's definition of justification at first seems to resemble Aquinas': justification 'consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ'.[28] However, whereas Aquinas emphasises man's

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[23] In *After Merit: John Calvin's Theology of Works and Rewards,* Charles Raith II argues that Calvin's soteriology revolves around his desire to counter the merit-based soteriological system of his day (32). The concept of merit was closely connected to Catholic dogmas concerning purgatory, the communion of saints, and sacramental confession, and so, by extension, to the necessity and desire for forgiveness of sins, as it assumed that man was an active participant in his own salvation. In a Calvinist system of salvation man has no real control over his own destiny. This truth could lead either to a profound sense of peace, as one is, thus, entirely in the hands of God, or to a sense of hopelessness and dread, as one can never be certain that his sins are forgiven or that he is saved (as opposed to the 'moral certainty' that one could have in Catholicism). Such a mood of despair can be discerned, for example, in John Donne's *Holy Sonnets,* which, John Stachniewski argues, 'contribute eloquently to the expression of a vision of the helplessness of man and the uselessness of human effort before vastly powerful, indiscriminate, and often merciless forces which, to add to their terror, are invested with a personality and with eternal immutability' (702). In the face of such cosmic inevitability, given their sense of their own sinfulness, men might easily question whether or not forgiveness is possible.

[24] Aquinas, I.II.113.1, I.II.113.2.

[25] Ibid., I.II.113.3.

[26] 'Hence man, by his natural, endowments, cannot produce meritorious, works proportionate to everlasting life; and for this a higher force is needed, viz. the force of grace. And thus without grace man cannot merit everlasting life…' (I-II. Q109. A5).

[27] It is worth noting, however, that according to Aquinas man cannot accept a grace without the grace to accept it. Thus, even the act of free will is moved by the grace of God (I-II. Q112. A2).

[28] Calvin, III.11.2.

cooperation with grace, Calvin stresses the imputation of righteousness, Christ's righteousness, through faith.[29] For Calvin, Christ is the 'material cause' of justification, whereas faith is the instrument for receiving it.[30] Throughout his discussion of justification, Calvin almost entirely excludes any reference to free will, in keeping with his claim earlier in the treatise that free will all but disappeared after the fall of Adam.[31] As Raith explains, for Calvin, justification 'affirms justification by faith and forgiveness of sins *rather than* being transformed into a just person', whereas for Aquinas, 'one is justified by faith and by forgiveness of sins *and therefore* possesses the quality of justness'.[32]

Due to the many similarities between their theologies, it is not always initially apparent where or how Aquinas and Calvin differ.[33] Both theologians focus on the intimacy they believe should exist between God and His people, and for both, as Raith explains,

> that intimacy is rooted in the divine initiative—in God's grace—and not in human striving. Nothing human beings bring to the table merits God's turning to the sinner. Rather than God first seeing a human being as good and loving that human being, God first loves the unworthy sinner and in doing so makes the sinner good.[34]

Although both theologians begin from what seems to be the same point, God's love for the sinner, as they expound upon the form and direction of this love, their theologies diverge, entailing practical consequences.

Whereas there is a place in Thomistic theology for the intercession of Mary and the saints, purgatory, and sacramental confession, Calvin's theology of predestination and

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[29] Ibid., III.11.3.

[30] Ibid., III.11.7.

[31] II.2.7. and II.2.8. As Jaroslav Pelikan explains, 'Augustine became the patron for the teaching of the Reformation that free will existed in name only, not in reality' (141).

[32] Raith, p. 53.

[33] In addition to their mutual use of Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin both rely on similar passages from Scripture to reinforce their soteriological arguments: in particular, see Romans, 3.24, 4.5, 8.28-30, 9.8-13; 2 Corinthians, 3.5, 5.18-21; Ephesians, 1.1-11, 2.8-14.

[34] Raith, p. 206.

justification makes these beliefs and practices superfluous.[35] If God is personally directing man's actions and imputing the righteousness of Christ to those predestined to eternal life, then there is no need for the intercession of Mary and the saints because God can accomplish His will without them;[36] nor is there a need for purgatory or sacramental confession because the merits of Christ that are imputed to the sinner are more than enough to sanctify him without these means. Calvin's Reformed theology not only presented Protestants with a new way of viewing their relationship with God but also required them to think differently about the communion of saints: that is, their relationship to other Christians, both living and dead. Calvinist revisions to longstanding doctrine removed several mediating influences from the religious life of Englishmen and left them, in effect, alone in their hopes for salvation.

During the first few decades of the sixteenth century, English Catholics were still steeped in the rich religious heritage of the late medieval period. Although some argue that the populace was exasperated with the Church and clerical abuses, Eamon Duffy, Christopher Harper-Bill, Ronald Hutton, Christopher Marsh, and J.J. Scarisbrick, among others, have provided considerable evidence that the religious atmosphere on the eve of the Reformation was in fact one of relative fervour and contentment. Measurable signs include the huge part local parishes played in the lives of their parishioners; the large bequests left to

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[35] For Aquinas' examination on the intercession of the saint, see *ST* Suppl. Q72. A2.: 'the saints who are in heaven are more acceptable to God than those who are on the way…much more, therefore, should we ask the saints who are in heaven to help us by their prayers to God'. For his examination of purgatory, see *ST* Suppl. Appendix II. A1: where Aquinas concludes

> it is sufficiently clear that there is a Purgatory after this life. For if the debt of punishment is not paid in full after the stain of sin has been washed away by contrition, nor again are venial sins always removed when mortal sins are remitted, and if justice demands that sin be set in order by due punishment, it follows that one who after contrition for his fault and after being absolved, dies before making due satisfaction, is punished after this life. Wherefore those who deny Purgatory speak against the justice of God: for which reason such a statement is erroneous and contrary to faith.

For Aquinas on sacramental confession, see *ST* III. Q84. A1, where Aquinas establishes that Penance is a sacrament: 'as Baptism is conferred that we may be cleansed from sin, so also is Penance…but Baptism is a sacrament as stated above (Question 66, Article 1). Therefore for the same reason Penance is also a sacrament'.

[36] Whereas Aquinas would argue that it is not that God cannot save a soul without intercessory prayers, it is that He chooses to use this method, 'Calvin dismissed the distinction between divine action and divine permission as 'frivolous' and demanded to know what the real difference between the two could be when applied to God' (Pelikan, 224).

churches and monasteries in wills; the considerable number of enrolments in confraternities and guilds; the number of masses requested for the dead; and the rise of chantries.

In pre-Reformation England, the local church held a place of particular importance: not only as a place of worship, but also as a social space and a political centre. It was, as Scarisbrick observes, 'the object of local pride and a symbol of the community's integrity, continuity and wealth'.[37] Perhaps more importantly, it was the space in which theological doctrines were visibly and publicly proclaimed and enacted. At its centre was the altar, on which was celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the central ritual of the Catholic Church. The Mass was believed to be a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, and as such it was, in the words of C. W. Dugmore, 'a work satisfactory for the remission of penalties due for mortal or venial sins of both the living and the dead'.[38] The Mass culminated in the consecration of the host, which then, according to believers, became the body and blood of Jesus.[39] The consecrated Host, Duffy reminds us, 'was far more than the object of individual devotion, a means of forgiveness and sanctification: it was a source of human community'.[40] The entirety of Catholic belief, from the theology of predestination and justification mentioned above, to the cult of Mary and the saints, belief in purgatory, and sacramental confession, all revolved around the central mystery of the consecration. Consequently, Margaret Aston argues, 'for reformers fighting the seemingly endless battle against idolatry, the greatest idol of all was the abused element of the host'.[41] Yet the

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[37] J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 44-45.

[38] C.W. Dugmore, *The Mass and the English Reformers* (London: Macmillan, 1958), p. 159-60.

[39] According to Christopher Harper-Bill, during the period immediately preceding the Reformation 'faith and observance became increasingly Christocentric' (65). This shift was due to the influence of the spirituality espoused by the twelfth-century monasteries and cathedral schools, 'which emphasised the friendship of the human Jesus rather than the wrath of the Old Testament patriarchal God'. In consequence, 'concentration on the love of God manifest in Christ's Passion ensured that, in popular consciousness as much as among professional theologians, the sacrifice of the Mass would displace other, peripheral religious practices. This growing awareness of the significance of the Eucharist has been taken as a sign of the spiritual maturity of western Christianity' (65).

[40] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, C.1400-c.1580* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2005), p. 93.

[41] Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts Vol.1: Laws against Images* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p. 7-8.

Eucharist was in the end the last 'idol' to be destroyed. For, as Dugmore notes, 'the English Church, including the Reformed Catholics, remained 'orthodox' with regard to the doctrine of the sacrament almost to the eve of King Edward's accession'.[42]

Because the Mass was so central to Catholic belief, all other doctrines intertwined with it. Sacramental confession, for example, understood as cleansing the penitent from sins committed after Baptism and restoring him to the grace of God, was usually performed by the laity only once a year, during Lent, before they approached the altar for their yearly reception of the Eucharist. Confession, Christopher W. Marsh observes, like the Eucharist, was 'of crucial significance in the transmission of grace from God to humans'.[43] Furthermore, as Thomas Tentler points out, it was in this institution that 'theology, law, and life converge'; confession was where 'theories of grace and rules for conduct [worked] together to discipline and console'.[44] When, Tentler continues, the reformers abolished confession, they not only did away with a sacrament but also destroyed an institution that had provided the vital function of 'discipline or social control': for confession required both an admission of guilt and the performance of a penance as dictated by God through the priest.[45] Later in the century, Marsh contends, numerous Protestant spokesmen would regret its demise.[46]

Also closely connected to the Mass was the doctrine of purgatory, which Christopher Harper-Bill defines as the belief that 'there lay between Heaven and Hell an intermediate place, by passing through which the souls of the dead might cleanse themselves of the guilt attached to the sins committed during their lifetime by submitting to a graduated scale of

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[42] Dugmore, p.109.

[43] Christopher W. Marsh, *Popular Religion in Sixteenth-Century England: Holding Their Peace* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 79.

[44] Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977), p. xxi.

[45] Ibid., p. xiii,

[46] Marsh, p. 81.

divine punishments'.[47] Catholics believed that the Mass had the power to commute some or all of the temporal punishment due on account of their sins. Pre-Reformation English Catholic preoccupation with purgatory is evident, as Scarisbrick has shown, in the wills of the time and in the rise of almost innumerable confraternities and guilds whose purpose was to pray for the souls of the dead.[48]

Protestants sought to destroy familiar Catholic iconography, as well, thereby discouraging participation in the cult of Mary and the saints, which both Harper-Bill and Scarisbrick have shown was central to pre-Reformation devotion. As Harper-Bill observes, the people's 'zest for venerating saints and relics is indisputable'.[49] This passion for veneration was especially true of the cult of the Virgin Mary, who had countless shrines, churches, guilds, chantries, and pilgrimage centres dedicated to her. Nevertheless, Benedict informs us, as early as 1538 injunctions ordered the removal of images 'to which offerings and pilgrimages had been made'.[50] The Reformers, Aston argues, rightly ascertained the importance of images and objects to the ceremonies and doctrines that they hoped to replace. In attacking the physical manifestations of Catholic theology, iconoclasts 'affected the whole fabric of worship and the ways in which people believed'.[51] As Aston explains,

> The presence or absence of imagery profoundly affected the way in which people worshipped and were taught to believe. It also affected the ways in which they thought and created. The destruction of objects dear to the worshippers and communities that possessed them made a deep and lasting impact both upon witnesses who saw these events and upon those who were born in a period increasing in consciousness of loss.[52]

English Protestants wanted more than to simply change the outward appearance of religion; more profoundly, they sought to restructure the English population's understanding of

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[47] Christopher Harper-Bill, *The Pre-Reformation Church in England 1400-1530*, rev. ed. (London: Longman, 1996), p. 67.

[48] Scarisbrick, p. 55.

[49] Scarisbrick, p. 54.

[50] Benedict, p. 234.

[51] Aston, p. 16.

[52] Aston, p. 2.

religion. Eliminating the various 'idols' of Catholicism, beginning with images of Mary and the saints and culminating in the abolition of the Mass, was a means to this end. For, as Scarisbrick notes, 'the theology on which the religious guild rested and which was its *raison d'être* (belief in Purgatory, the sacrificial efficacy of the mass, veneration of the saints) was the very antithesis of Protestantism'. [53]

Once the outward manifestations of Catholic doctrine had been destroyed, Calvinist soteriological ideas became more easily and widely dispersed. What was previously the Sacrament of the Eucharist, with its central doctrine of transubstantiation, became a commemorative meal. As Dugmore observes, the changes made in 1552 'concentrated upon removing anything remaining which could be interpreted as teaching transubstantiation'.[54] 'It was the intention of Cramer and his fellow-revisers', he argues, 'to substitute for the late medieval notion of placatory sacrifice…the older intention of thanksgiving and *anamnesis*'.[55] This change from the Eucharist as the sacrament containing the real presence of Christ in the host, to the Eucharist as a commemoration of the Last Supper created a domino effect. Before long sacramental confession was dispensed with, as was praying for the intercession of Mary and the saints. Purgatory became conceptually unnecessary, given a Calvinist system of belief that rested on a foundation of predestination. Doctrine was

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[53] Scarisbrick, p. 39. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that people welcomed the destruction of their images with open arms. As Eamon Duffy, points out 'the men and women of Tudor England were, by and large, pragmatists. Grumbling, they sold off as much of their Catholic past as they could not hide or keep, and called in the carpenters to set boards on trestles and fix the forms round the communion tables. Used to obedience, many of them accepted the changes, however unwelcome, as unavoidable' (502). Ronald Hutton, discussing the local impact of the Tudor Reformation, agrees: 'the evidence of the churchwardens' accounts bears out the assertions of Dr. Haigh and Professor Scarisbrick, that the great majority of the English and Welsh peoples did not want the Reformations of Henry, Edward and Elizabeth. Catholic practices retained their vitality in the parishes until the moment they were proscribed, and there were few anticipations of official instructions. On the contrary, accounts suggest that Tudor parishioners were reluctant to implement any religious changes. If it be asked then why they got them, the answer is that they were forced to conform. The machinery of coercion and supervision deployed by the government was so effective that for most parishes passive resistance was simply not an option' (Ronald Hutton, 'The Local Impact of the Tudor Reformations', in *The Impact of the English Reformation, 1500-1640*, ed. by Peter Marshall [London: Arnold, 1997], 160-61).

[54] Dugmore, p. 160.

[55] Ibid., p. 133.

simplified, and the new churches and services reflected the gutting of what had been a highly ritualised religion with an intricate array of dogmas.

These sweeping changes were not confined to the abstract realm of theological doctrine. In Catholic England, the parish played a large part in the functioning of society. As Marsh explains,

> Before and after the Reformation, the local church was a vital forum for the propagation and absorption of moral lessons. Through sermons, rituals and liturgical lessons, people learnt and re-learnt the rule of 'upright dealing', and asked forgiveness for their shortcomings. They were taught how to live, and they expressed their respect for the church by conducting a significant amount of their day-to-day business in and around the church.[56]

In early sixteenth-century England, no part of a person's life would have been untouched by the Church and by their parish life. From their baptism, to their marriage, to their burial in the blessed ground of the parish cemetery, every important milestone of an individual's life happened as part of a parish community. Spiritual and social identities, the establishment of local reputations and interrelationships, were, according to Marsh, forged in the local church.[57] In addition to being the religious centre of the community, the parish church also acted as the social centre. Scarisbrick observes that 'for many people it would have given the first and even only experience of painting, formal music, sculpture, architecture'.[58] Changes in doctrine, especially when accompanied by widespread iconoclasm, thus deeply influenced the relationship between the people and their parishes.

Although some changes, such as congregational psalm-singing, were met with enthusiasm, many others, Marsh contends, were 'deeply regretted'.[59] For example, Marsh describes how parish government became 'gradually more oligarchical and more heavily influenced by external directives', while at the same time 'the connection between traditional festivities and the church [became] steadily weaker, as the powerful popular

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[56] Marsh, p. 27.

[57] Ibid., p. 28.

[58] Scarisbrick, p. 44-45.

[59] Marsh, p. 39

energies within English culture were suppressed or redirected'.[60] As government continued to encroach upon and dictate religious belief and exercise, voluntary gifts to the church decreased.[61] The number of clerics likewise markedly decreased:

> Haigh estimates that, overall, clerical numbers fell from 40,000 to 10,000 during the century. England still required roughly the same number of parish incumbents, but had lost a wealth of monks, friars, nuns, and supplementary chantry or guild priests, all casualties of the Reformation.[62]

Although this loss of clerics was partly due to the outlawing of the old religion and the requirement that the clergy swear an oath acknowledging the supremacy of the English monarch over the Anglican Church, it was also a matter of identity. Within the new Calvinist system of religious practice, priests were no longer expected to act as mediators between God and His people. The denial of transubstantiation and abolishment of the Eucharist as a sacrament, took away from them what had been their central purpose: to offer the sacrifice of the Mass. As Marsh explains, 'theologically, they lost their absolute and fundamental importance in the future of souls, and clergymen were no longer to be regarded by the populace as "higher than the angels"'. [63] By the time Shakespeare began writing and producing plays, England had undergone a radical transformation of faith and identity.

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[60] Ibid., p. 79, 102.

[61] One of the main reasons for this decrease in funds was that people no longer left donations to the church for masses and prayers as a means of aiding the souls of the dead—because the idea of purgatory had been done away with. 'It does seem, for example, that Protestantism was less successful than Catholicism in stimulating parishioners to make voluntary gifts to the church…the abolition of holy intercessors like the saints, of purgatory with its sense of close contact between living and dead, and of the belief that good works could make some contribution towards and individual's salvation, may have combined to reduce the motives for generosity' (Marsh, 68).

[62] Marsh, p. 86.

[63] Marsh, p. 87. In essence the Calvinist Reformation of the English Church was an incredible act of identity sabotage. Everything the people had known before, the very things that defined them, was taken away and replaced. Gone were their priests, gone were their images and statues, gone were the guilds and chantries that once gave them a sense of comfort in death, gone was the Eucharist, gone was confession, gone was the idea that they had any control over their own eternal destiny. Violence was done not only to the churches and clergy of England, but to her people. It was a true cultural genocide perpetrated by the "Defender of the Faith".

If Calvin's new theology could elicit tones of despair from learned men such as Donne, then it could undoubtedly cause confusion in the uneducated. With the changed view of man's relationship to God came a recasting of his relationship with his neighbour. Although the precepts of charity were still a major part of Calvinist theology, the abolition of sacramental confession and the Church as mediator left people without their traditional coping mechanism for pangs of conscience. Whereas before there was a physical sacrament in which they could partake and leave knowing they were forgiven, now their communication was no longer through the priest but with God directly. Without the definitive '*ego te absolvo*' people slowly lost the certainty that they had enjoyed.[64] Nevertheless, Robert Grams Hunter argues, 'the orthodoxy in which Shakespeare and his contemporaries were expected to believe (whether they did or not is another question) was very close to the *Summa Theologica* when it came to the forgiveness of sins'.[65]

In her treatise on forgiveness in Shakespeare, Sarah Beckwith discusses the importance of language to the Reformation, arguing that

> the transformation of the languages of penance and repentance were at the very centre of an unprecedented, astonishing revolution in the forms and conventions of speaking, hence of modes of human relating. Confessing, forgiving, absolving, initiating, swearing, blessing, baptising, ordaining—these are a mere few of the speech acts so transformed in the English Reformation.[66]

What we choose to call things and the language that we use to define them help to shape our understanding of their nature and their relationship to us. It is not surprising, therefore, when Beckwith later argues that 'the Reformation was an argument about the very nature of

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[64] Doubtless this uncertainty helped propel John Donne to write an apology for suicide, called *Biathanatos: A Declaration of that Paradox or Thesis, that Selfe-homicide is not so Naturally Sinne, that it mat never be Otherwise* (London, 1644), wherein he argued that man could take his own life while in a state of grace in order to keep himself from future sin.

[65] Robert Grams Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness* (New York: Columbia UP, 1966), p. 20.

[66] Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2011), p. 4.

forgiveness'.[67] Before the Reformation, sin was seen as a triune offence against God, neighbour, and self. The Catholic sacrament of Penance, therefore, addressed each of these three aspects. The sinner was required to acknowledge his fault, have contrition for it, make restitution to his neighbour (if necessary), resolve to sin no more, and accept a penance determined by the priest. Only upon fulfilment of these conditions would his sins be absolved. The process was one of self-searching, ownership, and rebirth, after which the sinner could be morally certain that he had obtained forgiveness of his sins. The method of the sacrament, because it required something of the sinner, facilitated self-forgiveness. After the process was complete, the penitent could begin with a clean slate, safe in the knowledge that, if he did sin again, the process of repentance and forgiveness could begin anew. He had faith in God's promise of forgiveness. Sacramental confession 'contained', in effect, as Tentler explains, 'a theology of consolation'.[68]

The destruction of this sacrament left the English people, therefore, without an outward way to cleanse themselves from sin, as well as the accompanying guilt and shame. How could they forgive themselves on their own? What, indeed, is forgiveness? Is it an interpersonal affair? Does it have to be? If the purpose of forgiveness is the reconciliation of the offended and the offender, then, yes, it must necessarily be interpersonal. If the purpose, however, is to let go of wrongs so as to clear the heart of all resentment, then it could conceivably be an entirely unilateral, internal affair. When discussing forgiveness, therefore, it is of paramount importance to think about the end that a person wishes to achieve by forgiving. Is the benefit they wish to receive for themselves, for the one forgiven, or both?

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[67] Ibid., p. 37.

[68] Tentler, p. xiii.

In *Before Forgiveness*, David Konstan argues that forgiveness is an interpersonal affair that requires a transformation on the part of both forgiver and forgiven. His definition is precise and systematic. As previously stated, he argues that forgiveness is

> a bilateral process involving a confession of wrongdoing, evidence of sincere repentance, and a change of heart or moral perspective – one might almost say moral identity – on the part of the offender, together with a comparable alteration in the forgiver, by which she or he consents to forego vengeance on the basis precisely of the change in the offender.[69]

That is to say, forgiveness is a transformative process that effects a change in not one, but two people. By this definition, both the forgiver and the forgiven must undergo a moral transformation in order for forgiveness to occur. Even though Konstan's criteria may speak to modern notions of fairness and equality, they also pose a serious problem: if forgiveness is a 'bilateral process', then forgiveness can only occur if the offender, as well as the victim, participate in the performance of the forgiveness act.[70] Konstan rejects, in other words, the possibility of a person who has been wronged forgiving a wrongdoer who remains unrepentant. This counterintuitive exclusion runs contrary to the Christian concept of forgiveness that would have been prevalent in Renaissance England and indeed remains pervasive still today.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus repeatedly urges his disciples to follow his example. He encourages them, 'be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect'; or again, 'learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart'.[71] In line with these exhortations to perfection, meekness, and humility, He makes clear to His followers that they must no longer hate their enemies: 'but I say to you, love your enemies: do good to

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[69] David Konstan, *Before Forgiveness: The Origins of a Moral Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), p. 21.

[70] What is missing from Konstan's treatise is a more careful consideration of competing definitions of forgiveness, a problem not overlooked in several reviews. Leo Zaibert questions what he calls 'the central assumption of Konstan's book', and points out that he himself, among others, has defended the possibility of forgiveness without what Konstan calls 'moral exchange' (448). Joseph Liechty, citing Donald Shriver, asks whether reparation could be a consequence of forgiveness, rather than a condition for it. Joseph Fantin protests, that forgiveness 'cannot be restricted to such a precise meaning'. Brendan Boyle argues that Konstan 'casts' Christian forgiveness, in particular, 'in an unduly thin light': quoting Konstan's reading of the Gospels, he protests that 'the injunction to forgive "seventy times seven times" sounds like a radical demand, far in excess of some "general charitableness"' (194).

[71] Matthew, 5.48, 11.29.

them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you'.[72] With these words He condemns the 'eye for an eye' mentality that pervades pagan Greek and Roman literature, as well as the Old Testament: when asked how often one must forgive his brother, He tells Peter, 'seventy times seven times'.[73] In the Gospel of Luke, when Jesus is crucified, he cries out to God, saying, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'.[74] With this prayer He makes it clear that his followers are to forgive even those who do not ask for, or even deserve, forgiveness. He demonstrates in practice what He preached: the malice of others is not an excuse for Christians to harden their own hearts.

This supreme generosity in the face of such tremendous suffering has baffled many. Even Nietzsche, an outspoken enemy of Christianity, acknowledges that 'from the trunk of the tree of revenge and hatred…grew something just as incomparable, a *new love*, the deepest and most sublime kind of love'.[75] As Nietzsche sees it, Jesus's crucifixion changed man's moral horizon. Nietzsche is amazed, albeit also horrified, by the beginning of what he calls 'the slave revolt in morals':

> …all at once, we confront the paradoxical and horrifying expedient through which a martyred humanity has sought temporary relief, *Christianity's* stroke of genius: none other than God sacrificing himself for man's debt, none other than God paying himself back, God as the only one able to redeem man from what, to man himself, has become irredeemable—the creditor sacrificing himself for his debtor, out of love (would you credit it?), out of *love* for his debtor![76]

For Nietzsche, the Christ's Passion is the exemplary foundation of a new moral order, one grounded in forgiveness, and one that he himself refuses to accept. As St. Paul explains, 'we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles'.[77] It is this 'foolish' love, love that freely forgives despite the gravest of injuries, that pervades

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[72] Matthew, 5.44.

[73] Matthew, 18.22.

[74] Luke, 23.34.

[75] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality,* trans. by Carol Diethe, ed. by Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), I.viii.

[76] Ibid., II.xxi.

[77] I Corinthians, 1.23.

Shakespeare's romantic comedies. Allan Bloom rightly suggests that 'no one can make us love love as much as Shakespeare, and no one can make us despair of it as effectively as he does'.[78] Like Sarah Beckwith, and in the spirit of the New Testament, I consider forgiveness here as a process defined and permeated by love.

It follows, therefore, that an absence of love, whether of another or of the self, would pose a serious impediment to forgiveness. Stephen Cherry argues that 'to suggest that forgiveness is simply an act of the will is to fail to recognise that it is possible to want to forgive and yet find it impossible to do so'.[79] As true as this statement is of our forgiveness of others, it is even more true when it comes to forgiving ourselves because self-forgiveness is often particularly hindered by intense feelings of shame and guilt. These are emotions that are directed inwards toward the self, as opposed to anger, for example, which might be directed outwardly toward someone who had offended us. Although sacramental confession could not erase the outward consequences of sin, and so might not fully dissipate inner shame and guilt, it went a long way in helping people to move past these feelings by giving them the chance to honestly confess and accept penance for their fault. People were used to acting out forgiveness.

When it comes to Shakespeare, the acting out of forgiveness is quite literal. In his plays offenders tend to require that there be someone there, someone alive, to offer them forgiveness for their offence before they can forgive themselves for it. The offended person takes the place of the priest, but the ritual remains largely the same: sorrow, confession of fault, promise of future amendment. Beckwith draws an interesting conclusion when she says that, 'for Shakespeare, forgiveness *is* acknowledgement'.[80] If this statement is accurate,

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[78] Allan Bloom, *Shakespeare on Love and Friendship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p.141.

[79] Stephen Cherry, *Healing Agony: Re-Imagining Forgiveness* (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2012), p. 24.

[80] Beckwith, p. 6.

then in this truly important way forgiveness is the same, whether of others or oneself, which makes sense, for how can an offence be forgiven if it has not been acknowledged? Denial excludes the possibility of self-forgiveness.

In addition to denial, guilt and shame are the two main hindrances to self-forgiveness, as they preoccupy the inner life of the soul until it is cleansed. Guilt, on the one hand, manifests as an internal gnawing away of the soul. It is, as Stanley Cavell says, 'the reflex is to avoid discovery'.[81] At the same time, however, guilt exerts pressure on the conscience to confess and accept punishment. Shame, on the other hand, is best understood as the opposite of esteem or honour.[82] Shame, as Christopher Tilmouth argues, is 'conditioned by man's falling short of his own ideal self-image, an ideal shaped according to aspirations and values that he forms in association with his community'.[83] Cavell distinguishes shame from guilt by explaining that 'under shame, what must be covered up is not your deed, but yourself'; on account of this relationship to the self, shame 'is a more primitive emotion than guilt, as inescapable as the possession of a body, the first object of shame'.[84] Shame, therefore, is often accompanied by disgrace and humiliation, and, according to Ewan Fernie, it is portrayed by Shakespeare as 'death, as self-dissolving deformity, as an explosion of being, as the shattering of the self'.[85] Nevertheless, the ultimate effect of shame and guilt is dependent on two things: the ability of the individual to forgive himself, which is directly related to the forgiveness of the one offended. Assuming this forgiveness is obtained, then, as Fernie writes,

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[81] Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), p. 49.

[82] Ewan Fernie maintains that, 'because of their accustomed pride and generally secular orientation, Renaissance people are at once far more sensitive to the goads and pricks of worldly shame and to revolutionary spiritual shame than their medieval forebears' (Ewan Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare* [New York: Routledge, 2002], 73).

[83] Christopher Tilmouth, *Passion's Triumph over Reason: A History of the Moral Imagination from Spenser to Rochester* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), p. 503.

[84] Cavell, p. 49.

[85] Ewan Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 82.

> Shame is a chrysalis…it is a form of death and preparation for that death which will come inevitably. It terminates the attempt to believe in and sustain the impossible illusion of the old substantial self which otherwise dominates our life and the conditions of our perception. This disillusioning reveals all that really is. Contact with this reality is a new birth and in relation to the real a new and more credible self may unfold and flourish. Freedom from self is liberation into love.[86]

This rebirth is the ultimate effect of shame (and guilt) in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Cymbeline,* where rash assumptions on the part of male protagonists lead to 'deaths' which ultimately become rebirths. The men's spiritual rebirths are physically represented on stage by the coming back into being of the women they had previously wronged.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of Shakespeare's great tragic heroes. As Patrick Gray writes, citing Stanley Cavell, 'an individual can be aware of something…and yet at the same time balk at that awareness, shy away from it, work around it'.[87] In *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *King Lear*, the protagonists struggle, to greater or lesser degrees, with internal self-knowledge, as well as external understanding of others. As David Bromwich observes, 'if self-knowledge was the aim, we are made to see a failure to converge between the hero's aim and his object…yet the hero's failure is successfully concealed from himself…by the satisfaction derivable from the mere language of self-discovery'.[88] Shakespeare's tragic heroes, Bromwich argues, never truly know themselves. Overcome by guilt and shame, with no one left to forgive them, they are unable to forgive themselves.

Overcome by Guilt and Shame

The anguish of soul endured by Shakespeare's tragic heroes is readily apparent; even though their guilt and eventual despair are often of their own making, one cannot help but pity the

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[86] Fernie, p. 245.

[87] Patrick Gray, 'Shakespeare versus Aristotle: Anagnorisis, Repentance, and Acknowledgment' *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 49.1 (2019), 89.

[88] David Bromwich, 'What Shakespeare's Heroes Learn', *Raritan: A Quarterly Review*, 29.4 (2010), 136.

sorrow that they have brought upon themselves. Sometimes, as in *Macbeth* or *Othello,* the tragedy is spurred on by a villain who whispers poisonous words to the protagonist. Other times, however, as in *King Lear*, the tragedy is entirely of their own making. Regardless of how it comes about, however, the mental turmoil of these protagonists mirrors the fear, confusion, and despair that accompanied the abolition of sacramental confession. And, in the case of Macbeth and Othello, especially, they realise too late that the absolution they seek is beyond their grasp, and that, as a result, they will never experience the dulcet sound of *ego te absolvo*. Nevertheless, as Patrick Gray argues:

> When someone makes a decision, whether it be to take some violent action, like Shakespeare's tragic protagonists, or to write a line of poetry, like Shakespeare himself, he is in effect committing himself, even if only temporarily, to a hierarchical organisation of his values. And this prioritising of one value-system over another entails a choice, howsoever dimly recognised, between rival visions of reality: a de facto arbitration of competing truth-claims.[89]

Having once made the decision to pursue a morally questionable course of action, Macbeth, Othello, and Lear fully commit to following through with their self-determined visions of reality. And as a result of their tenacity, each finds himself engulfed in guilt and shame, as he gradually loses an inner struggle with his own conscience.

As Jeffrie Murphy explains, 'we typically hate ourselves not because of…abstract and formal violations of moral rules but because we see vividly the harm that we have inflicted on others by such violations'.[90] It might be said, therefore, that it is not the violation of conscience *per se* that causes guilt, but rather the effects of our actions. Consequently, as Bernardine Bishop makes clear, 'what Shakespeare shows us so much of so hauntingly is guilt which [cannot] repent because it [cannot] hope to be forgiven'.[91] Shakespeare's tragedies interrogate the power of this guilt and the expediency of suicide as a

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[89] Patrick Gray, 'Seduced by Romanticism : Re-imagining Shakespearean Catharsis', in *Routledge Companion to Shakespeare and Philosophy*, ed. by Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 515.

[90] Jeffrie Murphy, *Getting Even: Forgiveness and Its Limits*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), p. 63.

[91] Bernardine Bishop, '"The Visage of Offence": A Psychoanalytical View of Forgiveness and Repentance in Shakespeare's Plays', *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 23.1 (2006), 32.

means to escape it. In *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *King Lear*, the protagonists recognise that they have sinned, and as a result they despair: their guilt, shame, and grief overcome them. For Macbeth and Othello, death seems to be the only alternative to an intolerable life; for Lear the situation is somewhat more complicated, as Cordelia is actually able to offer him the forgiveness he seeks.

In Elizabethan England the taking of one's own life was officially condemned. Nevertheless, as Eric Langley observes, 'early modern drama incorporates suicide as an integral aspect of its broader consideration of humanist self-determination, trying out the possibility of self-authored action, testing the inextricability of our dependence on a presiding deity'.[92] The question of control, of individual agency, was one which flowed naturally from a new dogmatic system that denied human beings command of their eternal destiny. Henry Romilly Fedden argues that the 'very doctrine of predestination was a destructive weapon…an agent tending to provoke suicide'.[93] Calvin's new soteriology, he explains, might naturally lead one to despair:

> If he [the Christian] felt doubtful, not only must the blackest gloom have descended upon him, but a hopeless irresponsibility. No act of his could remedy the situation; he was a 'vessel of wrath' and must remain so. Thus damned, no religious hopes and no fear of a worse future could effectively intervene between an impulse to suicide and its execution.[94]

Why continue living if the end is damnation no matter what you do? Calvin tries to reason his way out of what Rolf Soellner calls a 'paradox of determinism and free will' by saying that 'the will of man that obeyed God fulfilled necessity, but that the will of man opposing Him was responsible for its disobedience'.[95] This argument, however, does not address the biblical 'seven times per day' that even the just man sins.[96] As Hannah Arendt says, 'without

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[92] Eric Langley, *Narcissism and Suicide in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), p. 253.

[93] Henry Romilly Fedden, *Suicide: A Social and Historical Study* (New York: Benjamin Blom Inc., 1972), p. 158.

[94] Ibid., p. 158.

[95] Rolf Soellner, *Shakespeare's Patterns of Self-Knowledge*, (Ohio State UP: 1972), p. 248.

[96] Proverbs, 24.16.

being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we would never recover'.[97] In other words, we become stuck in an eternal loop, one which always begins and ends with our unforgiven sin. It will come as no surprise, then, that Thomas Aquinas calls despair the 'origin of other sins'.[98]

We begin our decent into darkness with *Macbeth*, which Ned Lukacher calls the 'drama of the absolute, fatal frustration brought on by the pangs of conscience'.[99] When we first meet Macbeth he is a battlefield champion, one who has and deserves his king's favour. An unexpected prophecy then unsettles his world. It is doubtful that Macbeth would have murdered Duncan of his own accord; rather, it is the machinations of his wife which propel him forward. 'It is Lady Macbeth who supplies the emotional power that enables him to settle his will,' Dolora Cunningham maintains, 'and so complete the act of moral choice that leads ultimately to the catastrophe'.[100] Coppélia Kahn argues that Lady Macbeth's ability to influence her husband is due to 'a paradox of sexual confusion', one in which the valiant warrior, Macbeth, is but an unfinished man who has been moulded by women to believe that bloodshed is the ultimate marker of masculinity.[101] When Macbeth wishes to 'proceed no further in this business', Lady Macbeth taunts him: 'art thou afeared / to be the same in thine own act and valour / as thou art in desire?'.[102] She calls into question his manhood and provokes him to respond that he dares to do 'all that may become a man'.[103] Having received such a response, Lady Macbeth continues in the same vein until she has convinced

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[97] Hannah Arendt, quoted in Beckwith, p. 2.

[98] Aquinas, II.II.20.

[99] Ned Lukacher, *Daemonic Figures: Shakespeare and the Question of Conscience* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994), p. 163.

[100] Dolora Cunningham, 'Macbeth: The Tragedy of the Hardened Heart', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 14.1 (1963), 39.

[101] Coppelia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 151.

[102] *Macbeth*, 1.7.31, 39-41.

[103] Ibid., 1.7.46.

the reluctant warrior to 'bend up / each corporal agent to this terrible feat'.[104] Once he has agreed to kill Duncan, there is no turning back. Cunningham contends that this 'inability to overcome the surrender to evil and to cope with its consequences is the fundamental tragic pattern of *Macbeth*'.[105]

Even before Macbeth actually kills Duncan, Tilmouth argues that he 'experiences his conscience as something open, visible, worldly'.[106] He is, as David Bromwich contends, the Shakespearean hero 'who most directly confronts his fate as the author of wicked actions'.[107] He imagines that he sees before him a dagger, only to realise that it is 'a dagger of the mind, a false creation / proceeding from [his] heat-oppressed brain'.[108] His conscience troubles him and tries to prevent the deed he contemplates by foreshadowing the madness that is to come. Nevertheless, Macbeth chooses to proceed. The impact his sin has on him is immediately apparent: he refuses to return the bloody daggers to the chamber of the king, exclaiming, 'I am afraid to think what I have done. / Look on 't again I dare not'.[109] In his bewildered, almost trance-like, state, Macbeth looks at his blood-stained hands and wonders,

> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
> Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas in incarnadine,
> Making the green one red.[110]

Although Macbeth does divine his own future guilt at the end of Act 1, it is only after the fact, when he cannot seem to wash Duncan's blood from his hands, that he truly recognises the impact the king's murder will have on his soul, for, as Lukacher points out, 'conscience

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[104] Ibid., 1.7.80-81.

[105] Cunningham, 46.

[106] Tilmouth, p. 510-11.

[107] Bromwich, p. 141.

[108] *Macbeth*, 2.1.38-39.

[109] Ibid., 2.2.50-51.

[110] Ibid., 2.2.59-62.

clings the way blood clings to the hands of the Macbeths, not as a physical stain but as an irrepressible and incontrovertible compulsion to repeat'.[111]

Macbeth copes with his guilt by trying to hide it from both others and himself. Consequently, Act I ends with Macbeth acknowledging that 'false face must hide what the false heart doth know'.[112] Macbeth knows that he must appear to be a good host, he must seem to love Duncan, if he wishes to carry out his assassination of the king successfully. From the beginning, then, the thane knows that he will have to hide behind a mask of love and civility. What he does not account for, however, is the repulsion that he comes to feel for himself. Even before the actual murder Macbeth admits, 'to know my deed, 'twere best not know myself'.[113] That is to say, in order to carry out the murder Macbeth believes he must dissociate, separate himself from the reality of his deed, because, as Soellner points out 'he seems in some way to associate self-knowledge with a moral way of life'.[114] These last pangs of conscience must be silenced if Macbeth is to have any hope of performing the murder without being caught.

Macbeth's conscience, however, rebels against his treason. Hopelessly lost in his own guilt, Macbeth tries another method of assuaging his conscience: he resolves to continue along the path of destruction, hoping thereby to inure himself to evil. He will now, as Cunningham writes, 'murder for no reason other than to habituate himself to the terrors of his corrupted state and make himself comfortable among them'.[115] Macbeth rationalises this path of destruction to himself in various ways. In the beginning he tells himself that 'things bad begun make strong themselves by ill', wrongly assuming that destroying those

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[111] Lukacher, p. 185.
[112] *Macbeth*, 1.7.83.
[113] Ibid., 2.2.72.
[114] Soellner, p. xiv-xv.
[115] Cunningham, 42.

who know of his treason will secure his own power.[116] By Act III, however, Macbeth has all but despaired of his ability to right his wrongs. In the same breath in which he laments his position, he admits to yet more wicked intentions:

> …I am in blood
> Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more,
> Returning were as tedious as go o'er.
> Strange things I have in head that will to hand,
> Which must be acted ere they may be scanned.[117]

In this passage, Macbeth once again speaks of acting in a dissociative state, a state in which he need not think about the evil he is committing. As Stephen Greenblatt observes, his 'imagery of torture transfers the horrors of souls in the otherworld to the experience he has condemned himself to live in this one'.[118] His mind wages a war against itself. For Cunningham, Macbeth 'suffers so intensely his fall from where he belongs that he sets out to make himself at home in hell'.[119] And according to Macduff, he succeeds, as 'not in the legions / of horrid hell can come a devil more damned / in evils to top Macbeth'.[120]

In the final act, when Macbeth speaks to the doctor about his wife's madness, there is a brief moment of hope, a pause in which Macbeth searches for a remedy. As he questions the doctor one can almost hear the yearning in his voice:

> Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
> Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
> Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
> And with some sweet oblivious antidote
> Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff
> Which weighs upon the heart?[121]

Maybe, just maybe, there is a way back after all, a way to undo the damage he has caused to himself and others? But, alas, in such an instance, the doctor tells Macbeth, the patient 'must

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[116] *Macbeth*, 3.2.55.

[117] Ibid., 3.4.135-39.

[118] Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001), p. 194.

[119] Cunningham, 40.

[120] *Macbeth*, 4.3.55-57.

[121] Ibid., 5.4.40-45.

minister to himself'.[122] Cunningham correctly surmises that Macbeth 'remains to the end conscious of all he has lost'; once all hope has vanished, he readies himself for his final stand, for the inevitability of death.[123]

Like Macbeth, Othello is lead astray by a trusted confidant. Unlike the thane, however, the general commits his murder in a fit of passion, leading Stanley Cavell to argue that, 'with his "jealousy", Othello's violence studies the human use of knowledge under the consequence of skepticism'.[124] Although Othello does initially doubt Iago's words, the villain eventually overcomes his skepticism with 'proof'. In discussing *Othello*,[125] scholars have often debated Iago's role. According to Fred West, Iago is 'an accurate portrait of a psychopath', who is 'devoid of conscience, with no remorse'.[126] Meanwhile, Weston Babcock would have us see Iago as 'an human being, shrewdly intelligent, suffering from and striking against a constant fear of social snobbery'.[127] John Draper postulates that Iago is simply 'an opportunist who cleverly grasps occasion', spurred on by 'the keenest of professional and personal motives'.[128] The psychology of Iago, however, is not as important to the plot as the fact that all the other characters, but especially Othello, believe him to be a man of the highest calibre, beyond reproach.

At the beginning of the play, when Othello finds out that he must leave for Cyprus, it is to Iago that he entrusts Desdemona with the words, 'honest Iago, / my Desdemona must I leave to thee'.[129] In commending his new wife to the care of Iago, Othello is singling him

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[122] Ibid., 5.4.46.

[123] Cunningham, 44.

[124] Cavell, p. 9.

[125] Parts of this section are borrowed from a conference paper I presented at the Othello's Island Conference (Cyprus 2017), entitled *'I am not what I am': Iago as Fool in Shakespeare's Othello.*

[126] Fred West, 'Iago the Psychopath', *South Atlantic Bulletin*, 43.2 (1978), 27, 29.

[127] Weston Babcock, 'Iago-an Extraordinary Honest Man', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 16.4 (1965), 301.

[128] John W. Draper, 'Honest Iago', *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 46.3 (1931), 726, 728.

[129] *Othello*, 1.3.296-97.

out as a man on whom he can depend to protect what is most precious to him. Nonetheless, barely fifty lines later, Iago professes to Roderigo: 'I retell thee again and again, / I hate the Moor'.[130] Hence, the audience learns early on that Iago, though Othello judges him loyal, is actually out to destroy everything that 'the Moor' cherishes. As the play progresses it becomes even clearer that Iago is using his position as confidant to manipulate the feelings, and afterwards the jealousy, of Othello. In the fateful scene in which Iago first plants the seed of jealousy in Othello's heart, the audience is forced to look on, to hear the sweet sound of 'my lord, you know I love you' —echoing the profession of St. Peter after his betrayal of Jesus—all the while recognising that everything Iago says is a lie.[131] In effect, Iago uses honesty as his disguise; he pretends that he does not want to respond to Othello's inquiries because he loves him, and Othello believes him entirely because he trusts in the reality of this love. Even the love of Desdemona is not enough to counteract the poison once it has entered her husband's heart, for, as Cavell argues, 'Othello's eager insistence on Iago's honesty, his eager slaking of his thirst for knowledge with that poison, is not a sign of his stupidity in the presence of poison but of his devouring need of it'.[132] In other words, once Othello has allowed doubt to fill his heart, he eagerly absorbs Iago's lies because they validate his jealousy.

Eventually, Iago's falsehoods lead Othello to question why he ever got married at all: 'Why did I marry? This honest creature doubtless / sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds'.[133] Using a mixture of false words and situations designed to appear other than they are, Iago successfully dupes everyone. One of the best examples of his knavery is when the villain finally convinces Othello that Desdemona is unfaithful; he simply suggests that

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[130] Ibid., 1.3.366-67.

[131] Ibid., 3.3.119.

[132] Cavell, p. 133.

[133] *Othello*, 3.3.245-47.

Cassio had a dream about Desdemona, and this suggestion is enough to evoke a cry of 'blood, blood, blood!'.[134] No proof. No evidence. Conjecture is all that is required, and Othello's imagination does the rest. As Robert Miola attests, Iago successfully 'assumes the role of the loyal and restraining confidant in order to turn Othello into a passionate, unrestrained protagonist'.[135] As a result of Iago's lies, Othello is determined to kill his wife, thereby erasing the imaginary blot to his honour.

Paige Martin Reynolds argues that 'Othello legitimises Desdemona, from the beginning, merely by loving her', because, in the world of the play, 'Desdemona's validity is contingent upon – even created by – Othello's feelings'.[136] In other words, Desdemona is, first and foremost, a wife, and, as such, her main duty is to maintain and protect the image of her chastity that allows her husband to move about the world with his honour intact. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, female chastity was the defining characteristic of married women during this period, not least because, as Miola explains, it 'define[d] male identity: the men are husbands not cuckolds, sole possessors (in physical and legal senses) of their wives'.[137] For Renaissance men, nothing was more humiliating than being a cuckold. This fact was reflected in the interpretation and enforcement of the law. Curtis Brown Watson explains that 'revenge for adultery, by the murder of both wife and adulterer, was tolerated in the early laws of every European European country'.[138] Hence, Peter Brook contends that

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[134] Ibid., 3.3.454.

[135] Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 129.

[136] Paige Martin Reynolds, *Performing Shakespeare's Women: Playing Dead* (New York: Bloombury, 2019), p. 25.

[137] Robert S. Miola, "Wrying but a Little?": Marriage, Punishment, and Forgiveness in Cymbeline', in *Shakespeare and Renaissance Ethics*, ed. by John D. Cox and Patrick Gray (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014), 188.

[138] Curtis Brown Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1960), pp. 159-60.

> this is an often neglected key to Othello's murderous rage. For Othello, a woman is a symbol of purity—virgin. Purity belongs to God and a betrayal of purity is far more than the betrayal of a wife. It is defiling the sacrament; a chaste woman's pure nature expresses itself in outer form.[139]

When we keep in mind the gravity of Desdemona's alleged crime, we can almost predict that her protestations of innocence will fall on deaf ears. Like Claudio in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Othello trusts his own eyes more than he does the virtue of the woman he loves. Thus, when Desdemona protests, 'I never did / offend you in my life',[140] he calls her a 'perjured woman',[141] and insists that she must die immediately.

Othello realises too late that he has been tricked, that he has smothered that which was most precious to him. As great as was his rage against her when he thought her unfaithful, greater still is his anger against himself when he realises what he has done. Jefferie Murphy provides a framework for understanding the self-hatred into which Othello now descends:

> perhaps the best way to understand moral hatred of self is as a kind of *shame* placed on top of guilt: guilt over what one has done but, in cases where being a moral person is part of what Freud would call one's ego ideal, shame that one has fallen so far below one's ideal of selfhood that life—at least life with full self-consciousness—is now less bearable.[142]

Free from Iago's lies, Othello is now free to contemplate the pure wickedness of his actions, and Desdemona's complete lack of guilt only serves to fan the flame of her husband's shame and guilt. He cannot, nor does he want to, hide from his conscience. Despite the fact that Desdemona forgave him with her dying breath, Othello cannot forgive himself. As a result, Fernie describes him as 'on the brink of mental collapse'.[143] Othello does not even recognise himself as the same man, for, when Lodovico asks where the rash and unfortunate man is, the tragic hero answers 'that's he that was Othello? here I am'.[144] 'He has', Fernie argues,

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[139] Peter Brook, *The Quality of Mercy: Reflections on Shakespeare* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2014), p. 48.

[140] *Othello*, 5.2.58-59.

[141] Ibid., 5.2.63.

[142] Murphy, p. 60.

[143] Fernie, p. 166.

[144] *Othello*, 5.2.283.

'to labour hard to attain self-consciousness—first recognising not Othello, but the man who was Othello, only then recognising that man as himself'.[145]

As the full weight of his mistake crashes into his consciousness, Othello plans his death, but not before he asks Lodovico,

> I pray you, in your letters,
> When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
> Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
> Nor set down aught in malice: then must you speak
> Of one that loved not wisely but too well.[146]

Even moments before he kills himself, Othello still defines himself in terms of Desdemona's love. Fernie maintains that it is his shame of falling short of this love, 'his disgust when he realises he has turned into his own worst enemy', that causes him to take his own life.[147] He cannot go on living knowing that his jealousy destroyed a woman who loved him so completely.

Whereas Macbeth commits suicide by battle, and Othello kills himself, in Lear the protagonist dies from grief: he simply loses the will to go on living. Robert B. Heilman makes the following comparison:

> Othello appears to hurry over his evil act and to spend most of his few remaining words on sketching the most favourable possible portrait of himself[,] Lear needs a civil war, a terrible storm, and madness before he can shift from abuse of villains to acknowledgement that it is he who needs forgiveness.[148]

Lear's journey starts at the very beginning of the play, when he disowns and drives away his daughter, Cordelia, because she refuses to make a overwrought display of her love for him. Instead, he hands her off dowry-less to France and divides his kingdom between his two remaining daughters, who have had no qualms about making an exhibition of their love before the court. Fernie explains Lear's reaction in terms of shame: Cordelia's refusal to

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[145] Fernie, p. 166.

[146] *Othello*, 5.2.340-44.

[147] Fernie, p. 78.

[148] Robert B. Heilman, ''Twere Best not Know Myself": Othello, Lear, Macbeth', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 15.2 (1964), 97-98.

play Lear's game makes him feel shamed.[149] Cavell concurs with this assessment, arguing that 'Lear's behaviour in this scene is explained by…the attempt to avoid recognition, the shame of exposure, the threat of self-revelation'.[150] Cordelia's reaction to her father's request exposes it for what it truly is: fishing for compliments before an audience.

However, Lear soon comes to regret his decision. No sooner has he ceded power to Regan and Goneril then the women start taking away the privileges he sought to preserve for himself, until, finally, they chase him away altogether. Susan Snyder argues that it is this subjection to his daughters, this humiliation, that 'opens his way to wisdom'.[151] Lear knows in his heart that his treatment of Cordelia was wrong, yet his pride cannot bring him to admit his guilt to anyone save his fool—at least not until late in the play. This pride is why he must suffer, according to Bromwich, 'a deeply unsettling and shocking reversal', because it is 'the only thing that can precipitate any self-recognition at all in a person of strong self-will'.[152] Being humiliated is not in itself enough; he must also accept his humiliation. Lear's struggle with acceptance is why Cavell argues that he 'is not maddened because he had been wrathful, but because his shame brought his wrath upon the wrong object. It is not the fact of his anger but the irony of it, specifically and above all the *injustice* of it, which devours him'.[153]

As he struggles through his awakening, Lear quite literally goes mad and begins railing at the wind and the rain. He calls himself 'a man more sinned against than sinning',[154] and he professes that the storm raging in his mind 'doth from [his] senses take all feeling else / save what beats there. Filial ingratitude!'[155] At the height of his railing he

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[149] Fernie, p. 201.

[150] Cavell, p. 57-58.

[151] Susan Snyder, 'King Lear and the Prodigal Son', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 17.4 (1966), 364.

[152] Bromwich, 146.

[153] Cavell, p. 59.

[154] *King Lear*, 3.2.59-60.

[155] Ibid., 3.4.13-14.

insists that unkind daughters reduce men to the lowest of states. For him, Greenblatt argues, 'human existence…has been turned into a purgatory in which demonic figures with names like Goneril, Regan, Edmond, and Cornwall are given leave to torment flawed souls'.[156] Lear has lost both his power and his daughter, and at over eighty years old his struggles overwhelm him. 'Having violated justice', Susan Snyder writes, 'he must come to terms with it before moving on to a different plane in the reunion with Cordelia'.[157]

When Lear is finally reunited with Cordelia toward the end of the play, he struggles, at first, to recognise who she is. When she asks him how he is he responds,

> You do me wrong to take me out o' th' grave.
> Thou art a soul in bliss, but I am bound
> Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
> Do scald like molten lead'.[158]

Lear's reference to a 'wheel of fire' calls to mind both the wheel of fortune upon which the fates of men were decided, and the tortures of one damned to the fires of hell. In Lear's case, however, it is not the wheel but his own unbridled anger that has caused his sorrows. 'Before he can acknowledge, before he can really see his child Cordelia, and the dreadful wrong he has done her,' Fernie argues, 'Lear has to be stripped and reduced to nothing in a process which is as long as the play itself'.[159] By the end of the scene, Lear has begun to recover his senses, yet he still neglects to take full responsibility for what has happened, choosing instead to blame his actions on old age and the foolishness that accompanies it. As he says to Cordelia, 'pray you now, forget, and forgive. / I am old and foolish'.[160]

When we next encounter the pair they are prisoners of the victorious Regan and Goneril. Lear is unconcerned, however, because, as Heilman says, 'to reach this point, [he] has traveled a long road, a road of ruinous hardship; in effect he has had to destroy a part of

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[156] Greenblatt, *Hamlet*, p. 186.

[157] Snyder, 365.

[158] *King Lear*, 4.7.45-48.

[159] Fernie, p. 173-74.

[160] *King Lear*, 4.7.83-84.

himself to understand himself'.[161] Now that he has achieved some sense of self, now that he has been reunited with Cordelia, he is happy to go to prison so long as she is there. One can feel his happiness when he exclaims,

> Come, let's away to prison:
> We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:
> When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
> And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh.[162]

Lear cares nothing for all that has come before; nothing for where he is or what happens to him as long as Cordelia is by his side. He imagines a utopia in which his need for his daughter, and her forgiveness, might not only be fulfilled, but perpetually reenacted. As Fernie explains, 'Lear is unable to acknowledge Cordelia as separate: he cannot distinguish her from his need of her, and he is still…trying to fulfil himself in her love'.[163] When Cordelia is hung in her prison cell, Lear thus falls to pieces once again; his old age is unable to support a new separation. Even though Cordelia freely grants Lear the forgiveness he is after, once she is dead the effects of that forgiveness seem to disappear. It is as though her forgiveness only has power to release him from his guilt so long as she is alive. In consequence, he dies cradling his dead daughter.

Macbeth, Othello, and Lear all struggle with shame and guilt. Macbeth is shamed by his wife into perpetrating a deed that makes his life a living hell. He struggles with his guilt but eventually embraces it, despairing of forgiveness and descending deeper and deeper into 'hell'. Othello, on the other hand, starts off as a good and loving husband, only to succumb to his own insecurities through the machinations of Iago. Meanwhile, Lear slowly comes to the realisation that his imaginative, self-gratifying demand for love is responsible for his unhappiness. Each protagonist is forced to face himself in the mirror of his own conscience,

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[161] Heilman, 94

[162] *King Lear*, 5.3.8-12.

[163] Fernie, p. 206.

and each eventually despairs of finding the forgiveness he desires. Whereas these tragic protagonists are overcome by their own shame and guilt and left unable to forgive themselves, the heroes we will discuss in the next section are guided to self-forgiveness by the unconditional love of the women they have wronged.

Achieving Self-forgiveness

Much Ado About Nothing, *A Winter's Tale*, and *Cymbeline* all contain similar stories: a man falsely accuses the woman he loves of infidelity; the woman dies; the man goes through a process of grieving, fully aware that he has caused the death; the woman is reborn and forgives the man, thereby allowing him to forgive himself; and the couple moves forward together. In each play forgiveness is a performance that closely follows the format of sacramental confession: there is a confession of guilt, an expression of contrition, and a desire to make satisfaction. Within this structure Hero, Hermoine, and Imogen take the place of the priest, whereas Claudio, Leontes, and Posthumus are the penitents. Despite the active performance of forgiveness in these plays, some scholars, nonetheless, question whether or not forgiveness truly takes place.

As Paul Hughes explains, forgiveness 'typically involves overcoming *moral anger* toward another'.[164] Bernardine Bishop argues that, absent this anger, the forgiveness of Shakespeare's heroines constitutes a type of pseudo-forgiveness, because 'the possibility of their non-forgiveness is simply not an issue'.[165] Bishop maintains that heroines such as Hero, Cordelia, and Desdemona refuse to acknowledge the reality of their situations and that, on account of their denial of the reality of the pain they have been made to suffer, they

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[164] Paul Hughes, 'What Is Involved in Forgiving?', *Philosophia*, 25.1 (1997), 33.

[165] Bishop, 29.

are left with nothing tangible to forgive. In other words, there is no matter for forgiveness, and, Bishop maintains, 'true forgiveness can't be if nothing has happened'.[166]

Although the heroines of *Much Ado About Nothing*, *A Winter's Tale*, and *Cymbeline* might seem to forgive too much too quickly, their forgiveness can be better understood as an implicit return to the practice of Christianity in England before the Reformation. Their generosity allows the happy endings to take place, because it allows the male characters to forgive themselves. Their love is pure precisely because it is not tainted with thoughts of vengeance, in keeping with the words of Christ from the cross: 'Father, forgive them. They know not what they do'.[167] As Robert Grams Hunter argues, 'the forgiveness of man by man, on which psychological and social order depends, is the result of the forgiveness of man by God'.[168] The selflessness of Shakespeare's heroines mirrors God's own forgiveness of human sin in sacramental confession, thereby allowing for the self-forgiveness of the male protagonists and the restoration of the social order.

Claudio's grievously mistaken denunciation of Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing* is one of the most notorious travesties of justice in all of Shakespeare's plays. Members of the audience are rightly outraged by Hero's unwarranted humiliation. It is easy to forget, however, that our outrage stems from a position of knowledge: we know that Hero is innocent. Claudio, by contrast, has been duped; he is the puppet of a psychopath who thrives on pain and suffering. Don John, for his part, accomplishes his nasty trick by appealing to Claudio's sense of honour. With an air of nonchalance, the prince feigns indifference even as he plants poison in Claudio's heart: 'If you love her then, tomorrow wed her. / But it would better fit your honour to change your mind'.[169] The implication here is as clear as the

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[166] Ibid., 30.

[167] Luke, 23.34.

[168] Hunter, p. 183-84.

[169] *Much Ado About Nothing*, 3.2.105-07.

reaction to it is instantaneous. If Claudio marries a tainted women, then his honour will be as tarnished as her chastity. Propelled by this thought, Claudio feels compelled to find out the truth. Since his concern is selfish, however, he cannot see clearly, and his eyes are easily deceived.[170] Don John is able to convince Claudio that, as Hunter puts it, 'he has fallen in love with an illusion and that the reality he has truly perceived in Hero does not exist'.[171]

Just before he denounces Hero, Claudio cries, 'O, what men dare do! What men may do! What / men daily do, not knowing what they do'.[172] This utterance is directed at Leonato, but one cannot help but recognise its prophetic nature. In his ignorance, Claudio casts aside his bride, believing her to be 'but the sign and semblance of her honour'.[173] Throughout the charges that he levels at Hero Claudio's language is riddled with the language of sight: semblance, behold, show, see. Yet in fact he is the one who is blind to the truth. From the beginning Claudio has trusted his judgement of Hero to his eyes. As a result, he sees her, but he does not know her. Since he has been so externally focused, moreover, her hidden virtues, which should be her defence, cannot help her. The eyes cannot hear. In this shaming scene, Hero is a victim of the male gaze, and Claudio blames her for destroying the illusion of his love, calling her a 'pure impurity and impious purity' and insisting that, on account of her betrayal, he'll 'lock up all the gates of love'.[174] This focus on his own imaginary shame is why, as Fernie explains,

> although Hero is virtually perishing from shame, the emphasis is all on the quite unnecessary shame suffered by her bridegroom and father…Hero is perfectly shamefast, but her men are so distracted by the mere whiff of dishonour they are ready to believe she is shameless and are shamed by association, treating her with shameful hate.[175]

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[170] Claudio watches a scene play out on Hero's balcony and assumes that Margaret is Hero. While he does mention both seeing and hearing Hero's fall, one can only assume that he is too far away to make out the faces of the pair or to hear what is being said; otherwise, he would have surely recognised that the woman on the balcony was not Hero. Nonetheless, Margaret's dressing like Hero and answering to her name, undoubtedly helped to make the ruse successful.

[171] Hunter, p. 94.

[172] *Much Ado*, 4.1.17-18.

[173] Ibid., 4.1.31.

[174] Ibid., 4.1.103-04.

[175] Fernie, p. 87.

The men in the scene, in other words, are so wrapped up in what Claudio's accusation means for them and their social standing that they completely neglect to consider the effect it might be having on the woman accused.

After Borachio's later confession, Claudio continues to speak the language of sight. As his mistake dawns on him, he declares, 'Sweet Hero! Now thy image doth appear / in the rare semblance that I first loved'.[176] As quickly as his anger flared and robbed Hero of her beauty, so too does it subside and return her to her pedestal. For Claudio, Hero is, once again, a reflection of all that is good and beautiful, and with her return to the pedestal comes Claudio's return to sense. He is now ready to acknowledge his fault and do penance for it. 'I know not how to pray your patience,' he begins,

> Yet I must speak. Choose your revenge yourself.
> Impose me to what penance your invention
> Can lay upon my sin. Yet sinned I not
> But in mistaking'.[177]

Claudio's words to Leonato leave many angry, as he seemingly refuses to accept full responsibility for what he has done. Those words, 'yet sinned I not but in mistaking', strike one as tantamount to 'I'm sorry, but it wasn't my fault'. Although it is indeed true that Claudio was misled by Don John, and that, as David Margolies concedes, this '"mistake" might perhaps be seen as youthful naivety or stupidity', the fact remains that his 'brutal and self-regarding treatments of Hero' are 'difficult to overlook'.[178] Claudio did not have to denounce Hero so publicly, nor so cruelly. His half-hearted apology thus seems inadequate. As Jeffrie Murphy observes, 'absent the requisite change of heart, self-forgiveness is probably hasty and is a sign of nothing more than moral shallowness'.[179] In the play,

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[176] *Much Ado*, 5.1.243-44.

[177] Ibid., 5.1.263-67.

[178] David Margolies, *Shakespeare's Irrational Endings: The Problem Plays* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 45.

[179] Murphy, p. 69.

Claudio's conscience seems impervious to any sort of real sorrow for what he has done; and, as Linda Anderson point out, 'it is a triumph of Shakespeare's portraiture that we do not see him as the villain of the piece'.[180]

To his credit, however, Claudio is willing to do penance for his bad choices. The penance Leonato imposes on Claudio focuses on three things: repairing Hero's reputation, acknowledging his fault to her, and renewing the love between their families. He wants Claudio and Don Pedro to 'possess the people in Messina here / how innocent she died', and he instructs Claudio to 'hang an epitaph upon her tomb / and sing it to her bones' before returning to Leonato and taking his niece as a bride in place of Hero.[181] Claudio agrees to and accomplishes all of these things, and in doing so his journey closely follows the act of sacramental confession: an offence is followed by contrition, acknowledgement, and penance. As a reward for his conversion, Hero is returned to him. Although there is no direct exchange of apology and forgiveness between Hero and Claudio, the reconciliation is assumed. Hero's return to life completes the forgiveness cycle, and Hero's generosity allows the happy ending to take place.

In *A Winter's Tale,* Leontes seems to be on a quest to outdo the rashness of Claudio, when, with no evidence, he denounces his pregnant wife, Hermione. The problem arises when Polixenes, Leontes' dearest friend, wishes to depart for home after spending nine months at the court. When Leontes cannot persuade Polixenes to stay, he asks his wife to try. Her success, then, appears to him as proof of her infidelity. Leontes goes mad, albeit more subtly so than Lear; he refuses to listen to counterarguments and even plots to assassinate Polixenes. When Polixenes is apprised of his fall from favour, as well as its cause, he knows he must depart in haste. 'This jealousy', he notes 'is for a precious creature', and

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[180] Linda Anderson, *A Kind of Wild Justice: Revenge in Shakespeare's Comedies* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987), p. 86.

[181] *Much Ado*, 5.2.273-74, 276-77.

> As she's rare,
> Must it be great; and, as his person's mighty,
> Must it be violent, and as he does conceive
> He is dishonoured by a man which ever
> Professed to him, why, his revenge must
> In that be made more bitter.[182]

Like every subject in Leontes' realm, Polixenes recognises Hermione's rare qualities, her virtue as well as her beauty, and he knows that the loss of such a one, whether real or imagined, is likely to invoke the most all-consuming feelings of loss and rage. As Soellner points out, 'the passions of great men are part of their greatness'.[183] The revenge for such a betrayal, were it real, could only be extreme. Leontes, however, sees Polixenes' flight as but further proof that his suspicions are correct.

As the tension grows, Paulina rebukes the king of having no further proof save his own 'weak-hinged fancy'.[184] Her accusation is shown true when the Delphic Oracle proclaims Hermione's innocence, yet Leontes continues to persist in his madness. The king's blasphemy against Apollo results in the death of his son, and it is only in that moment that he finally capitulates to reality. As quickly as he was enraged, he is broken; his entire world crumbles before his eyes. Like Claudio, Leontes was focused on the externals, on what he could see—or rather on what he thought he could see—but his vision was unclear; like Claudio, he denounces a women who loves him because he trusts his senses more than her virtue. When Hermione 'dies', Paulina is on hand to chastise the king; she plays the role of what William Hamlin calls a 'god-surrogate'. That is to say, Paulina is a character whose 'function [is] to prompt or prod conscience when conscience fails to prompt itself', and she fulfils her purpose masterfully.[185] Her rebuke of Leontes is both forceful and effective:

> …O thou tyrant,
> Do not repent these things, for they are heavier
> Than all thy woes can stir. Therefore betake thee

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[182] *A Winter's Tale*, 1.2.451-57.

[183] Soellner, p. 256.

[184] *Winter's Tale*, 2.3.118.

[185] Hamlin, p. 243.

> To nothing but despair. A thousand knees,
> Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting,
> Upon a barren mountain, and still winter
> In storm perpetual, could not move the gods
> To look that way thou wert.[186]

As cruel as these words might be to an already broken man, Leontes, in large part, deserves them, as he knows. The king's journey toward redemption and forgiveness begins with acknowledgement. Just as he refused to listen to the wisdom of his counsellors, who tried to reason with him and convince him of the innocence of his queen, so he admits, even before Paulina's chastisement, 'I have deserved / all tongues to talk their bitterest'.[187] The grief is too great, however, for any save Paulina to upbraid the king. He has lost his son, his newborn daughter, and his wife. He has destroyed all that he held dear. 'Like Claudio and Posthumus,' Hunter observes, 'Leontes must endure the false belief that he has killed the woman he loves, but his suffering is far lengthier and more intense than theirs'.[188]

For sixteen long years Leontes does penance, 'his fond jealousies so grieving / that he shuts himself up'.[189] His friend Cleomenes tries to convince him that he has done enough, that he has 'performed / a saint-like sorrow', that he has 'paid down / more penitence than done trespass', and he beseeches him, 'do as the heavens have done, forget your evil / with them forgive yourself'.[190] Nevertheless, Leontes continues to protest his guilt:

> …Whilst I remember
> Her and her virtues, I cannot forget
> My blemishes in them, and so still think of
> The wrong I did myself, which was so much
> That heirless it hath made my kingdom, and
> Destroyed the sweet'st companion that e'er man
> Bred his hopes out of.[191]

Leontes has convinced himself that he is unworthy of forgiveness because the one whom he has so grievously wronged is dead. It is his sense of guilt, Hunter maintains, not his reason,

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[186] *Winter's Tale*, 3.2.205-212.

[187] Ibid., 3.2.213-14.

[188] Hunter, p. 199.

[189] *Winter's Tale*, 4.1.18-19.

[190] Ibid., 5.1.1-6.

[191] Ibid., 5.1.6-12.

that keeps him from violating the dictates of the gods.[192] Paulina, meanwhile, encourages both his performance of penance and his despair of forgiveness. In the end he swears not to marry again without Paulina's permission, and she, for her part, promises him a bride who, although not as young as his first queen, will be as his 'first queen's ghost'.[193] Within Paulina's promise Leontes finds that certain faith and hope in the future which Beckwith argues must be present in forgiveness.[194]

As in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the apparent tragedy of *The Winter's Tale* ends with a welcome revelation. Upon seeing the 'statue' of Hermione, Leontes is moved to shame; he feels that the very stone rebukes him 'for being more stone than it' in his treatment of the queen.[195] Like Claudio, however, Leontes has acknowledged his fault and performed his penance, and like Claudio he is now rewarded with forgiveness. Beckwith argues that this forgiveness is 'an exchange of love, and coterminous with the growth and possibility of love'.[196] For years Leontes has performed penance and confessed his fault; now, finally, he is granted absolution, in an unforeseen opportunity to prove his love to his still-living wife. When Hermione comes back from the grave and drapes herself around his neck, Leontes asks pardon of both her and Polixenes for putting his 'ill suspicion' between their 'holy looks'.[197] And so, as Hunter says, 'the forgiveness of Leontes sin…is made perfect by the erasing of its consequence'.[198]

The plot of *Cymbeline* revolves yet again around the apparent adultery of an innocent woman. In this case, however, it is, as Hunter says, 'the weakness of the hero that

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[192] Hunter, p. 201.
[193] *Winter's Tale*, 5.1.80.
[194] Bechwith, p. 10.
[195] *Winter's Tale*, 5.3.38.
[196] Beckwith, p. 10.
[197] *Winter's Tale*, 5.3.48-49.
[198] Hunter, p. 201.

allows strife to enter into the world of the play'.[199] Michael Friedman argues that in this play Shakespeare 'seeks to explore a common and imperfect love whose course is fraught with detours, roadblocks, and potential dead ends represented by male tendencies toward fickleness, suspicion, lust, and sexual irresponsibility'.[200] It is not inconsequential that from the beginning the play articulates an impossible reality to which women must aspire: the ideal woman must be 'fair, virtuous, wise, chaste, constant, qualified, / and less attemptable' than other women.[201] These requirements are in line with the Renaissance perception of women that Watson describes: 'women were at one and the same time revered and hated, admired and held in contempt'.[202] As had been mentioned previously, once married, a woman's identity was subsumed into that of her husband, and upon her shoulders rested his honour. Robert Miola explains that during this period 'chastity defines female identity, and, in some important sense, constitutes female essence and existence'.[203] It is perhaps therefore to be expected that Posthumus, in bragging about Imogen, should stress her faithfulness and declare to Iachimo that she 'exceeds in goodness the hugeness of / [his] unworthy thinking'.[204] Nonetheless, in a fit of masculine pride, Posthumus cannot resist Iachimo's challenge, a challenge that he himself calls into existence with his continuous bragging about his wife's unassailable virtue. Foolishly, he agrees to allow the scoundrel to test his wife's chastity.

To his dismay, Iachimo proves unsuccessful in his attempts to seduce Imogen. Determined as he is, however, not to lose his bet with Posthumus, he hides in Imogen's room and learns enough about her chamber and her body to convince Posthumus that she

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[199] Ibid., p. 153.

[200] Michael Friedman, *'The World Must Be Peopled': Shakespeare's Comedies of Forgiveness* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2002), p. 27.

[201] *Cymbeline*, 1.4.59-61.

[202] Watson, p. 162.

[203] Miola, p.188.

[204] *Cymbeline*, 1.4.145-46.

has been unfaithful. Unfortunately, R. A. Foakes points out, because 'Posthumus has idealised Imogen as a paragon of beauty and goodness…his image of her is all too easily destroyed'.[205] Posthumus believes himself a cuckold, and his lamentation soon turns to *furor* and a desire for vengeance:

> …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,
> It is the woman's part; flattery hers; deceiving hers;
> Lust and rank thought, here, hers; revenges, hers;
> Ambitions, coverings, change of prides, disdain,
> Nice-longing, slanders, mutability,
> All faults that name – nay, that hell knows – why hers.[206]

In his grief, Posthumus condemns all of womankind. Noble adjectives such as fair, virtuous, wise, chaste, constant are replaced by their antitheses. In this enraged state Posthumus instructs Pisanio to kill Imogen.

We do not see Posthumus again until the final act of the play. His anger cooled, his conscience upbraids him:

> …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 Imogen to repent, and struck
> Me, wretch, more worth your vengeance'.[207]

Posthumus is unique among Shakespeare's rash lovers in that he repents of his order to kill Imogen even though he still believes her to be guilty, because in doing so he has robbed her of the opportunity to repent of her sin. His remorse is such that he condemns himself to an unmourned death on the battlefield, fighting, unrecognised, on behalf of his wife's kingdom. When he survives the battle he is distraught and agonises that he is in his 'own woe charmed' because he 'could not find death where [he] did hear him groan'.[208] Nevertheless,

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[205] R. A. Foakes, *Shakespeare and Violence* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2003), p. 189.

[206] *Cymbeline*, 2.4.171-79.

[207] Ibid., 5.1.7-11.

[208] Ibid., 5.3.68-69.

he is not deterred; he remains determined to end his life 'by some means for Imogen'.[209] Posthumus, having repented and confessed his wrong, believes that the only way to atone for his sin is to sacrifice his own life: a life for a life. For Posthumus, death is a refuge; liberty; it is, to quote Stephen Cherry, a '*healing agony*'.[210]

In the final scene of the play, Iachimo, now a prisoner, confesses, in the presence of the entire court, how he deceived Posthumus. Upon hearing Iachimo's declaration, Posthumus abandons his disguise and cries,

> Ay me, most credulous fool,
> Egregious murderer, thief, anything
> That's due to all the villains past, in being,
> To come. O, give me cord, or knife, or poison,
> Some upright justicer.[211]

At this point Imogen tries to reveal herself, only to be struck down by Posthumus, who still believes her to be a pageboy. Pisanio then confesses to his master that he did not carry out the order to kill Imogen, and Imogen reveals herself, much to the joy of Posthumus and her father. The proof of her chastity, as Miola explains, 'restores order and enables the worlds of the play to cohere and continue'.[212] Imogen forgives Posthumous and, in doing so, teaches him how to forgive not only himself, but also Iachimo. Posthumus has learned from his rash outburst of anger at the beginning of the play; rather than a death sentence, therefore, he admonishes Iachimo to reform:

> The power I have on you is to spare you,
> The malice towards you to forgive you. Live
> And deal with others better.[213]

Having received forgiveness, Posthumus is now able to forgive not only himself but also the villain who was the true cause of his grief. Charles Williams beautifully sums up the final act of the play as 'a wild dance of melodramatic recognitions', reserving special praise for

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[209] Ibid., 5.3.83.

[210] Cherry, p. 2.

[211] *Cymbeline*, 5.5.209-214.

[212] Miola, *Cymbeline*, p. 188.

[213] *Cymbeline*, 5.5.419-21.

Imogen: 'the style of Imogen is the keynote of all; the pardon of Imogen the pattern of all; and both style and pardon, though so heavenly, are as realistic as anything in Shakespeare'.[214] The adultery proven false, Imogen is able to calm all rages and settle all hearts; as a result, 'pardon's the word to all'.[215]

Concluding Remarks

From the beginning, I have held with Sarah Beckwith that 'Shakespearean tragedy results from avoiding love, from failures in acknowledgement'.[216] Claudio, Leontes, and Posthumus all fail to recognise the real virtue of their loves, and in every case their doubt ends in 'death'. Only through acknowledgement are they able to find the forgiveness they need. Robert Grams Hunter agrees and suggests that

> within these plays, as within the nature of God, are forces which demand justice and forces which plead for mercy, and it is the reconciliation in forgiveness of these forces that permits the comedies to end happily. Furthermore, that forgiveness, like God's, is freely given by the offended party and it is merited, as it is in the miracle and morality plays, by contrition.[217]

In other words, these plays mirror the Sacrament of Penance. Each male character acts out a forgiveness ritual before he is allowed to experience the rebirth of love: a love made stronger for having been tried. Such was the case with Posthumus, for example. He did not wish his own death because he had broken some abstract precept, but rather because in breaking it he had caused harm to the woman he loved. Death was, in his eyes, the only way to atone for his sin, because, not knowing that Imogen was still alive, he did not believe forgiveness possible. Posthumus confirms Bernardine Bishop's hypothesis that 'the capacity

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[214] Williams, p. 115.

[215] *Cymbeline*, 5.5.423.

[216] Beckwith, p. 6.

[217] Hunter, p. 40-41.

to repent depends upon a belief in forgiveness'.[218] Once Posthumus realises that Imogen has survived his attempt on her life, he is then able to accept her forgiveness and move forward with the assurance of her love. Not all heroes, however, are as fortunate as Posthumus.

In the tragedies, death makes the further development of love impossible. It seems a logical conclusion, therefore, that this absence of love makes forgiveness, too, unattainable. In the cases of Macbeth, Othello, and Lear acknowledgement either comes too late or not at all. Each protagonist, in his own way, despairs: without the acting out of the forgiveness ritual, each is unable to forgive himself. These characters' hopelessness and defeatism mirrors the despair and fatalism often associated with Calvinist predestinarianism. Each of the plays is shrouded in sadness; destruction seems inevitable. If one believes, as Calvinists did, that 'all are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation',[219] then, when everything falls apart, when terrible choices are made, what hope is there of forgiveness?

In these six plays, then, we are presented with contrasting versions of guilt and shame. With the exception of Macbeth, forgiveness is freely and explicitly offered to each protagonist. Whether the outcome of each play is comic or tragic depends, therefore, on the degree to which their heroes believe in and accept the forgiveness they are offered. The false accusations of a jealous and insecure lover; the murder of a superior for self-advancement; the intense displeasure of a parent: these scenarios would have been familiar, if perhaps only by extension or analogy, to theatregoers in Elizabethan England. Likewise, shame, guilt, and even despair are emotions with which an audience can empathise. As Allan Bloom writes, in a small treatise on love and friendship in Shakespeare, 'once the immediate charms of the present are overcome one realises that our dignity or lack of it comes from the way we

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[218] Bishop, 32.

[219] Calvin, III.21.5.

confront that which is always in man'.[220] In Shakespeare, the pivot from comedy to tragedy is precisely this moment of acknowledgment.

[220] Bloom, p. 143.

FINAL REMARKS

When I first began this project I was surprised by how little had been written on the topic of forgiveness in Shakespeare. While this theme has certainly gained some momentum since the publication of Sarah Beckwith's excellent book, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* in 2011, much of the scholarship focuses on tangential subjects, such as mercy and pity. In addition, many of the available articles and books seem to emphasise the problem plays and the late romances—the most popular being *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*. Within this treatise, while I do discuss the explicit scenes of forgiveness in the aforementioned plays, I have also tried to explore forgiveness outside of the usual suspects. Consequently, Shakespeare's histories, tragedies, and Roman plays are all represented.

Throughout these pages I have tried to demonstrate that forgiveness is not only personal, but also contextual and cultural. My decision to organise the chapters contextually was born of a desire to create arguments grounded in pertinent contemporary and philosophical influences. I was not interested so much in whether or not Shakespeare himself read Machiavelli or Seneca, as I was in the ways in which these theorists, along with Aristotle and Calvin, shaped Renaissance English thought and cultural norms. Shakespeare's personal reading list aside, he was a man completely in tune with the changes and struggles of both his own era and those of human beings more generally. Consequently, whether or not he read *The Prince*, for instance, was less important to me than his knowledge of the principles expressed therein. When one considers English history and the politics of the time, the influence of Machiavelli is quite pronounced. Similarly, England underwent significant religious changes during the 16th and 17th centuries that deeply influenced the lives of every Elizabethan, and it is unimaginable that a man like Shakespeare could be

unaware of such momentous shifts in religious observance and practice. By placing the emphasis on the borrowing of ideas, rather than on direct referencing or adaptation of specific works, I have sought to write a thesis that allows readers to get a contextual overview of how the philosophical influences on Shakespeare and his contemporaries shaped their reactions to certain situations, and how this, in turn, influenced their forgiveness rituals and responses.

Further, I have argued, like Andrew Shifflett, that throughout the course of his career Shakespeare's treatment of forgiveness evolves.[1] As he matures, the playwright's treatment of forgiveness becomes increasingly obvious; no longer does one need to read between the lines to come to an understanding of his position. Consequently, when his plays are read in their entirety, one can trace the evolution of both the bard's own thinking and that of his contemporaries. When read in this way, Shakespeare's plays represent a coming to terms with, and blending together of, often competing paradigms. Slowly, however, forgiveness emerges as a theme in its own right, becoming most pronounced in his late romances.

Speaking of Shakespeare's *Henriads*, Shifflett argues these 'histories of forgiveness have been largely ignored in the vast body of scholarship on the first and second tetralogies'.[2] He blames this lack of attention on 'the so-called Tudor myth, which often had more to say about moral relationships between kings and God than kings and other human beings'.[3] In my chapter on Machiavelli and leadership, I argue that Shakespeare recognises the danger of giving forgiveness too freely, as Henry VI's acts of forgiveness are shown to directly contribute to the onset of civil war. In his second tetralogy, however, the playwright makes an uneasy truce with Machiavellianism as necessary to the preservation of the state. The kings in the second *Henriad*, both Henry IV and Henry V, are keenly aware of their

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[1] Andrew Shifflett, 'Shakespeare's Histories of Forgiveness,' *ELH*, 85.1 (2018), 33-53.

[2] Ibid, 33.

[3] Ibid.

obligation to protect their people, even if that means making decisions that would rightly be condemned if taken by a private individual. Throughout this set of plays, then, Shakespeare demonstrates that Christian forgiveness is difficult, if not impossible, for kings, especially when they act as individuals, because every act of a king has repercussions for his entire kingdom.

Having recognised that a difference must be acknowledged between the actions of a leader, as a leader, and those of an individual, I then moved on to a discussion of individual forgiveness as it relates to the desire to be avenged on one who has wronged us. Renaissance men were particularly obsessed with honour, as it was bound up with both their reputation and their standing within the community. Consequently, they were willing to do whatever was necessary in order to preserve it. Nonetheless, they were also Christian, and their religion commanded them to forgive, to 'turn the other cheek'.[4] In his Roman plays, Shakespeare explores just how difficult forgiveness is when honour is at stake. Many of Shakespeare's characters live in a world where honour *is* identity. Thus, their struggle to overcome their desire for revenge, when they even attempt it, is largely futile, and, in the cases where they do forgo revenge, it is often begrudgingly and at great cost to themselves.

In my third chapter I look at the evolution of the English legal system and how it came to be based upon Aristotle's concept of equity. Whereas previously common law and precedent had governed judicial judgments, without much consideration of circumstances, voluntariness, or intention, equity brought balance to the legal system. Many plays throughout Shakespeare's oeuvre contain trial scenes or discussions about the legality of certain actions. Using a cross-genre selection of Shakespeare's plays, I investigate the ramifications of autocratic governance and formalistic legal systems, and I explore whether

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[4] Matthew 5.39 says: 'But I say to you not to resist evil: but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other'.

or not forgiveness is an option within these structures. In the end, I conclude that forgiveness is only truly possible in a state that relies on principles of equity, and that equity itself can only survive within a stable society.

Finally, I consider how the Reformation, and especially Calvinist theology, changed the way in which people viewed their relationship with God, and, in so doing, altered how they interacted with one another. In the presence of predestination theology, shame, guilt, and despair became genuine problems; especially as the absence of sacramental confession made self-forgiveness increasingly difficult. In his late plays Shakespeare creates a forgiveness ritual that includes the elements of acknowledgement, contrition, and penance, found in the Catholic sacrament. In the romances the performance of this ritual between individuals, specifically between wronged women and the men who have accused them, allows for the possibility of self-forgiveness and a happy ending. However, in the absence of such a ritual exchange, forgiveness of the self becomes more complicated, if not altogether impossible.

Throughout the Introduction and the four chapters that follow, I acknowledge that I do not expound upon my own definition of forgiveness.The reason is simple: I do not believe there is a single definition. Rather, I am convinced that to create one inevitably leads to the production of false hypotheses and connections as one tries to force the text to conform to a predetermined formula. Such was the difficulty encountered by David Konstan in his book *Before Forgiveness*, where he developed such a specific set of parameters that he was left arguing that real forgiveness does not exist in the New Testament—something with which many, myself included, would disagree. To make up for the lack of material written about forgiveness in Shakespeare, specifically, I considered a wider array of sources dealing with definitions of forgiveness and forgiveness rituals. I read Desmond Tutu's *The Book of Forgiving*, a collection of stories from *The Forgiveness Project*, and Stephen Cherry's

Healing Agony: Re-Imagining Forgiveness, among others. These books all have one thing in common: the acknowledgement that forgiveness is deeply personal and often circumstantial.

Forgiveness is, admittedly, an enormous topic, and my dissertation barely scratches the surface. Indeed, each chapter could be used as the starting point for its own treatise on forgiveness. However, the key takeaway that emerges from this discussion is the constant reminder, throughout every chapter, that forgiveness is a profoundly personal process, and that, on account of this, a single, blanket definition of forgiveness is impossible. To attempt one definition would be to ignore the individuality and subtlety of being human. Shakespeare understood this reality. Circumstances, social status, intention, voluntariness—each episode of forgiveness occurs between specific individuals and within an extremely nuanced context. Forgiveness is, therefore, and, indeed, must be, as varied as the parties who enact it.

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