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**“A jest’s prosperity lies in the ear / Of him that hears it, never in the tongue / Of  
him that makes it” (LLL V.ii.849-51)**

A Thesis Presented

by

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Abstract of the Thesis

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After fifty years of religious upheaval, the question of religion continued to be a sociopolitical problem throughout the reign of Elizabeth I and into the reign of James I. Through his characters crises of identity and through the attempted incursion of Roman Catholicism into society by characters’ aligned with Spain, Shakespeare addresses England's anxiety over religious identity. By portraying the difference between Protestant and Roman Catholic ideology and rite, Shakespeare reflects the relationship between the Catholic and Protestant psychologies by flavoring his plays, throughout his career, with nuggets of Roman Catholic doctrine; these are not mementos, but rather instances wherein the practice of Catholic doctrine subverts the meaning of the doctrine.

## **Dedication Page**

First I would like to thank my parents William and Regina, whose love of reading encouraged my own and opened up a world for me. I would also like to thank my husband Gary, who facilitated my return to school; my daughters Alyssa and Regina, who understood and encouraged my continual thirst for knowledge; and my nephew Danny who is as thirsty as I am and who thinks I know a thing or two. Thanks to all the professors from various departments who filled my head with new ideas, and a special thanks to Bente Videbaek who made me realize that literature was my passion, and who always encouraged me to dig deeper. I will always be grateful for her support.

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## **Shakespeare's Audience**

Roman Catholic papists were a thorn in the side of Protestant rulers of England, although not thirty years before Elizabeth's reign began, the whole country was Roman Catholic. Indeed, the Roman Catholic Henry VIII often exchanged opinions with the Pope on religious questions. In 1522 Henry was given the title Defender of the Faith by the Pope for his challenge to Martin Luther in "A Defense of the Seven Sacraments." Henry's decision in the early 1530's to replace papal authority over the church with himself as head of the Church of England was motivated in large part by his desire to divorce Katherine of Aragon. His break with Rome led to the ransacking of the monasteries, and the translation of the Bible into English, but making it only available to the English nobility. Henry, as opposed to Continental Protestants, reaffirmed the Catholic practices of transubstantiation, the changing of the Host into the Body of Christ, clerical celibacy, confession to a priest, and the observation of feast days. Traditional Roman Catholicism was reformed under Henry VIII, and even though he was the head of the Church, England remained highly Catholic. After Henry, religion was reformed and changed with each successive Tudor ruler. Henry died in 1547 and his young son Edward VI came to the throne a more conservative Protestant.

Edward's Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, published the first and second versions of the Book of Common Prayer, which provoked a Catholic uprising in Cornwall. The second version of the book, published in 1552, was even more conservative and less Catholic. Edward, under the Protectorate of his Protestant uncle Thomas Seymour, tried to sever all links with Rome and the major Catholic power in Europe, Spain. He revised prayer books, rearranged

the church calendar and changed the Mass. Throughout England, during Edward's reign, parish churches sold off Catholic objects and replaced them with English Bibles and published homilies. In 1547 Edward mandated that there be no images, no vestments, and that the clergy be permitted to marry, but since his reign was short the changes he made did not have time to become entrenched.

Protestantism had not fully taken hold when Mary I came to power. Mary, daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, was a staunch Roman Catholic; she repealed the Reformation legislation, and the Mass was restored to Latin. She had new religious primers published, trying to reestablish the principles of Catholicism. Mary went so far as to marry a Catholic, King Philip II of Spain. This provoked the Wyatt's rebellion, which forced Mary to agree that Philip was not, and could never be King of England. The English wanted no foreign, Catholic as King. Mary restored heresy laws and the Marian persecution of Protestants began; some three hundred non-conformists were burned at the stake, and many Protestants fled to communities on the continent. Just as all Catholics could not be converted during the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI, so too Mary's Catholic reforms could not provide a complete transformation of belief in the five years of her reign.

When Elizabeth came to the throne in 1558, England experienced its third religious upheaval in little more than a decade. Stephen Greenblatt relates an incident in *Will in the World* wherein Elizabeth alerted her subjects on which side of the Protestant / Catholic doctrine debate she stood, on January 14, 1559, the day before her coronation:

At the Little Conduit in Cheapside [Elizabeth] took the English Bible proffered to her by an allegorical figure of Truth, kissed the book, held it aloft, and then clasped it to her breast. When some days later at Westminster Abbey, monks bearing incense, holy water, and candles approached to offer her their blessing, she dismissed them roughly: "Away with those torches... we can see well enough by daylight" (91)



Elizabeth did not approve of the superstitious use of papal imagery; Protestants relied on biblical scripture alone. Therefore as under Edward VI, there was a large-scale appropriation of Catholic properties, as well as the destruction of altars and vestments. Elizabeth brought Protestantism back, but a less conservative version than her brother Edward had imposed. In 1559 Elizabeth passed the Act of Uniformity as part of her religious settlement. She negotiated a middle way between Catholics and reformers, trying to avert a division in the kingdom. The Settlement was a compromise that both Protestant and Catholic zealots found unsatisfying, but most reasonable people accepted

The difference between the two religions, Roman Catholicism and Anglican Protestantism was laid out in the Thirty-Nine Articles and The Book of Homilies. At issue were the Mass, the Book of Common Prayer, priestly marriage, monastic property and vestments, Purgatory and rituals for the dead, pardons, images as relics and the invocation of saints and the Virgin Mary. The other major difference was the sacraments.

Roman Catholics believed there were seven sacraments: Baptism, Penance, Communion, Confirmation, Holy Orders, Matrimony and Extreme Unction. Protestants cut this down to two: Baptism, and Communion or The Lord's Supper. Protestants took these two from the Bible and considered the other five to have been created by the Apostles rather than ordained by God. Of the two sacraments that the religions have in common, Baptism is much the same for both religions; in both, Christians are christened as a sign of regeneration, whereby Original Sin is removed from the soul. The baptized person officially becomes part of the Church adopted through the intercession of the Holy Ghost. Both religions stress the baptism of young children, because a soul could not enter heaven without being baptized. The Lord's Supper is also a Sacrament of redemption or regeneration. The difference between the Protestant Eucharist and

the Catholic is the nature of the sacrifice. Catholics believe in transubstantiation, whereby the bread and wine are actually changed into the Body and Blood of Christ, and as such should be revered. The Protestant belief is that the spirit of Christ is present beneath the bread and wine, but they do not transform.

At first Elizabeth did not make it mandatory for Roman Catholics to receive Communion in the Anglican Church, but this changed in 1570 because the Catholic Church declared Elizabeth a heretic, and therefore a usurper. Pope Pius V declared that the Catholic Church did not recognize Elizabeth as a legitimate ruler, and therefore her Catholic subjects should depose her. She was excommunicated, and the Pope encouraged the murder of Elizabeth with absolution for the sin guaranteed in advance. This led to many plots to murder the queen, including the Babington, which ensnared Mary Queen of Scots, a Catholic, and eventually led to her arrest, imprisonment, and execution. This plot and the threat from Catholic Spain led to a stronger enforcement of anti-Catholic measures. Catholics were required to declare their loyalty to the Crown, or be thought traitorous. Catholicism was kept in check, since Catholics were forbidden to practice their faith, and were obligated to attend Anglican services every Sunday or be fined. Anyone saying a public mass was subject to huge monetary fines and a year in prison, and those trying to convert others were treated harshly. Since Catholics only permitted services to be said by an ordained priest, and since no new priests were ordained in England, or permitted to enter England, eventually the priests died out, but Catholicism held on.

The Catholic community appealed to James I in the hope of greater liberty and toleration after his ascension in 1603. The Catholic Supplication hoped to evoke for the king the memory of his Catholic mother, Mary Queen of Scots, and begged his permission to practice their religion. The Supplication was answered in a point-by-point refutation, the main point being that

Catholics would be unable to obey the King and the Pope. By 1604 the statutes against Catholicism were reenacted, and Jesuit priests were prosecuted. 1605 saw the Gunpowder Plot, wherein a group of dissidents, including Robert Catesby, Father Henry Garnet a Jesuit priest, and Guy Fawkes, plotted to blow up Parliament while the king was visiting. The conspirators were questioned, tried and executed; Shakespeare uses the popular cultural reference to this incident in *Macbeth*, when the Porter at the gate talks about equivocation (II. iii). Equivocation basically permitted Catholics to lie by circumventing the truth when questioned. Lying is a mortal sin since it breaks a Commandment, but equivocation was permitted.

Maurice Hunt, in his *Shakespeare's Religious Allusiveness: Its Play and Tolerance* asserts, “[I]t is evident from his plays that Shakespeare was interested in religious issues and knowledgeable about Protestant and Catholic doctrine” (xvi). This seems to be true since Shakespeare includes many references to Roman Catholic practices, and many plays are set in Catholic city states, or in the past. Shakespeare’s audience itself was at one time Roman Catholic, or at the most removed by only one or two generations. Shakespeare, born in 1564, was baptized in a Protestant ceremony at Trinity Church, but because his parents’ birth dates, prior to Henry VIII’s reformation, it is reasonable to assume that they were baptized Roman Catholic, but like most English families of the time they joined the church of whatever the reigning monarch believed, since heresy was a crime punishable by death. His audience, like Shakespeare, was aware of the religious instability that occurred during the time of Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Mary Tudor and continued to a lesser degree under Elizabeth and then James; therefore, the Catholic references in his plays were surely noted and understood. Shakespeare continued these references throughout his career, and throughout the different genres of his dramas.

## Part One

### The Early Years

#### *Richard III*

Shakespeare followed the three parts of *Henry VI* with *Richard III* early in his career, circa 1592.<sup>1</sup> The three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III* tell the story of the end of the War of the Roses and conclude with the beginning of the Tudor dynasty. Set in the time before Henry VIII reformed Roman Catholicism in England, *Richard III* stages Roman Catholic doctrine tempered with a Protestant sensibility.

Protestant reformers considered Roman Catholicism, along with its doctrine and rites, to be steeped in superstition. *Richard III* presents a superstitious king and immediately references a cure, a new Baptism. Edward IV “hearkens after prophecies and dreams” (I.i.58). Edward is superstitious and he believes someone whose name begins with the letter G, he assumes his brother George, Duke of Clarence, will murder his children. The new Baptism alludes to the fact that babies are named at their christening, and refers to the Sacrament of Baptism. Baptism is a sacrament of renewal whereby Original Sin is washed from the soul, and subsequently the soul is bound to the church. Presumably, Clarence has already been christened and entered the Roman Catholic Church; therefore, this could be seen as a purging of the old religion, and a christening into a new church, the Anglican perhaps.

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<sup>1</sup>Although it cannot be known when exactly Shakespeare wrote each play, we do have information on when some of them were staged, and when some were published in various forms. Jonathan Bate in *The Case For The Folio* (2007) points out the fluidity of dates with regard to the plays by pointing out “Shakespeare’s plays were not polished for publication; they were designed as scripts to be worked upon in the theater. To be cut, added to, and altered” (25).

Although both Roman Catholic and Protestant doctrine treated Baptism in much the same way, Protestant doctrine opposed the superstitious nature of Roman Catholicism, and the use of Latin in the administration of sacraments, the Roman Mass, and as the vernacular of the Bible. For Catholics, the ordinary person's relationship was to the Church, the embodiment of the Holy Ghost through a priest, and not to the Bible. Latin, a language unfamiliar to most people, required a priest to interpret scripture. People had no first-hand knowledge of scripture, which is what Luther's reformations sought to reverse, and this reversal is addressed by Article XXIV of the Thirty-Nine Articles, which calls it loath to God to minister in any language not understood by the people (Anglicans Online). When incense, candles and images that were venerated were added to the mix, it was considered that the Roman Catholic faith was drenched in superstition. The cure for Roman Catholic superstition and the king's superstition is to baptize Clarence with a new identity.

Shakespeare explores the difference between the Protestant individual identity and the Roman Catholic communal identity through the two forms of memorialization of the dead. Lady Anne and the halberdiers attend the stark ceremony of the heraldic procession of the corpse of Henry VI. Anne laments her dead father-in-law, invoking his ghost as her tears rain down, but they are a "helpless balm" (*R3* I.ii.14). Anne's tears do not help her wretchedness because she is grieving alone; there is no one to commiserate with her. Henry is not afforded the communal act of mourning, considered a charitable act for the souls in Purgatory by the Roman Catholics, and Anne's mourning is cut short by the appearance of Richard. Anne is the sole mourner for the king, but even she is lured from her mourning by the self-proclaimed Vice, Richard.

Richard as the Vice Iniquity (*III.i.83*) references the popular medieval morality plays, which had ended before Shakespeare's career began. Religion and statecraft were matters

deemed too serious for entertainment. Beatrice Groves in her book *Texts and Traditions* cites an Elizabethan proclamation from 1559, which Groves claims was penned by the Queen herself, which states that neither religious matter or states-craft should be staged since they were not “meet matters to be written or treated upon...nor to be handled before any [common] audience” (16). This speaks to the fact that the censors were to assure that the drama of the time was not overt in its depiction of religion. By Shakespeare’s time religious theater was a thing of the past, but the audience remembered the Vice as a comic seducer of mankind, who tried to lead man away from his moral duty.

Anne in speaking to the Vice uses language that connotes Richard’s evil, she calls him foul devil, and fiend; she is aware of what he is, yet speaks to him. Richard tries to lead her from her duty to mourn Henry because he is already in heaven. Richard is not a believer in Purgatory, and claims he himself has never mourned anyone, he wants to forget the dead; they cannot affect him. He makes his Confession, saying, “I did kill King Henry / ...’twas I that stabbed young Edward” (*R3I.ii.196-99*). Since there is no priest to give absolution, the confession hangs in the air, but it works on Anne because she accepts his ring. Richard himself is incredulous at his success; Anne has forgotten to mourn for both her husband and her father-in-law. Henry’s body, sent to the Tower, will await its proper remembrance by his wife in the combined lamentation with the other women.

Opposing the individual mourning of Anne is the communal ritual of lamentation. The women carry the memory of the dead through the play. The funeral rites for Henry VI are maimed, but his widow Margaret addresses the audience in asides and brings them into the play as a witness to the murders and betrayals by both sides in the War of the Roses. Margaret’s appearance produces a litany of offences perpetrated by both the Yorkists and Lancastrians. All

the characters in the scene are publicly held accountable for past actions; they will join again to mourn future casualties.

The death of Clarence unites his mother the Duchess of York with his children in their shared grief, and the death of Edward IV brings his wife Elizabeth into that circle. In the Folio of 1623 the stage direction preceding the entrance of the queen speaks of her unbearable grief, she enters with her hair untied (*R3II.ii.s.d.*). On the Elizabethan stage, loosened hair on a woman is a visual sign of grief; therefore Elizabeth's statement that she will wail her dead husband is compounded. The members of the family each moan and wail their particular loss as the most grievous, but Dorset voices the Protestant view that it is displeasing to God to wail for the dead. The women should be moving on from the dead Edward IV, and looking forward to the future, Edward V. Letting the dead go, and concentrating on the living, and the Protestant view of the futility of mourning is expressed by Richard, "But none can help our harms by wailing them" (*II.ii.106*). The Protestant view of wailing is that it is too feminine and too Catholic and Dorset and Richard endorse that view. For Catholics the practice of communal mourning was an important social function, as it kept the dead and the living part of one community.

The second lament, this time for the Prince and his brother York in the Tower, parallels the three Marys who visit the tomb of Jesus, when the women announce their relationship to the entombed children; the women are the mother, the grandmother, and the aunt. These women know the death of the children is imminent or a *fait accompli* because the guard, Brackenbury, has referred to Richard as the king. Their shared grief at this turn of events unites the women, and calls upon them to serve as the memory of the community.

Shakespeare references another Catholic custom, the tolling of bells, which alerted the Catholic community to a recent death, and called them to pray for the souls of the departed. The

bells enable prayers, a form of spiritual communion with God for a member of the congregation, to begin immediately. Shakespeare alludes to this custom by having Richard inquire the time of Buckingham, as he meditates, or goes through a form of spiritual introspection upon hearing that Richmond has landed. The striking of the bell that tolls the time interrupts Richard's reflection, and calls out the women who come to the Tower to mourn for their dead.

The Tower becomes the tomb of not only the children buried there by a priest, but also of Clarence who was murdered there. Clarence is stabbed and then drowned during his new baptism in a malmsey butt (*R3III.ii*). The second murderer, on Richard's orders to slay Clarence, profanes the sacrament of Baptism using it as a method of death. In addition to the children and Clarence, the body of Henry VI is placed in the Tower. It becomes the receptacle of the past.

The final lamentation is at this tomb. The mourners include Queen Elizabeth, the Duchess of York, and old Queen Margaret, all of whom lament the past with their Catholic ritualistic wailing. The women sit on "England's lawful earth / Unlawfully made drunk with innocent blood" (*IV.iv.31-32*). These women wail their own personal loss, and the communal loss of the country. Margaret, who shares their communal loss, joins the two Yorkist women, as the Duchess wails for Edward Plantagenet. There is ambiguity as to which Edward the Duchess is lamenting since there are three Edward Plantagenet: Edward, son of Henry VI and Margaret, who is a Lancastrian; the late king Edward IV; and his son by Elizabeth, Edward V, who are both Yorkist. The Lancastrians and Yorkists all come from the same Plantagenet, Geoffrey of Anjou. The Duchess recalls the fact that at one time they were all relatives, all Plantagenets. A common thread also ran through the religious ancestry of England at one time; in the not so distant past they were all Roman Catholics.



The Roman Catholic ritual of wailing the dead has a communal purpose. The women are “pew-fellows” as they commiserate in their grief (IV.iv.60). Margaret ticks off their shared losses:

I had an Edward till a Richard killed him;  
I had a husband till a Richard killed him;  
Thou hadst an Edward till a Richard killed him;  
Thou hadst a Richard till a Richard killed him.  
IV.iv.42-45

The Duchess remembers that Margaret killed her husband Richard, and her son Rutland. And Margaret reminds the Duchess that her son Clarence has also been murdered. Their sorrows have infiltrated each other; they are lamenting all their joined losses, because if they “[h]elp nothing else, yet do they ease the heart” (R3IV.iv.135). The women lament the dead so they will not be forgotten.

The women’s lament and the fact that it is All Soul’s Day (V.i.10) invoke the ghosts that haunt Richard on the eve of battle. All Soul’s Day is a Roman Catholic day of observance and prayer for the souls in Purgatory. It is a general commemoration of the dead, and as such provides for souls that have no family or friend to pray for them. Shakespeare’s ghosts, these souls, haunt the dreams of both Richmond and Richard, but to Richmond they have bring uplifting dreams. Richmond’s dream is visited by the souls of those Richard has killed, and they invoke victory. He has the “prayers of holy saints and wronged souls” (V.iii.255). These souls bring blessings and prayers to Richmond; they are not demons, because demons do not give blessings, nor do they pray for deliverance from death. These are souls from Purgatory, part of the communal Christian society they impart hope and confidence. As opposed to Richmond, Richard awakes in fear after the visitation of the self-same souls. They give a catalogue of the

crimes he has perpetrated against them, and all wish him to despair and die. All the ghosts ask Richard to remember them. They are the collective consciousness of the community.

The Roman Catholic ritual of mourning has been observed, and the community has wailed its dead; it has remembered its past. The women have lamented the blood spilled in the War of the Roses and Lancaster and York together will beget the Tudor dynasty. The play ends with hope for the future, but as the audience knows, the progeny of this union: Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I will bring a future wherein the lawful earth of England will be soiled by the blood of both Protestant and Catholic martyrs, victims to the religious upheaval brought about by the break with the Catholic doctrine begun by Richmond's son Henry VIII. Shakespeare employs the Roman Catholic communal ritual of wailing the dead as a way of atonement for past transgressions, and then subverts it, by pointing to a future that will not remember; the country will again be split into factions by the reformation of the Roman Catholic religion.

## *Romeo and Juliet*

One of the major factors that produced the Reformation was dissatisfaction with the Roman Catholic clergy. Although Shakespeare's representation of Catholic clergy is not as harsh as other writers' of the time, it is not quite benign either. Catholic priests and nuns were thought to be habitual fornicators, and were often depicted that way on the stage. Protestants held that the Catholic clergy was too worldly and corrupt, and as such Cardinal Wolsey, under Henry VIII, had the money and power to build Hampton Court Palace, which was grand enough to be confiscated by the king and become a royal residence. In contrast, Shakespeare's clergy are members of the Franciscan order, owning no possessions and dedicated to helping the poor.

Shakespeare's inclusion of Friar Laurence, the voice of reason in *Romeo and Juliet*, and the pseudo friar, Friar Lodowich in *Measure for Measure*, along with the novice Isabella, references the theological issues that divided Catholic and Protestant doctrine at this time. All three are members of the Franciscan order and like their patron Francis of Assisi, the Franciscans take a vow of poverty. The Franciscans are a mendicant order; they depend directly on the charity of the people, and since Franciscans do not own property of their own, tithes are what sustain them. The friars spend their time preaching the Gospel and serving the poor, traveling in pairs and barefoot. Shakespeare chooses to make his friars part of one of the most unworldly orders, but they both spend time trying to fix secular problems, and in doing so employ questionable methods.

Shakespeare evokes religion and references the Roman Catholic view of relics as holy objects, as Romeo and Juliet make a religion of their love. Not only do they exchange sins

through kisses and touches, but in *Will in the World* Greenblatt avers that Shakespeare pushes the religious language, in the exchanges between Romeo and Juliet, to such an extent that it evokes “erotic sainthood” (111).<sup>2</sup> Romeo refers to Juliet’s hand as a holy shrine wherein [his] lips, are likened to blushing pilgrims which are ready to worship (*Rom.* I.v.94). Juliet picks up on this by calling him a pilgrim, equating him to pilgrims that visit holy shrines and touch the relics and are thereby blessed. This exchange highlights the Catholic use of images as representative of the sacred, and the Protestant view that the veneration of images and objects is idolatry. The Homily ‘Against Peril of Idolatry’ equates the images of saints, the focal point of pilgrimages, with pagan idolatry. From the perspective of either religion this exchange is blasphemous. The lovers consider their touching a religious experience, and so need clergy to sanctify their vows.

Friar Laurence is the wisdom and sanctity of this community. Meeting with Romeo for confession, Friar Laurence mixes his spiritual guidance with secular plans. His knowledge of herbs and plants, and his plan to turn the marriage of Romeo and Juliet into a method for ending the feud between the Capulets and the Montagues places him in a secular realm. The friar speaks of plants and herbs given by the earth for the nourishment of mankind, but man can twist these blessings for evil use. The friar is a healer with both plants and herbs, but also with “holy physic” (II.iii.48). So as the plants can be used as poisons, so too the blessing of the sacraments that give grace can also lead to strife if they are conferred in error. The friar offers the sanctity of confession and of marriage, but advises Romeo to proceed more slowly.

Heedless of the friar’s advice Romeo and Juliet are formally wed that night with vows of holy matrimony spoken before the selfsame friar. Friar Lawrence prays for heaven to smile on

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<sup>2</sup>The hagiography of female sainthood is rife with scenes of the torture that these women endured for their religion, usually involving sexual torture such as the cutting off of breasts and rape.

their marriage, and again counsels moderation, because the pleasures of the world are trivial, but since they are so adamant in their love the church will make them one through the grace of the sacrament of marriage. Romeo and Juliet disregard the friar's advice, as does the friar; he is afraid that the couple will consummate the marriage out of wedlock. His counseling has been ineffectual. Seeing that there is no divorce in the Roman Catholic doctrine, and only death can put asunder what God has joined together, the rush to marriage is for the physical union, not for the spiritual union; therefore, heaven does not smile on this marriage. Romeo and Juliet, with the help of Friar Lawrence, flout patriarchal authority with the clandestine wedding, and forgo the communal aspect of marriage.

The community further breaks down: Romeo murders Tybalt, and Juliet, already a wife, is promised in marriage to Paris. For their transgression against society, Romeo is banished, which to him is akin to purgatory, torture, hell itself (*Rom.III.iii.18*). Romeo is punished for his mortal sin of murder, by the civil law, and spiritually he is headed for the tortures of either purgatory or hell, but he acknowledges only the temporal, his separation from Juliet, not the spiritual punishment. Romeo cannot see the blessings he does receive: a commuted sentence from the Prince who sets aside the law, or the blessing of sanctuary from Friar Lawrence who also offers absolution and grace to comfort him. The fact that Romeo contemplates suicide, a sin that cannot be absolved, proves that the friar is unable to do his spiritual job. He cannot comfort either the desperate Romeo, or Juliet who also threatens suicide. Since the friar's philosophy and wisdom cannot comfort the lovers he moves to a secular solution: Romeo will flee to Mantua and Juliet will have a pseudo death.

The friar in his secular frame of mind advises Juliet to falsely accept Paris's proposal, and his advice includes permission to commit the mortal sin of lying to her parents. A potion he

provides will accomplish her simulated death. Shakespeare provides the friar with healing herbs as a medic, and then introduces a twisted use for those herbs, a use bordering on magic.

Lawrence does not even have to prepare the potion, but has it on hand. The friar, in trying to help the lovers is committing sins himself. He does not belong in the secular world manipulating a plot, but rather belongs in the spiritual world offering guidance against committing sins. Juliet has doubts, she fears it may “be poison which the Friar / Subtly hath minister’d to have [her] dead” (*Rom.IV.iii.24-25*). Juliet uses the word “subtly,” which illustrates that doubts are creeping into her mind. She questions the friar’s motives thinking that he is worried about his honor if he has to marry her a second time. Juliet has placed the friar in the secular world by suspecting him of nefarious motives, and thinking that he is worried more about secular honor than spiritual grace. The friar has failed at his spiritual job, but Juliet cannot hold onto her doubt, because the friar is a holy man (*IV.iii.29*). Shakespeare, through Juliet’s words reaffirms the friar as a man of holiness and goodness.

Reestablished as a holy friar, Laurence places blame for Juliet’s death on the Capulets. The friar whose job is truth and comfort means well, but his plot is costing him his own grace. He has abandoned spiritual counsel for secular counsel. Friar Laurence blames Providence since an outbreak of plague places him in the center of his plot, and assures that he will have to assume responsibility for his actions.

In blaming heaven for foiling his plan, Friar Laurence acknowledges that a greater power has had a hand in his failure. Although the friar is definitely not evil, his actions do speak to a clergy that commit offenses as mentioned in Article XXVI of the Thirty-Nine Articles. The Catholic friar commits sins and the Protestant article of faith acknowledges that the clergy can be fallible. The friar’s plan has failed the lovers both spiritually and secularly. Romeo dies with two

murders and suicide on his soul, and Juliet dies with the sin of suicide on hers. Friar Laurence has lost the souls of both Romeo and Juliet to hell through mortal sin, and only upon arrest does the friar confess and take responsibility for his actions, but the Prince redeems the friar once more saying: “We still have known thee for a holy man” (*Rom.V.i.269*). This holy man has wrought much destruction because he stepped out of his role as spiritual advisor, and into the role of secular machinations.

Shakespeare portrays a Roman Catholic friar, as a member of an order that is the antithesis of the commonly held belief of the worldliness and corruption of the Roman Catholic clergy, which the Reformation sought to curtail. The audience is reminded several times that the friar is a good man that means well, but Shakespeare subverts this portrait when the friar advocates lying as a method of enacting his plot. Friar Laurence provides spiritual guidance, but when his spiritual advice is not heeded he steps into the secular world where his advice is heeded, but to disastrous results.

## The Middle Years

### *Hamlet*

Less than a decade after *Richard III*, Shakespeare, perhaps anticipating renewed religious upheaval upon the death of Elizabeth I, revisits the doctrinal conflict between Roman Catholic and Protestant forms of confession, mourning, and ghosts in *Hamlet*. *Hamlet* presents a ghost in the guise of a father. Shakespeare addresses one of the major differences between the Roman Catholic and Protestant religions, the belief in Purgatory, through the ghost. While there is no doubt about the intentions of the ghosts in *Richard III*, they bless Richmond and wish him victory, and they curse Richard and wish him dead, the ghost of Hamlet's father is ambiguous. His presence reminds the audience of the suppression of the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, but there is the fact that he asks for revenge.

Catholics believed that only saints went straight to heaven; everyone else went to Purgatory to atone for the sins that were not cleansed by penance. Purgatory, between heaven and hell, was a place of torment where the soul spent time until it was fit for heaven. Although Purgatory was in no way benign, it was a concept that left open the door between the living and the dead. Family, friends, or even the community could lessen the tortures exacted on the souls of the dead through prayers and masses said on their behalf could lessen the time the soul had to spend in Purgatory. This intercession for the dead by the living created communal Catholicism; Protestantism had a different view.

Article XXII of The Thirty-Nine Articles speaks specifically against the institution of Purgatory. It "is a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but



rather repugnant to the Word of God” (Anglicans Online). Since the Bible does not speak of Purgatory, it was thought to be a thing invented by man, and so not something that should be given merit. That Purgatory was a contentious subject can be surmised from the fact that Article XXII is not enough on the subject, but is also revisited in the second Book of Homilies, specifically in Homily VII, which says that Scripture only acknowledges two places for the soul to go after death, either heaven for the blessed, or hell for the damned. (Anglican Library)

Protestants believed that salvation came by faith alone; indeed only God could save the soul, and prayers for the departed did nothing since God’s will is unchangeable. Therefore, since there was no Purgatory, there was no need for communal ritual to get the soul to heaven. A soul upon judgment would go either to heaven, or to hell. There was no possibility of a visitation from a ghost according to the Protestant faith, because a soul could not leave hell, and did not want to leave heaven. The belief in ghosts disappeared slowly from Elizabethan and Jacobean England, but continued on the stage as a theatrical device. Shakespeare exploits this device in *Hamlet*, as the nature of the ghost vacillates from Catholic purgatorial ghost to Protestant demon.

Appearing to the watch three times, clad in battle armor, and recognizable to Horatio from the frown he has seen before, the ghost seems the image of old Hamlet. Horatio says, “Before my God, I might not this believe / Without the sensible and true avouch / Of mine own eyes” (*Ham.I.i.66-68*). Horatio swears to God that seeing is believing, but this is against the basis of both religions, where things are taken by faith alone.

The nature of the ghost is questionable, is it a thing, an apparition, or the king himself, what is its purpose, and is it a portentous figure? Horatio is called upon to speak to it, because he is a scholar and therefore knows Latin, the language of exorcism, in case it comes to that. Horatio demands that the ghost speak, because it was believed that ghosts only speak when

spoken to. Horatio questions the apparition as if it is from Purgatory; there was a standard for this type of questioning. Stephen Greenblatt explains the practice of a *discretio spirituum* in *Hamlet in Purgatory*, which he explains is a sort of “judicial ritual.” These were a set of questions, which allowed for the determination of whether a spirit was good or evil. The six key questions are: *Quis? Quid? Quare? Cui? Qualiter? Unde?* Who? What? Why? To Whom? How? From Whence? The simplified version merely asks *Nomen? Causas? Remedium?* Name? Reasons? Cure? (103). Horatio’s questions all fall under the simplified version, but the ghost waits for Hamlet.

Hamlet, chided by his mother and uncle because of his overwhelming grief for his dead father, seizes upon the report of this ghost of his father. Hamlet seemingly does not ascribe to the Protestant view that excessive mourning goes against heaven because the death of fathers is natural and inevitable. Claudius denies Hamlet’s need to grieve, and also his request to return to Wittenberg (*Ham.I.ii.117*). Shakespeare, in establishing Hamlet as a student at Wittenberg recalls Martin Luther who was a student at Wittenberg in 1517. Hamlet also alludes to the Diet of Worms in IV.iii; Polonius’s body is attended to at “a certain convocation of politic worms” (IV.iii.23). Martin Luther was condemned in the city of Worms in 1521. Hamlet is recalled from Protestant Wittenberg and has an encounter with Catholic Purgatory in the form of his father’s spirit.

Horatio says that the spirit is as much like Hamlet’s father as Horatio’s two hands are like each other. Hamlet is therefore looking for his father in the spirit; he cannot be objective. He questions it as he should, but waits for no answer, and calls it father. The ghost speaks, and presents himself as a soul from Purgatory. He describes a place of fires, which burn him by day and condemn him to walk the night in penance for his sins. The spirit gives a glimpse of the

afterlife and his punishment for the sins he has committed during his lifetime, but he is forbidden to give the details. He makes known his cause; he wants revenge because he was murdered.

The spirit alludes to the Garden of Eden, likening his brother Claudius to the serpent who stings with the poison he pours in his ears. The ghost claims he was, “[c]ut off, even in the blossoms of [his] sin / Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled / No reck’ning made” (*Ham.* I.v.83-85). He is unconfessed, unabsolved, did not receive the Eucharist, and is without the rites of Extreme Unction. The spirit may not be from Purgatory, but old Hamlet was a Roman Catholic, and he has been denied the cultural ritual of Last Rites, therefore he cannot rest. The ghost exits, calling, “Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me” (I.v.98). The translation is To God, to God, to God. Remember me; remembering a person to God is praying for them. The ghost does ask for prayer, therefore he seems to be from Purgatory.

Hamlet explains the ghost to Horatio, also a student from Wittenberg, the birthplace of Protestantism, “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy” (I.v.86-87). He proffers an explanation that calls for faith alone, that there are more things in the world than can be explained by any religion. The men who have seen the ghost swear on the hilt of a sword, which forms the image of a cross, a form of Catholic iconography that they will not reveal what they have seen. Article XXXIX of the Protestant articles of faith addresses the swearing of oaths. Oaths should only be sworn in the cause of faith and charity, in justice, judgment, and truth (Anglicans Online). Hamlet calls for the swearing of an oath not to reveal the truth. The iconography of the cross and the spirit of the oath belie Protestantism, so that when Hamlet calls the ghost a perturbed spirit it still seems a spirit from Purgatory since it can eventually rest, but there is the fact that it wants revenge.

Miles Coverdale, publisher of the first complete English Bible in 1535, in his book *Remains* affirms, “Neither it is a wonder, if the devil can disguise himself in the form of a dead man, seeing he can transfigure himself into an angel of light” (475). The Protestant view of any seeming spirit is that it is a demon. The demon puts on a sweet shape to lure humans to sin. Hamlet, with his Wittenberg education, is not wholly convinced that the ghost is his father, no matter how much he wants him to be. The “Murder of Gonzago,” the play within the play, is another test of the ghost’s veracity. The ghost accomplishes his goal of convincing Hamlet he is telling the truth because Claudius’s leaves the play abruptly after the poisoning of Gonzago, and Hamlet assumes the king’s distemper and choler to be the result of a guilty conscience.

Claudius’s reaction to the play is to go to confess and repent his sins. The Protestant confession made by Claudius is an unmediated confession to God; Protestantism had moved away from private confession, and self-examination became the usual method for confessing sins and achieving reconciliation. Roman Catholic Confession is said to a priest as a conduit to God, and Hamlet’s father, a Roman Catholic died unaneled; he made no auricular confession, and so died with his sins on his soul. Interestingly the two forms of confession are connected by the image of poison being poured into the ear. The ghost tells Hamlet that this is how he died, but he died before he was able to pour the poison of his sins into the ear of a priest. Claudius leaves the play after witnessing the pouring of poison into an ear on stage and immediately tries to confess and repent. There is no priest to hear his confession, but the poison of his sins are poured out, but they are unheard by Hamlet. Shakespeare presents both forms of confession, the missed opportunity of a Roman Catholic Confession by old Hamlet, and the wasted opportunity of a Protestant Confession by Claudius.

Hamlet does not hear his uncle's confession, but he does hear the tale that the ghost relates. Just as Hamlet has no objectivity when he first sees the ghost because Horatio tells him it is his father, he has no objectivity when hearing the tale because the ghost tells him that the tale will make him want to revenge. The ghost gives just enough information about Purgatory, the common knowledge of a fiery place wherein a soul is purged of sin, in order to convince Hamlet it has first-hand knowledge and it is thereby not a demon. The ghost also spins a tale of murder, of a gruesome death, implicating Claudius whom Hamlet already hates because he married his mother so soon after his father's death. The clincher is that the ghost went to his death without proper rites, and it has correctly answered the questions of the *discretio spirituum*. The ghost is correct; the tale has made Hamlet swear revenge, but Hamlet will wait for another opportunity, when Claudius can die with his sins unconfessed; instead Hamlet pours barbs into his mother's ears.

The daggers of Hamlet's words pierce the ears of Gertrude and she reflects on her sins, but the appearance of the ghost changes the direction of the scene. Hamlet calls upon guardian angels to protect him, which is a strange thing for Hamlet to do if he believes the ghost to be his father from Purgatory. The ghost wants Hamlet to stop his mother's reflection, to "step between her and her fighting soul" (*Ham.III.iv.129*). Gertrude, like old Hamlet and Claudius misses the opportunity to reflect and repent. She does not see the ghost, even though it showed itself to Horatio and the watch, it does not show itself to Gertrude, old Hamlet's wife. Perhaps the demon knows that Gertrude will know it is not her dead husband's spirit. The ghost demands a murder, a new sin, which will blight not only his, but also Hamlet's soul. A ghost from Purgatory would not want to add to his sentence with more sin, but a soul from hell is doomed already; this is not Hamlet's father.

Hamlet speaks not of his step-father, but of his king (V.ii.72), when listing Claudius's sins. The remembrance is no longer personal. Hamlet kills Claudius in an act of rage rather than a plotted revenge. The appearance of the ghost, who must be a demon, has indirectly led to the death of Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern, all killed by the alteration of Hamlet after seeing the ghost. Gertrude, Claudius, and Laertes all die by ingesting poison; old Hamlet is killed by poison too, as Marcellus points out, "Something is [indeed] rotten in the state of Denmark" (Ham.I.iv.100). Shakespeare purges the last vestiges of this poisoned, rotting regime, including Hamlet, who dying unshrived like the rest, will go to hell. Hamlet, like old Hamlet, wants to be remembered; he asks Horatio to tell his story. Without Purgatory the memory of the dead is left in the graveyard. Just as the ghost begged to be remembered, so too remembrance is what Hamlet begs of Horatio. The ghost of old Catholicism haunts *Hamlet*, like it haunts Shakespeare and the Elizabethan and Jacobean world, but as the rituals of remembrance die out, so too will the old religion.

## The Later Years

### *Measure for Measure*

The pseudo friar of *Measure for Measure* is a secular leader who dons the habit of a Catholic friar, which places him in the spiritual world as an advisor. As in *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare examines the relationship between religious commitment and secular affairs. The Duke dons his disguise, and uses its spiritual access to the motives and intentions of his subjects in order to mandate changes in the secular world.

Abandoning his secular duties, the Duke turns over the job of enforcing the laws of Vienna to Angelo. Angelo is left to be the moral compass of the city, it is left to him to mete out mercy as he sees fit, he holds the power of life and death, and it is left to his judgment to enforce or mitigate the law. The Duke does not give any reason for his sudden departure, only that he does not want a formal exit because he does not like to be the focus of public attention. He will achieve this by putting on the attire and persona of a non-descript Franciscan friar.

Lucio voices the opinion that the Duke left to attend a commission to broker peace with the King of Hungary. His discussion of this reason with the First Gentleman leads to a further discussion of grace “Grace is grace despite all controversy” (*MM* I.ii.24-25). This alludes to the religious division between the Catholic and Protestant doctrines as to whether or not good works are necessary for salvation. The Protestants believe that *Sola Fide*, faith alone, is the path to salvation. Article XI of the Thirty-Nine Articles speaks of the justification of man by the sacrifice of Christ, which is in itself judicial pardon for sin, and salvation is received solely through faith (Anglican Online). Roman Catholics believe that grace through good works is also

necessary for salvation, in addition to faith. By taking on the guise of the Roman Catholic friar, the Duke will do good works for his subjects, and by faith alone leave Angelo in charge of the law.

Angelo relies on an old law, which ensnares Claudio and Juliet, but there are mitigating circumstances, which Angelo refuses to acknowledge. It is true Juliet is pregnant by Claudio, but they are contracted to marry, and the common law contract, a mutual recognition as husband and wife, in the presence of witnesses, is a valid marriage; only the church requires a religious ceremony. Claudio and Juliet are therefore within the law, but as Angelo cannot see beyond the letter of the law, he shows no mercy. Angelo succumbs to the temptation of power, but unlike the Duke, he has not been given his prerogative to rule by God, but rather by a man. Article XXXVII of the Thirty-Nine Articles spells out the power of civil magistrates. Princes or Dukes are not given power to “the ministering either of God’s Word, or of the Sacraments,” but rather over all things temporal (Anglicans Online). The Duke abandons his responsibility of divinely given justice to the humanly sanctioned rule of Angelo, whom he knows to be all too human, because the Duke knows of Angelo’s treatment of Mariana. Friar Thomas, the Duke’s spiritual advisor, chides him that it is his duty as secular leader to enforce the law; he has been given grace from God in order to rule firmly yet mercifully. The Duke’s knowledge of Angelo’s lack of mercy should have precluded him from a position of power. In the past Angelo broke his marriage contract to Mariana because her dowry is lost at sea. Angelo’s inability to show mercy to Mariana sets the stage for his treatment of both Claudio and Juliet, but especially of Isabella.

Isabella is a novice of the Poor Clares, the sister order of the Franciscan friars. They are a very austere order, known for their discipline, which includes the restriction that the nuns may not speak with a man unless in the presence of the prioress, and even then must cover their faces.



Presented as the opposite of her brother Claudio, who cannot control his sexual urges, Isabella would like an even stricter regimen because she feels she has no need of worldly things. The inclusion of Catholic friars and nuns and their vows of life long chastity recalls Article XXXII of The Thirty-Nine Articles, which outlines the Protestant view of the clergy and celibacy: “[Clergy] are not commanded by God’s Law, either to vow the estate of single life, or to abstain from marriage: therefore it is lawful also for them... to marry at their own discretion” (Anglican Online). Roman Catholic clergy were forbidden to wed; they were supposed to follow the example of the Virgin Mary and remain celibate. Protestants did not venerate Mary as a holy figure, but only as the mother of Christ. These opposing views were another division between the two faiths.

Lucio considers Isabella to be heavenly and saintly for renouncing the world by becoming a nun, and Shakespeare alludes to the mystery surrounding the Catholic clergy through Angelo who implies that Isabella’s chastity is something sacred which he wants to penetrate and destroy (*MM.II.ii.171*). Isabella’s sanctity is made known by her nun’s habit, which should mark her taboo, but instead stirs up lusty feeling in Angelo; Isabella then stands as the virtue Virginité while Angelo exhibits the opposing vice, Lust. Angelo is asking Isabella to commit the same sin, and break the same law, for which Claudio is condemned. Angelo demands Isabella give up her virginity in order to save her brother, but she does not succumb to the stereotype of the stage nun, she refuses his advances, but she does become obsessive about her own purity, and thereby commits the deadliest sin, the sin of pride. Isabella considers her virtue more important than her brother’s life, even though to yield would not be a sin since she is forced, but chastity should be spiritual, not just physical, and so retaining her virtue becomes for Isabella a matter of honor. The spiritual has become the social, and since the secular law cannot save her, so the spiritual

must. The secular and the spiritual become jumbled in a land where the Duke cedes the power of secular authority for the moral authority of a poor friar. The fact that this is pointed out by Lucio, a man who frequents brothels and is in jail for a moral offence, is meant to illicit laughter from the audience (*MM* III.ii.89-90).

The Duke does not want to have to enforce unpopular laws, and be thought ill of, so he takes on the guise of a holy friar and confessor so that he may feel good about giving his subjects absolution and grace, which will be imparted by the sacrament of Penance. He does this even though he does not have the Roman Catholic spiritual authority imparted by the sacrament of Holy Orders. Protestant doctrine though makes provision for absolution granted by an unqualified person through Article XXVI of the Thirty-Nine Articles; because the recipient of absolution does not lose grace because of the unworthiness of the minister (Anglicans Online). Roman Catholicism does not permit any but an ordained priest to administer sacraments, therefore to a Roman Catholic the hearing of confession and the giving of blessings by the Duke are sacrilege. Although his point of view, which is that Shakespeare writes with a Catholic sensibility, is skewered in the opposite direction of this essay, David Beauregard in *Catholic Theology in Shakespeare's Plays* does admit that the Friar Lodowick's unhooding at the end of the play is part of a "trope of Protestant apocalyptic exposure of Catholic corruption" (68). This trope employed by Shakespeare reverses his seemingly favorable depiction of friars and nuns, but this friar is not evil so Shakespeare allows the pseudo Roman Catholic friar to minister under the guidance of the twenty-sixth article of the Protestant faith

Besides the Duke's stratagem of disguising himself as a friar, he devises a bed trick in order to catch Angelo in the same circumstance for which Claudio has been condemned. The bed trick is a device wherein Angelo thinks he is having sex with Isabella, but Mariana is

substituted. Mariana surrenders her maidenhood in place of Isabella, and the Duke as friar approves the contract to marry as binding. He sanctions Mariana's intimacy with Angelo; this is a mixed message. The law is either applicable or not; if it is, then the Duke is advocating a crime, if it is not the Duke should free Claudio. Instead the Duke flouts his own agent's authority and acts as a bawd, setting up the terms and conditions of Angelo's intimacy with Mariana in place of Isabella. The Duke is proposing a loophole whereby if the betrothed couple has sex then they are considered married. The Duke is too worldly for his disguise.

The disguise of a friar does not permit the Duke to save Claudio. The Duke dressed in the friar's robe produces the Seal of Office, a secular display of authority, in order to enact his third stratagem. His plan, much the same as the bed trick, is to substitute one head for another so that Claudio will not be executed; fortuitously a pirate dies of plague. As Duke, he has legal power over life and death, and as friar will give spiritual comfort for the soul of the prisoner who must be executed in Claudio's stead. Wearing two hats, as both spiritual friar and secular duke, the final scene is set for a judicial proceeding involving punishment and clemency, but also absolution and penance.

Reinstated as the center of secular authority, the Duke returns to deal with the legal complexities that have arisen in his absence. The Duke as friar confessor, privy to the secrets of the other characters, still forces a public display of accusation and confession. Isabella and Mariana are forced to accuse Angelo, confess the shame he has caused them, and beg for his life. It is understandable that Mariana would want him spared, but why would Isabella plead for the life of her would-be rapist? It seems that this is Isabella's penance for leaving the cloister and speaking to men without the prioress's presence. Isabella's public shaming, physical arrest, mental abuse, as she is scorned as a liar, her acceptance of her brother's death, and her

forgiveness of Angelo who has trespassed against her, all function to restore her to her pristine state, her state before she left the cloister. Indeed, after her plea for Angelo she speaks not a word.

The Duke listens to the accusations, but does not act, he is ineffectual; there are no resolutions given for any of problems that have occurred in his absence; he exits again and leaves Angelo in charge again; unwilling to function as the secular leader, the Duke returns cloaked in the friar's robe. Lucio unhoods the friar revealing the Duke, who finally takes back the reins of state, and metes out justice while still dressed as a friar. The justice meted out thereby takes on the form of absolution and penance. The sentences are all paired: Escalus, who has done no wrong, and his opposite Barnardine, the murderer, are pardoned, Angelo escapes a death sentence, but is given a life sentence as husband to Mariana, Lucio must marry the whore Kate Keepdown, Claudio, who is revealed to be alive, and Juliet are forced to marry, and it seems the dribbling dart of love has pierced the Duke's heart (*MM* I.iii.2); he asks Isabella to marry him.

The Duke enrobed as a monk asks the novice, still in her habit, for her hand in marriage, but Isabella remains silent. The erstwhile novice and the sometime Friar cannot marry; Roman Catholicism forbids marriage for the clergy. Although Isabella has not taken final vows she is still pledged to the church as a novice; therefore Isabella's silence could also be construed as acquiescence since the audience is familiar with the previously cited Article XXXII of the Thirty-Nine Articles, which provides that the clergy did not have to abstain from marriage, and were free to marry at their own discretion. As a comedy *Measure for Measure* looks forward to marriage at its end, but no one in this comedy marries of his or her own accord marriage is forced upon them; even Claudio and the heavily pregnant Juliet do not go through a religious ceremony and are ordered to marry at the end of the play. The play ends with punishment and

clemency, and the characters are paired for the exit, but what of the Duke and Isabella? Shakespeare leaves the ending conspicuously ambiguous. Isabella's silence is not a willing consent, but neither is her silence a denial.

*Measure for Measure* includes a duke, who for a time cedes secular authority for spiritual authority, but that does not mean he has it; he gives pastoral counsel and hears confession, but is not ordained. The confessions he hears are not sacramental, but rather civic. Although Shakespeare departs from the anti-Catholic convention of most literature of the time, and presents his nuns and friars as figures of Virtue, they do exhibit the sin of pride and are too connected to secular affairs. Although the Duke and Isabella do not participate in a marriage ceremony at the end of the play, Shakespeare skewers the Roman Catholic doctrine that prohibits marriage for the clergy by the proposal enacted while the couple is dressed in religious vestments, and by the silence of a novice who should have been outraged by the Duke's proposal. The ambiguity allows them to be perceived as a nun and a ghostly father.

## Part Two

### Pairing the Spaniard and the Moor

Elizabethan and Jacobean England's anxiety over religious identity was exacerbated by the external military threat presented by Roman Catholic Spain, along with the internal threat presented by the recalcitrant Catholics who remained in Protestant England. Three times in his canon, Shakespeare goes beyond criticizing Catholic rite, and creates characters that are either overtly Spaniards or are symbolically so, and pairs them with a Moor, a visible outsider.

Although an examination of the Moors and an in depth examination of their relationship with the England of Shakespeare's time are beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth noting that Shakespeare pairs the Spaniard and the Moor as twin threats in *Titus Andronicus*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Othello*.

Shakespeare clearly delineates the Moorish characters: Aaron, a Moor in the service of Tamora queen of the Goths; the prince of Morocco, described as a tawny Moor; and Othello, who is the Moor of Venice. The Prince of Aragon is clearly a Spaniard as Shakespeare seems to reference Henry VIII's first queen Katharine of Aragon, but the other two outsiders, Tamora and Iago seem to be Spaniards by inference. The Visigoths, who Shakespeare terms Goths, sacked Rome in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century and from there moved into Spain where they ruled as Catholics until being vanquished by the Muslims in 711. The Muslims ruled for over five centuries, but the Spanish continually fought back, so that by the time of Shakespeare's plays the Moors and the Spaniards had shared a long and complicated history with much mingling of cultures, which Shakespeare exploits by pairing a Moor with a Spaniard in each of these three plays.

## *Titus Andronicus*

*Titus Andronicus*, written circa 1592, is set in Rome during the late 4<sup>th</sup> century just prior to the fall of the empire to the Gothic hordes that would invade and bring an end to Rome's empire, and with it an end to classical civilization. Tamora, the foreign queen, the seeming representative of the Spaniard, begs for the life of her son by emphasizing the sameness between Goth and Roman, Rome being the representation of Reformation England, she calls them part of the same brethren (*Tit.* I.i.107). Titus differentiates the two societies by ignoring her plea, but Saturninus collapses the difference by taking Tamora as his wife. Saturninus aligns himself with the alien Goth whom he chooses because of her hue, which he points out in an aside. Francesca T. Royster takes a unique perspective in her article, "White-limned Walls: Whiteness and Gothic Extremism in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*;" she focuses on just this hue, which she defines as skin color, and explores the denaturalization of the whiteness of the Goths rather than the blackness of Aaron.

Tamora is described as having a hyper-white color, and Aaron reinforces the fact that white is a color, which he calls a "treacherous hue" (I.i.116). As Aaron is visibly othered by his blackness, so too is Tamora equally othered by her whiteness, whose hue Saturninus prefers over that of the Roman Lavinia. Royster calls the various hues a "kaleidoscope depiction of cultural insiders and outsiders" (Royster 436). This seems like the correct reading since Tamora's coloring, like Aaron's, is an immediate sign that she is outside this society. Shakespeare others his characters visually with two extremes of color, blackness and ultra-whiteness, so that they are easily recognizable to his audience, at a time in theater when appearance was often a shorthand

for characterization,<sup>3</sup> but to suggest that Shakespeare's focus is on racial coloring is an incorrect modern assumption. Rather, Shakespeare means for this othering to be drawn along the lines of religion.

We know that Tamora is Roman Catholic from Saturninus's proffer of marriage. He has a priest and holy water ready for the ceremony along with burning tapers (*Tit.I.i.328-29*). The Reformation denounced holy water as symbolic in the same way as statues, and also did away with the veneration of objects, calling them popish symbols. Roman Catholic symbolism can also be seen in the pseudo Eucharist as Tamora eats the body and blood of her sons. Belief in transubstantiation was a major difference between the Roman Catholic and Protestant religions, and although the scene references the Philomel story from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, among others, it also parodies the Catholic Eucharist, whereby the Host is believed to actually transform into the body of Christ (*V.iii.194, 202*). Saturninus releases Tamora from her shackles and marries her, thereby drawing her, her two sons, and her servant Aaron into the heart of the Roman society. Shakespeare visually sets them above the society with the stage direction, "[t]hey enter aloft (*I.i.304*). Tamora, her sons, and Aaron attempt to dismantle this society by orchestrating, abetting and carrying out the rape and dismemberment of Lavinia, who symbolizes the Roman political body itself. Lavinia's mutilated and raped body, a representative of the domestic, mirrors the incursion into the body politic of Rome by the Goth army, the Goth royals, and the Moor. The violation of both the domestic and the politic represents the looming collapse of Rome.

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<sup>3</sup>In a time when *mise en scene* was sparse, and men and boys played women, the audience understood symbolic characterization. Profound emotion was signified by a woman with loose hair, which is an affront to decorum, whether it represent the madness of Ophelia in *Hamlet*, grief in Queen Elizabeth in *Richard III*, or Lavinia, the victim of rape in *Titus Andronicus*. So too skin color signified an othering of the character.



Included in the Introduction to *Titus Andronicus* in the Arden edition edited by Jonathan Bate, is a drawing attributed to Henry Peacham. (39) This drawing is considered to be contemporaneous to the first productions of *Titus Andronicus* on stage. The drawing depicts a few costumed characters, all of whom are white except for Aaron who is depicted as totally black. This depiction of Aaron's blackness stands in stark contrast to the portrait of the Moorish Ambassador to Queen Elizabeth in a portrait dated 1600.<sup>4</sup> The ambassador has light skin and eyes, which would seem to indicate that the skin color of the Moors in Shakespeare's plays has more to do with emblematic othering than with a realistic depiction of individual skin tone or with the modern idea of race, as does Tamora's whiter than white hue, which marks her as Goth and not Roman. Emily Bartels through her book "Othello and Africa: Post Colonialism Reconsidered," reminds us that 'race' in the Renaissance included lineage, clan, and species, and that race with regard to conquest and imperialism did not come to England until after the Reformation (47-48). The word 'Moor' in early Modern England was a religious term used to identify non-Christians, rather than a racial identifier.

Shakespeare seems to align himself with Elizabeth I and her various edicts, which were meant to rid England of specific blackamoors, and not an entire race. In edicts dated 1596 and 1601 Elizabeth I issued three Privy Council orders regarding captured blackamoors and negroes.<sup>5</sup> These edicts authorized the exchange of these blackamoors for English prisoners held by Spain. This expulsion was fueled by political and economic circumstances.<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth did

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<sup>4</sup>A photograph of the painting of *Abdulguahid, Legatus Regis Barbariae In Angliam*, is thought to be the likeness of Ambassador Amad ben Adel; *Othello*, Arden edition ed. E.A.J. Honigmann (London, 1997) 3.

<sup>5</sup>July 1596 Acts of the Privy Council of England, ed. By John Roche Dasent 32.vols. (London:Machie 1902) 26:16-7 and 20-1, lists the first two edicts, and Russ McDonald in *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare* cites Paul Hughes's and James Larkin's publication of *Tudor Royal Proclamations* in 3 vols, (New Haven: Yale UP) 276-77, 302. The two sources give the exact wording of the edicts and provide Elizabeth's justification for her actions.

<sup>6</sup>Royster cites the serious harvest failures and famines of the 1590's as well as the overpopulation and resulting unemployment as a cause of Elizabeth's proclamations. These edicts were in addition to the edicts against masterless men, even Shakespeare had to be under the protection of a nobleman's acting troop in order to take his plays to the

not attempt to deport all blacks or Moors from England; the first deportation was of ten men and the second eighty-nine men. In her article “Too Many Blackamoors: Deportation, Discrimination, and Elizabeth I,” Emily Bartels illuminates the fact that the original ten blackamoors were taken as prisoners from a Spanish Colony, and that they had originally been brought into England by Thomas Baskerville; therefore this deportation was not a mass deportation, but a prisoner exchange. By the words of her edicts, Elizabeth I draws a wall around her liege subjects united in Protestant Christianity, which leaves the Catholic Spaniards, the infidel blackamoors, and Islamic Moors outside. Like Elizabeth I, Shakespeare does not banish blackamoors from his plays, but rather specific Moors who are attempting to invade and undermine the society of their respective play.

Like the blackamoors addressed by Elizabeth’s edicts, servants to a Spanish colony, Aaron is also a servant, he is not Christian, free, white, or English. He is an outsider, and as such is distanced from the Christian audience. Although he is Tamora’s servant, Aaron claims that Tamora is “bound to [his] charming eyes” (*Tit.* I.i.515).<sup>7</sup> Charming eyes accuse him of witchcraft, a claim which will also be made against Othello by Brabantio. Since witchcraft was a hanging offence, Shakespeare suggests that Aaron is no less peripheral to society than a witch. Aaron is likened to a raven, a black fly and a coal-black Moor; he also equates himself with a serpent, an adder that uncoils as it readies itself to strike (II.ii.34036). Aaron as such is a descendant from the medieval Morality Plays,<sup>8</sup> wherein blackness connotes not only villainy, but also demonic glee. Like the Vice depicted in those plays, he speaks directly to the audience,

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countryside during times when the London theaters were closed. Elizabethan England was not a place where people were free to roam around.

<sup>7</sup> This citation refers to the Arden 1995 edition of *Titus Andronicus* edited by Jonathan Bate who renders all of Act I into one scene.

<sup>8</sup> Aaron, brother of the biblical Moses, known for his persuasive speech, convinced the Israelites to return to the worship of Baal while Moses was away receiving the Ten Commandments from God.

sharing his plans, but Aaron does not utter a word until Act Two, and then only when alone. Reference is also made to Aaron's hiding of a bag of gold under an Elder Tree. This reference aligns Aaron to Judas Iscariot, the ultimate enemy, who hanged himself on an Elder tree. These analogies would not be lost on a Christian audience. Aaron describes himself as the absolute other, the Devil. Like the Devil, he instigates, and insinuates himself into society. He delights in villainy for its own sake, as showcased by his catalogue of transgressions (*Tit.* V.i.63-66).

Aaron's ultimate invasion into this society is through his son. "Turning Turk in Othello: The Conversion and Damnation of the Moor," a study by Daniel Vitkus sees conversion as a sexual transgression. This sexual link is prevalent in the three plays: *Titus Andronicus*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Othello*, whereby Shakespeare addresses miscegenation, in this case the mixing of two religions. Marcus broaches religious miscegenation by pointing out that Tamora gave birth to a child fathered by an irreligious Moor (*Tit.* V.iii.120). In fact two mixed children are born in *Titus Andronicus*. Aaron and Tamora have a black child, who ultimately will be raised by the Roman State since his parents are executed, but Aaron's countryman Muly and his Roman wife produce a child fair enough to pass as the offspring of Saturninus and Tamora. The Moor has successfully invaded the Roman bloodlines; the essence of Moorishness then is not black skin, but is instead an inner, foreign, unchristian difference. The interesting fact of these two babies is that Shakespeare is pointing out that there is a community of Moors already in Rome. The fate of the children of Aaron and Muly is left ambiguous, but the existence of the white Moor proves that Rome has become vulnerable to outside populations. The Moor can invade, impregnate and pass in the same way as the Roman Catholic can hide within the society of Protestant England.

Tamora and Aaron are Shakespeare's first pairing of the Spaniard and the Moor, and together they are a presence that precipitates the fall of this society. Shakespeare kills off the current Catholic threat to society with the deaths of Tamora and her two sons Demetrius and Chiron, and by placing the Goth army currently supporting Lucius inside Rome, he prefigures the historical fact that the Goths will overthrow Rome. Shakespeare revisits the threat of a Spanish Catholic invasion in *The Merchant of Venice*.

## *The Merchant of Venice*

Since *The Merchant of Venice* is a comedy, the foreign invasion is not a military threat but rather a social threat, whereby the Prince of Aragon tries to enter the society through the marital bedroom. Aragon tries to win Portia, her wealth, and a place in Belmont society by attempting to pass a test designed by her dead father whereby only the right suitor will pick the right casket. The theme of the casket test is that appearances are deceiving and this theme applies not only to the caskets and what they contain, but also to the suitors. Neither the Prince of Aragon nor the Prince of Morocco are taken from Shakespeare's sources for *The Merchant of Venice*.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it must be assumed that Shakespeare included these two as suitors and chose only them, besides the Venetian Bassanio, to take the casket test for a purpose, and as R.W. Desai reminds us in his essay "Mislike Me Not For My Complexion," included in *The Merchant of Venice New Critical Essays*, Shakespeare's introduction of the princes of Morocco and Aragon as suitors indicates a carefully crafted "ethnic semiotics" (315). This directly relates to the symbolic meaning of the metals that make up the caskets of the casket test, and how an outsider would not know the significance.

Given that the outsider is wholly determined in relation to what makes up the community of insiders, Shakespeare gives a listing of Portia's potential suitors and their various foibles. The characteristics of the suitors are such that Portia finds them all unsuitable. Only Falconbridge the Englishman gets off with just a minor complaint about his clothes. Portia admits the fact that she and he cannot converse due to their lack of a common language, which she admits is just as much her problem as his. Conspicuous in their absence from this group are the two suitors who

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<sup>9</sup>Sources ascribed to the story are *Il Percone* and *Gesta Romanorum*.

actually do put their future on the line to win Portia and her wealth; one the Moorish Prince of Morocco, the other the Spanish Prince of Aragon. Aragon's difference is not described but instead is pointed out to the audience by the very fact that he speaks.

Shakespeare uses Aragon to voice the terms of the test, and by doing so ensures that the audience knows that Aragon understands what he risks. A man who fails the test not only risks the loss of Portia and all her worldly goods, but he also assures himself no progeny, no posterity, and no eternal life through heirs. The test is a manifestation of Protestantism's tenet of *Sola Fide*, faith alone.<sup>10</sup> The Prince of Aragon's biggest concern is to get what he deserves, and he makes a point to speak of people who do not merit the status they have attained. This point of view is in direct contrast with Article Eleven of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the English Protestant faith, which avers that God gives merit through faith, not on account of good works or what we think we deserve.<sup>11</sup> Aragon's point of view is typical of the Roman Catholic belief in doing good works in order to accrue grace to offset time in purgatory.

Further, through Aragon, Shakespeare seems to be directly referencing Don Carlos of Spain, who was thought to be insane, thus the blinking idiot he finds in the silver casket.<sup>12</sup> Shakespeare, by means of Aragon, is commenting not only on Spain's prince who is a fool, but also on the Protestant view of the superficiality of the Roman Catholic faith, with not only its spectacle and outward show, but also its reliance on worldly deeds, rather than faith alone for salvation. The threat of this Roman Catholic entering the society is cut off by his erroneous

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<sup>10</sup>Luther advanced this tenet as one of the principles of his reform: faith alone, no more good works to amass grace, no rituals, the abolition of Purgatory, and open access to the Bible, no more priestly interpretation.

<sup>11</sup>See Thirty Nine Articles specifically Article XI.

<sup>12</sup>Don Carlos, eldest son of Phillip II, plotted against his father and was imprisoned until he died. Don Carlos was jealous of Phillip's right hand man Alba who Don Carlos saw as unworthy of his position in the Empire. The connection Shakespeare makes between Aragon and the reading of Aragon as Don Carlos is strengthened by the fact that Don Carlos was a member of the Order of the Golden Fleece; Bassanio equates Portia to the Golden Fleece, which all the suitors have come to find (*MV* II. 177-178).

guess, and Shakespeare thereby neuters the Prince and the Roman Catholic Spanish threat. Even though Aragon may be a blinking fool, he does accept his fate and patiently bears his anger.

The Prince of Morocco represents the cultural, diplomatic and commercial interaction between England and the Moors. Like the Prince of Aragon, Morocco tries his luck at the casket test. Shakespeare dresses him and his train in white to contrast with their tawny skin. Morocco's first scene is a catalogue of contrasts wherein he sets himself against fair northerners. Shakespeare builds an image of a Moor. Morocco carries a scimitar with which he fought for Sultan Suleiman, referencing Suleiman the Magnificent, the great foe of the European crusaders. In referencing virgins as a testament to his good looks, Morocco touches on the Muslim reward in the afterlife of wives who will always be virgins. Islam was at the time considered either a pagan religion or a Christian heresy, wherein the Muslim paradise was a place of earthly delights including food, wealth and sex.<sup>13</sup> Morocco perceives himself as handsome, brave, and worthy of Portia. She in turn cannot see past his complexion. (*MV* II.vii.87) All of Morocco's attributes are shown on the outside, and that is how he chooses the gold casket.

Fittingly, Morocco mentions the golden Angel coin of England in the same breath that he says that all rich gems are set in gold. What Morocco hopes to win is a rich gem encased in gold: on the surface, Portia, but symbolically Belmont the double for England. The Moors were familiar with the English coin from the delegation in London, and also from the English factors and ambassadors who resided in Muslim society, which was a facet of the maritime merchant economy.

The commercial enterprise and attendant risks to ships and cargo are threads that run through *The Merchant of Venice*. Shylock speaking of Antonio's ventures to Tripolis, the Indies,

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<sup>13</sup>See John Manderville description of Islamic practices which creates a picture of the lustful Turk in *The Travels of John Manderville*, ed. C.W.R.D. originally published in 1589 in Hakluyt's *Principle Navigations*. Mosley (London: Penguin, 1986) 104

Mexico and England speaks to the far ranging lands to which the merchants sailed, and also the risk of losing everything to: “land rats and water rats, water thieves and land thieves [by which he means] pirates” (*Oth.I.iii.22-25*). Elizabeth I did not condone piracy, nor did she discourage it; it made money for England, and so was tolerated. James I, on the other hand, did not accept piracy, and so English pirates were forced to abandon their country. Shakespeare alludes to piracy later when Iago refers to Othello as a pirate in his taking of Desdemona, “he hath boarded a land carrack” (*I.iii.50*). A carrack is a treasure ship. The capture of rich cargo ships, such as the Spanish *Andrew* captured by the English in Cadiz in 1596, or the Turkish pirate ship, which was captured in the Thames estuary in 1617,<sup>14</sup> meant not only lost cargo, but also sailors taken as prisoners.<sup>15</sup> English sailors taken by Spain were prisoners of war, and Englishmen taken by Muslims led to their imprisonment and slavery.<sup>16</sup> Sailors could be bought out of slavery, or they could convert to Islam and thereby attain their freedom.

The Merchant of Venice speaks to the English mercantile system, and the consequences of both leaving home, and opening your door to strangers. Shakespeare explores the twin threat of Spanish Catholics and Islamic Moors, as well as enemies within England’s own borders. These are represented by the visible outsider, but also by the malignant insider.

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<sup>14</sup>For more on Piracy see Barbara Fuchs’s “Faithless Empires: Pirates, Renegadoes, and the English Nation.” *ELH*. vol 67 no. 1 (Spring 2000) 45-69. Fuchs sees 16<sup>th</sup> century piracy as a battle between Christianity and Islam, but waged for economic reasons.

<sup>15</sup>Richard Hakluyt’s twelve volume *Principal Navigations* (1589) talks of Englishmen held as slaves (6.294)

<sup>16</sup>Slavery at this time was not confined to Africans. Englishmen, women, and children were captured by Ottoman pirates, as were peoples from other lands in the Mediterranean and North Atlantic.



## *Othello*

Iago is the seeming Spaniard in *Othello*. He is christened with a name from Spanish history and Honigmann strengthens this connection in a note in the Arden edition of *Othello*, in which he points out that Iago uses the word ‘*Diablo*’ for Devil (II.iii.157). Honigmann notes that it is Shakespeare’s only use of this word (192). Emily Bartels also points out Shakespeare’s reference to Spain in her book, *Speaking of the Moor*, when she cites Eric Griffin’s essay “Un-Sainting James: Or Othello and the ‘Spanish Spirits’ of Shakespeare’s Globe.” Bartels claims that the names “Iago and Roderigo are haunted by Spanish “spirits” (169). It seems more than a haunting though when one notes that Saint James of Compestela, the patron saint of Spain,<sup>17</sup> translates to Santiago. The historical Iago is Spain’s patron saint and is a well-known slayer of Moors, and although Shakespeare’s Iago does not physically kill Othello, he does kill his soul by inciting him to murder Desdemona and thereby damns his soul forever.

Shakespeare’s use of the Spaniard as a threat to English society speaks to a long-standing animosity between Protestant England and Roman Catholic Spain and by extension, the Pope. The break with Rome and the antagonism between England and Spain were further compounded when Elizabeth I authorized the execution of Mary Queen of Scots. Mary, like Elizabeth I was the granddaughter of Henry VII, and had been the hope of the Catholics as a contender for the throne of England. With the excommunication of Elizabeth by the Pope, many plots swirled around Mary including the Ridolfi Plot, backed by Catholics, and the previously mentioned Babington Plot. The Babington Plot enlisted the help of a Jesuit priest and included plans for a

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<sup>17</sup>Interestingly, Pelayo, a descendant of the Goths was the keeper of the relics of St. James of Compestela. This connection of Pelayo and Iago continues a thread running from *Titus Andronicus* to *Othello*.

foreign invasion, an insurrection by English Catholics, and the assassination of Elizabeth. The plot failed and after nineteen years as a continual threat, the execution of the Roman Catholic Mary Queen of Scots precipitated a war with Spain, which lasted from 1585 until 1604, and which saw the launch of the Spanish Armada in 1588.<sup>18</sup>

Although a providential storm thwarted the external threat by the Spanish Armada, Catholic Spain and the Catholic Church remained a threat. Shakespeare mirrors the historic fate of the Armada with a storm that protects Cyprus from an invasion by the Turks in *Othello*. He continues the comparison in *Othello* by pointing out the internalization of the threat with the plot by Iago, which leads Othello to question his men, “Are we turned Turk” (*Oth*.II.iii.166). Iago like the conspirators against Elizabeth seem to be part of society, but in reality they are plotting against it.

Iago is the opposite of the Prince of Aragon. In no way is he the blinking fool, nor does he accept his fate at being passed over for promotion, but rather he uses his wit to exact revenge. Iago never says what he means except in aside; he equivocates in all his dialogue. It should be noted that equivocation was a device adopted by Roman Catholic Jesuits who were arrested during the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras.<sup>19</sup> The doctrine of equivocation allows for truths expressed partly by speech and partly in the mind. Since God hears not only what one says aloud, but also what is in one’s mind, it is not considered a sin for Roman Catholics to speak a partial truth. Equivocation permitted the speaker to use double meanings to tell a literal “truth,” all the while concealing a deeper meaning. Protestants considered equivocation a Catholic

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<sup>18</sup>The intention was that the Spanish Armada invade England, and overthrow Elizabeth, and thereby stop English involvement in the Spanish Netherlands and English privateering in the Atlantic. The mission failed due to an English attack, strategic errors on the part of Spain, and bad weather. The Armada was only part of the Anglo-Spanish War 1585-1604.

<sup>19</sup> In February of 1585 Parliament banished Roman Catholic priests from England and ordered the return of all Englishmen studying in seminaries abroad.

justification for lying.<sup>20</sup> Famously, a Jesuit priest named Henry Garnet used equivocation in his defense during his trial for his involvement in the Gunpowder Plot. Shakespeare alludes to Garnet and equivocation in the Porter scene in *Macbeth*, and it seems he used this technique of half-truth in his personification of Iago.<sup>21</sup>

Montano warns Iago to tell the whole truth of his altercation with Cassio and Iago replies, “Touch me not so near” (*Oth.II.iii.213*). This exchange exemplifies Iago’s penchant for always delivering more or less the truth, but never the whole truth. Again, Iago equivocates on the word “lie” when he tells Othello that Cassio did lie with Desdemona, and permits Othello to imagine all the connotations associated with the word. Iago uses equivocation in order to exploit the ambiguity of meaning. He invites the misconstruction of what he says in dialogue by using language that suggests what appears to be, but which is actually not what he suggests at all. Iago states the obvious, but defines himself equivocally, “I am not what I am” and “were I the Moor I would not be Iago / In following him I follow but myself” (*I.i.65, 57-58*). Not only is Iago not what he seems, he negates the phrase that God makes in stating His identity ‘I am what I am,’ he is the opposite of God. Also, Iago both divides himself from, and conflates himself with the Moor. Iago is not a Moor, but in following the Moor, he follows himself, therefore it must be assumed that they are going in the same direction, heading toward the same goal. Iago’s success in attaining his goal depends upon Othello the Moor. Thus, Shakespeare again pairs the Spaniard and the Moor. Iago calls his allegiance to Othello nothing more than show, and his hidden motives are in direct opposition to his outward presentation. Iago’s traits of treachery and equivocation are evidence of his othering as a Roman Catholic Spaniard.

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<sup>20</sup> Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments*, from the mid 1500’s, gives detailed accounts of Christian martyrs, who faced death rather than equivocate as truth what they believed to be false.

<sup>21</sup>See *Macbeth* II.iii

Like Aaron who describes himself as the ultimate other, the Devil, Iago is also equated with the Devil. Although he does not have cloven hooves, he does not die when he is stabbed. He teases the audience; he does not confirm that his is a fiend, but only bleeds and does not die. This linking of Aaron the Moor and the Roman Catholic Iago with the devil recalls both John Foxe's writings and Martin Luther's *Table Talk*.<sup>22</sup> Both speak of an Antichrist who "is the pope and Turk together; a beast full of life must have a body and soul; the spirit or soul of antichrist is the pope, his flesh or body the Turk" (Luther 193). The pope is the soul of the antichrist because he will not amend his ways. Roman Catholicism believes in the same basic principles as the Reformed church, but the pope and the clergy have superseded their authority and so lose souls. The flesh or body of the antichrist belong to the Turk because of the notions of Islam put forth by the travel narratives of the time, which talked of the rewards of the flesh, and the Islamic paradise as a place of earthly delights. This is in direct opposition to the Christian division of things that belong to the world and things which are heavenly. To be sure, when Christian unity and peace with Spain became a focus under James I's rule, this duality would become a problem. Shakespeare though, exploits the connection between Catholic and Moor, thereby creating a joint threat to Protestantism. This threat in these plays exploit the sexual tone of the Turkish body, since all the Moors in this study try to enter their respective society through the bedroom.

Shakespeare's three named Moors, Aaron, the Prince of Morocco, and Othello, all speak eloquently and with knowledge of classical literature. These characters were perhaps modeled on the men who made up the Ottoman delegation that visited England in order to facilitate an Anglo-Moroccan alliance between Elizabeth I and Ahmad al-Mansur. This political entente began in 1589, and Ambassador Ahmad ben Adel arrived in London in 1595.

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<sup>22</sup>Martin Luther in *Table Talk* noted this association, as did John Foxe in *Actes and Monuments* (London: 1596); and Foxe goes on to warn against the misguided attitude toward Turks in England, which could soon lead to invasion and conquest.

There was a growing body of work at this time by which the Ottoman Empire entered the imagination of the English public. Nabil Matar in *Turks, Moors and Englishman in the Age of Discovery* claims that “there were dozens of plays about Turks and Moors,” (4) and Mark Hutchings in the appendix to his article “The ‘Turk Phenomenon’ and the Repertory of the Late Elizabethan Playhouse” gives a listing of these productions, which portray the Ottoman Empire in the person of a Turk or Moor who threatens Christendom.<sup>23</sup> Added to these is the travel literature of the time, which includes Richard Hakluyt’s *Principle Navigations*,<sup>24</sup> Richard Knolles’s *Generall Historie of the Turks*,<sup>25</sup> and Leo Africanus’s *The History and Description of Africa: and the Notable Things Therein Contained*.<sup>26</sup> Even with all this exposure, Elizabethans did not make distinctions between Moors, Turks, or black Africans. The terms Turk and Moor are used synonymously, and generally refer to adherents of the Islamic faith.

Conversion though was a critical issue to Elizabethans and Jacobean; the term to ‘turn Turk’ was invented and embodied on stage in the character of the Renagado. To turn Turk was in fact treasonous in a country where religion was part of the state, but Englishmen were converted nonetheless by assimilation, capture and enslavement. Jonathan Bate notes in “Othello and the Other: Turning Turk, the subtleties of Shakespeare’s treatment of Islam” that “[o]n one occasion, 2,000 wives petitioned King James and Parliament for help in ransoming their husbands from Muslim captivity.”<sup>27</sup> Nabil Matar in *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* puts this number at 3,000 in Algiers and 1,500 in Sali (97). The piracy

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<sup>23</sup>Hutchings gives a listing of ‘Turk’ plays c. 1579-1604, which speaks to the popularity of this genre.

<sup>24</sup>Hakluyt’s, *Principle Navigations* published in 1589 and again in 1598-1600 brought to the reading public an account of English expeditions to Africa. Included in these is *The Travels of John Manderville* whose descriptions of Africans match those of Leo Africanus.

<sup>25</sup>Knolles’s, *Generall Historie of the Turks* (London, 1603) recounts the efforts of the Venetians to defend against the Turks in the Battle of Lepanto in 1571.

<sup>26</sup>Africanus’s *The History and Description of Africa*, translated by Pory, outlines the history of a Moor turned Christian who then returns to Islam.

<sup>27</sup>From the *Times Literary Supplement*, October 19, 2001.

problem and the resulting return to England as renagados, those Christian captives who had converted to Islam, was far reaching enough that sermons were preached against conversion, and a form of penance and reconciliation was established for those who wished to be reinstated into the Church of England.<sup>28</sup> If like Othello the Renagado bears the mark of Islam on his body, circumcision, he cannot return to Christianity and become metaphorically uncircumcised since his difference is inscribed in his flesh. The Returnee's to the Church of England therefore had double identities, and mirrored the historical back and forth conversions in England from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism twice in the space of fifty years. Shakespeare addresses the resulting hybridity in *Titus Andronicus* and conversion in general in both *Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*.

Africanus brings up conversion in his *Historie*; he says that there are two kinds of Turks, natural, meaning born of Turkish parents, and accidental or converted Turk. He adds that Christians became Turks after some great passion, for example revenge, for temporal gains such as honor or greatness, or for a release from slavery (1015).<sup>29</sup> Shakespeare, like Africanus, seems to be taking a stand that conversion is not truly possible.

Indeed, Othello identifies with the Turk as he takes his own life (*Oth.V.ii.349-54*). The crossing of cultures breeds confusion and can end disastrously for Shakespeare's characters who attempt it; they are either slain or die childless. With Othello Shakespeare metes out the harshest penalty; while he is permitted to repent his murder of Desdemona, he not only dies childless, but is doomed for all eternity through the sin of suicide.

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<sup>28</sup>See Edward Kellett's and Henry Bynam's Sermons, (London 1627, 1628); along with William Gouge's, *A Recovery from Aposty* (London, 1639).

<sup>29</sup>For a description of Africanus's take on why and how Christians convert to Islam see *Historie* vol.3 1067-69, where he describes the temptation of secular comfort in exchange for conversion.

Shakespeare seems to be of two minds throughout the play in his presentation of the character Othello. First his otherness is signaled before the play even opens with its title *Othello, the Moor of Venice*. Shakespeare sets him apart from the other characters in the play; he is usually referred to as ‘The Moor’ unless he is directly addressed. With the label Moor Shakespeare gives the audience a predetermined identity for Othello. Iago continues with a physical picture and epithets that describe a barbarian, evoking the cultural stereotype of a Moor as described by Africanus, Manderville, Hakluyt and Richard Knolles.<sup>30</sup> Although Iago proves to be less than trustworthy, his voice along with that of his stooge Roderigo, is the one that introduces the title character.

Iago’s initial attack on the character of Othello is a political one, as his expected promotion falls through, but it later evolves into a personal domestic attack. This mirrors the juxtaposition of the military attack against Cyprus with the personal attack against Brabantio’s household. Othello usurps Brabantio’s patriarchal prerogative, which for Shakespeare’s audience was divinely ordained.<sup>31</sup> Shakespeare equates the conquest of Desdemona with the threat of the conquest of Cyprus: “Even now, now, very now, an old black ram / Is tugging your white ewe! [and] ...the Cyprus wars / Which even now stands in act (*Oth.* I.i.87-88, 148-49). The urgency of Brabantio’s predicament is equated with a Turkish attack on Cyprus, which in reality was a forgone conclusion at the time of Shakespeare’s writing of *Othello*.<sup>32</sup> By setting

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<sup>30</sup>See Leo Africanus’s *History and Description of Africa*, and Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*. Ed. Walter Raleigh (Project Gutenberg-web), Manderville’s *The Travels of John Manderville*, and Richard Knolles’s *The General History of the Turks* (London, 1603) vol. II, 263-4, wherein Knolles refers to the Turk “as the scourge of God and present terror of the world (150).

<sup>31</sup>Thomas Rymer, quoted in Martin Orkin’s *Othello and the ‘plain face’ of Racism* and found in “A Short View of Tragedy (1693) ed. by Brain Vickers, censured Othello as a play which warns “all maidens of Quality how, without their Parents consent, they ran away with Blackamoors” (51). This clearly speaks of the transgression against the patriarchy.

<sup>32</sup>Historically England had two major victories against the Ottoman navy, the defense of Malta in 1565 and the victory at Lepanto in 1571, but the Turks took Cyprus in 1572. James I wrote an heroic poem circa 1595, which describes the battle between “the baptiz’d race / And circumcised Turband Turks (11.6.-11). The poem: “His

the play before the fall of Cyprus, Shakespeare is able to allude to the English victory over the Spanish Armada, which like the Turkish force is destroyed by a providential storm, and a Christian victory over the Turkish forces at Lepanto. The military setting reminds the audience of England's victories over Catholic Spain and the Islamic Turks, but Shakespeare quickly changes the genre to a domestic tragedy.

Othello faces a hearing for usurping the father's right to pick his daughter's husband, but interestingly Brabantio's charge is witchcraft, another emblem of otherness. Othello speaks in his own defense and Shakespeare fractures Iago's stereotype of the Moor with Othello's rhetoric, which is both heroic and noble. Othello speaks with the cultural nuance of a Venetian, but he others himself, and follows Iago's exotic description by exoticizing himself through his history of coming in contact with cannibals, the Anthropophagi who "each other eat" (*Oth.*I.iii.146).<sup>33</sup> Bartels in *Speaking of the Moor*, sees this as a metaphor for Desdemona gobbling up Othello's stories, (178) but it seems to be more of a comment on culture, one consuming itself and the other an outside culture consuming an inside culture. This speaks directly to the argument that Shakespeare sees two threats to a culture, the English Protestant culture in particular, from insiders and from outsiders, both of whom destroy that culture.

The Duke reinforces this divide by siding with Othello against Brabantio's accusation, but the state has need of a military commander, and since its first choice Marcus Luccicos is in Florence, Othello gets the job by default (*Oth.* I.ii.45-46). Othello is recalled to Venice as soon as the crisis in Cyprus is averted, and Cassio is to replace him as governor (IV.i.234-360).

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Majesties Lepanto" or "Heroicall Song" (Edinburgh: Robert Walde-Grave,1591), was republished in 1603 when James ascended the throne. Since Shakespeare wrote Othello as a member of James's theater troupe, The King's Men, it seems that the addition of the attack on Cyprus to Shakespeare's source Giraldi Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, permits homage to James his king and patron. In fact in Cinthio's story there are no Turks, or Turkish threat, and only Desdemona is named, but he does refer to the ensign as a man of the most depraved nature, but this story is entirely a domestic tale.

<sup>33</sup>Much of Othello's history can also be read in both *The Travels of John Manderville*, and Leo Africanus's *Historie*. Both speak of the popular image of the 'other' that was produced in theatrical productions.



Othello is a military commander, not a civil commander. Lodovico, the voice of society, places Othello's action outside acceptable Venetian behavior. Lodovico brings the letter from the Duke recalling Othello, it is he who witnesses Othello slapping Desdemona, and it is he to whom Othello confesses. Shakespeare gives Othello a moment to be admired, but then he is thrust back into being an emblem of the infidel, the despised other, the Turk.

Although the Turkish threat disappeared with the storm, Cyprus is assaulted from within. The Turks invade the spirit of the society, and Othello accuses his men of turning Turk, which is a conflation of betrayal and conversion, whereby the external Turkish threat has become internalized. This turning complicates identity and points to the fact that the Other can be hiding among us, only waiting for circumstance to show himself. Othello's handkerchief is a symbol of this invasion. The handkerchief links Othello with his past, invoking a connection to demonic magic. The magic embroidery that joined Othello's parents has no place in a Christian society, therefore the fact that it comes into the possession of the courtesan Bianca, and is lost by the Christian Desdemona, speaks to its extra-societal symbolism. Shakespeare continues the reconversion of Othello by affecting him with the same falling sickness as attributed to Mohammed in Pory's translation of Africanus's *Historie* (381).<sup>34</sup> The handkerchief and the seizure tie Othello to his Islamic roots and evoke the question of whether conversion can truly change a person's nature.

Shakespeare's opinion on the matter is clear. Conversion cannot change a person. Othello's violent behavior escalates from a slap to the murder of Desdemona. Othello's identity changes from Moslem to Christian, from slave to general, from Moor to Venetian to Turk; he, not Desdemona, turns, and turns and turns again. Othello's suicide, more than any words he

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<sup>34</sup>Shakespeare had used this illness before in *Julius Caesar*, but since Caesar invaded England, this analogy is also valid for Othello's invasion of a Venetian household.

speaks, label him a Turk, and confirm that he is no longer capable of being saved. The suicide is always damned; he is an infidel. Shakespeare sets Othello's final story in Aleppo, a gateway city in Turkey, which reminds the audience that infiltration happens at gateways, but progresses throughout society. Othello aligns himself with Judas, "the base Judean, threw a pearl away / Richer than all his tribe" (*Oth.* V.ii.345-46).<sup>35</sup> Despicably Judas betrayed Jesus, the same as Othello betrays his Christian faith and throws away his salvation, which is worth more than anything. Shakespeare ends the play with damnation for Othello, and extrapolated, damnation for all Christians who give up their Christian beliefs and turn Turk.

*Othello* presents a microcosm of invasion in Iago's plot to destroy Othello by invading his psyche. Shakespeare widens the focus by depicting the invasion of a household and the resultant usurpation of parental prerogative. The focus becomes wider with an attempted invasion of Cyprus, and although that invasion comes to naught, Venice comes to learn that outsiders can disrupt society through their difference.

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<sup>35</sup>It has been suggested that Judean could also have been Indian, but surely Shakespeare did not refer either to India or colonial Indians, especially since Othello's last act is to kiss Desdemona as Judas kissed Jesus. Like Judas, Othello dies upon a kiss. (V.ii.357)

## Conclusion

Shakespeare continued the juxtaposition of Catholic and Protestant doctrine as well as an exploration of the parameters of identity throughout his career. He deals with a range of theological issues that plagued the culture of the Elizabethan and the Jacobean eras. By setting most of his plays in the past, or in lands that are Roman Catholic, Shakespeare is free to explore Roman Catholic doctrine without fear from the censors. He represents Catholicism's visual emphasis, but also Protestant's verbal; he embraces both aspects with aural and visual modes. Protestantism and Catholicism, both strands of Christianity are incorporated into Shakespeare's theatrical presentation, which illustrates how religion was assimilated into Shakespeare's secular drama. In pitting the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory and the attendant communal mourning, faith with attendant good works for salvation, and confession against Protestantism and the Thirty-Nine Articles, Shakespeare looks back on the old religion, not with nostalgia, but with an eye that subverts the doctrine's emphasis on communal ritual, and clerical intercession.

Shakespeare goes beyond the examination of the theological differences between Catholicism and Protestantism and delves into the ramification of an interloper in the primary society. He returns to the motif of pairing a Catholic Spaniard with a Moor three times in his canon. Each of the plays: *Titus Andronicus*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Othello* is set in a gateway city. The nature of the gateway is the back and forth exchange of culture and the resultant hybridization when those cultures mix. The concept of Moslem faith, fostered by the travel literature of the day, perpetuated a belief in the lasciviousness of the Moorish other. All three plays deal with Moors who try to enter the culture through the bedroom, but all the

religiously misogynistic unions end in disaster with either immediate death, or death to the genetic line due to lack of progeny. The Reformation fostered the polemic of Islam and Roman Catholicism as false faiths, which in turn played upon the fear of a Catholic invasion by Spain, and the anxiety about a secret Catholic conspiracy inside England, as well as a fear of the expanding Ottoman Empire. Shakespeare voices the fear that acceptance of outsiders, whether foreign aliens or domestic aliens, into a society leaves that society open to conquest. He narrows his focus from an invasion of the ruling family in *Titus Andronicus*, to an invasion of an economic way of life in *The Merchant of Venice*, to the microcosm of one household in *Othello*. In each instance, Shakespeare illuminates an imminent threat to the English Protestant way of life. Whatever Shakespeare's doctrinal views, his writings promote a moral ideal rather than a theological ideal, and as such enact the issues pertinent to not only the time of their writing, but also today. Ben Jonson sums it up in his quote for the publication of the First Folio, "He was not of an age, but for all time."

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